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Editorial

Karl Marx begins his *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (published in 1844) with the observation: 'As far as Germany is concerned, the criticism of religion is essentially complete, and the criticism of religion is the presupposition of all criticism.' The second half of this assertion is surely true not only for Germany, but for other parts of the world as well, and in particular for the Middle East.

However, if in the Germany of 1844 Marx was able to regard the criticism of religion as 'essentially complete', the Middle East today – almost a century and a half later! – has yet to shake off the medieval incubus of religion and clericalism. As far as religion is concerned, the Middle East has not quite broken out of the Middle Ages. The work which in western Europe was undertaken by the Enlightenment and developed by early 19th century radical philosophy is, in the Middle East, still to be performed.

In the Arab world, not only has there never been a serious bourgeois-liberal challenge to religion and clericalism, but the left too has for the most part avoided the issue or pussyfooted round it. With very few exceptions, left-wing and socialist theorists have either believed that religion is a mere 'epiphenomenon' and that fighting against its influence is a waste of energy, or have simply been too opportunistic and frightened to stick their necks out.

But recent events have demonstrated the utter futility and danger of this ostrich policy. The triumph of obscurantist reaction in Iran – for that is what the Islamic Revolution is – and the resurgence of the Muslim Brotherhoods in the Arab countries show that the problem of religion must be confronted as one of the major issues in the Arab-Islamic world.

In Israel too clericalism and religious fanaticism have in recent years come to play an increasingly dominant role. Medieval Judaism, which crystallised after AD 800, remained virtually intact until the French Revolution. In the 19th century a bourgeois movement of Jewish Enlightenment began to gather momentum and posed an internal (that is, Jewish) challenge to medieval Judaism. But this movement, humanist, assimilationist and cosmopolitan, was overtaken – when it was still fragile and vulnerable – by the rise of modern antisemitism. Zionism arose on its ruins. If the Jewish Enlightenment was a negation of medieval Judaism, zionism was a negation of that negation. Although ostensibly secular and in part even 'socialist', zionism

reverted to some of the most reactionary, xenophobic and isolationist strands of medieval Judaism. After the June war of 1967, and especially after the rise of the Begin government ten years later, these reactionary religious strands have risen to the surface and have become predominant. A confrontation with medieval Judaism has thus become an urgent task; without it, a critique of Zionism remains essentially incomplete.

In the present issue of *Khamsin* we take up the sadly neglected twin tasks of confrontation with Islam and Judaism.

Sadik al-'Azm's article deals with the broader subject of *Orientalism* – a concept which has come into vogue following the publication of the important book of that name by Edward Said. Orientalism is the totality of ideological constructions formulated by western academics and politicians, through which they have traditionally viewed and dealt with the unfamiliar world of the 'Orient' and Islam. Starting from a critique of Said's methodology, the article then reverses the concept, and uses it to launch an attack on the ideology of 'Orientalism in Reverse' current among some Arab academics and left intellectuals, who in the wake of the Iranian revolution have grown enamoured of Islam.

Lafif Lakhdar analyses the various internal and external causes for the recent resurgence of what he calls *Islamic integralism* – a trend embodied in the Muslim Brotherhood as well as in Khomeinism, which aims to subordinate the totality of social life to the tyranny of Islamic archaism. The emphasis of this article is on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other Arab countries. This movement is seen in its historical and social context, and the article traces its historical antecedents in movements of the late Ottoman empire.

Mohammad Ja'far and Azar Tabari focus on the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Their article (written before the Gulf war between Iraq and Iran) analyses the nature of Khomeinism and shows that Islamic fundamentalism, far from being an epiphenomenon, is at the very core of the new Iranian republic. In the final part of their article they draw certain important political conclusions for the strategy of the left in Iran.

Israel Shahak's essay has as its main focus an examination of the attitude of medieval Judaism (which he calls 'classical Judaism') towards non-Jews. Around this theme he mounts a formidable analysis and critique of medieval ('classical') Judaism as a whole. This article, mercilessly controversial and polemical, is in the tradition of the Enlightenment; it owes little to Marx, much to Voltaire. Like the latter, Shahak will no doubt be fiercely attacked by obscurantists of all kinds. We make no apologies for printing this article; the fact that Jews have been among the main victims of racism in this century cannot serve as a pretext for refraining from exposing and criticising the racism which Zionism has inherited from medieval Judaism.

Finally, E. Ein-Gil, a militant of the Socialist Organisation in Israel

(Matzpen), discusses in political (rather than philosophical) terms the recent rise of clericalism in Israel, and shows how the struggle against it interlocks with the struggle against zionism.

For reasons of space we have had to hold over some of the material on religion to the next issue of *Khamsin*, which is now in preparation. This material includes the second half of I. Shahak's essay, dealing with the social aspects of medieval ('classical') Judaism, together with an appendix containing a detailed account of the main rabbinical laws directed against non-Jews.

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The annual meeting of the Khamsin collective, held in July 1980, decided on the following change in the journal's structure. The group of members based in London and directly involved in the publication of the journal will now constitute the Editorial Group. Other members of the collective, in London and elsewhere, will, as before, be consulted on all important matters. This decision does not in any way change the policy and aim of *Khamsin*.

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A debate on imperialism. The phenomenon of imperialism and its influence over the course of events in the Middle East has been taken for granted by almost all political currents in their relation to the region. It appears that the Ba'thist regimes, Islamic republics, bourgeois nationalists, the Palestinian movement, and the far left – despite their differences – are agreed in conceiving themselves to be in continuous confrontation with this powerful force. Imperialism is constantly evoked by both the ruling classes and their political opponents, often on the flimsiest of pretexts, as the cause for their conflicts and crises (for example, the Lebanese civil war, the Iranian hostage crisis, the Gulf war). Is it not possible that imperialism is increasingly being used as a sort of political bogeyman? If so, then what does imperialism mean concretely today in relation to the Middle East? What are its real economic foundations and social agents?

These are some of the questions that the *Khamsin* collective, in its last annual meeting, decided to explore in future issues of the journal. It was felt that the usage of the term *imperialism* has undergone such far-reaching vulgarisation in the Middle East, as to render a reassessment of its real content a matter of some urgency.

We welcome contributions by our readers on this controversial subject and look forward to a stimulating and fruitful debate on the pages of our journal.

Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse

Sadik Jalal al-'Azam

PART I. ORIENTALISM

In his sharply debated book,¹ Edward Said introduces us to the subject of 'Orientalism' through a broadly historical perspective which situates Europe's interest in the Orient within the context of the general historical expansion of modern bourgeois Europe outside its traditional confines and at the expense of the rest of the world in the form of its subjugation, pillage, and exploitation. In this sense Orientalism may be seen as a complex and growing phenomenon deriving from the overall historical trend of modern European expansion and involving: a whole set of progressively expanding institutions, a created and cumulative body of theory and practice, a suitable ideological superstructure with an apparatus of complicated assumptions, beliefs, images, literary productions, and rationalisations (not to mention the underlying foundation of commercial, economic and strategic vital interests). I shall call this phenomenon *Institutional Orientalism*.

Edward Said also deals with orientalism in the more restricted sense of a developing tradition of disciplined learning whose main function is to 'scientifically research' the Orient. Naturally, this *Cultural-Academic Orientalism* makes all the usual pious claims about its 'disinterested pursuit of the truth' concerning the Orient, and its efforts to apply impartial scientific methods and value-free techniques in studying the peoples, cultures, religions, and languages of the Orient. The bulk of Edward's book is not unexpectedly devoted to Cultural-Academic Orientalism in an attempt to expose the ties which wed it to Institutional Orientalism.

In this way Said deflates the self-righteous claims of Cultural-Academic Orientalism to such traits as scholarly independence, scientific detachment, political objectivity etc. It should be made clear, however, that the author at no point seeks to belittle the genuine scholarly achievements, scientific discoveries, and creative contributions made by orientalists and orientalism over the years, particularly at the technical level of accomplishment.² His main concern is to convey the message that the overall image of the Orient constructed by Cultural-Academic Orientalism, from the viewpoint of its own technical achievements and scientific contributions to the field, is shot through and through with racist assumptions, barely camouflaged mercenary interests, reductionistic explanations and anti-human prejudices. It can easily be shown that this image, when properly scrutinised, can hardly be the product of genuinely objective scientific investigation and detached scholarly discipline.

Critique of Orientalism

One of the most vicious aspects of this image, as carefully pointed out by Said, is the deep rooted belief – shared by Cultural-Academic and Institutional Orientalism – that a fundamental ontological difference exists between the essential natures of the Orient and Occident, to the decisive advantage of the latter. Western societies, cultures, languages and mentalities are supposed to be essentially and inherently superior to the Eastern ones. In Edward Said's words, 'the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority...'³ According to this reading of Said's initial thesis, Orientalism (both in its institutional and cultural-academic forms) can hardly be said to have existed, as a structured phenomenon and organised movement, prior to the rise, consolidation and expansion of modern bourgeois Europe. Accordingly, the author at one point dates the rise of Academic Orientalism with the European Renaissance.⁴ But unfortunately the stylist and polemicist in Edward Said very often runs away with the systematic thinker. As a result he does not consistently adhere to the above approach either in dating the phenomenon of Orientalism or in interpreting its historical origins and ascent.

In an act of retrospective historical projection we find Said tracing the origins of Orientalism all the way back to Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides and Dante.⁵ In other words, Orientalism is not really a thoroughly modern phenomenon, as we thought earlier, but is the natural product of an ancient and almost irresistible European bent of mind to misrepresent the realities of other cultures, peoples, and their languages, in favour of Occidental self-affirmation, domination and ascendancy. Here the author seems to be saying that the 'European mind', from Homer to Karl Marx and A.H.R. Gibb, is inherently bent on distorting all human realities other than its own and for the sake of its own aggrandisement.

It seems to me that this manner of construing the origins of Orientalism simply lends strength to the essentialistic categories of 'Orient' and 'Occident', representing the ineradicable distinction between East and West, which Edward's book is ostensibly set on demolishing. Similarly, it lends the ontological distinction of Europe versus Asia, so characteristic of Orientalism, the kind of credibility and respectability normally associated with continuity, persistence, pervasiveness and distant historical roots. This sort of credibility and respectability is, of course, misplaced and undeserved. For Orientalism, like so many other characteristically modern European phenomena and movements (notably nationalism), is a genuinely recent creation – the product of modern European history – seeking to acquire legitimacy, credibility and support by claiming ancient roots and classical origins for itself. Certainly Homer, Euripides, Dante, St. Thomas and all the other authorities that one may care to mention held the more or less standard distorted views prevalent in their milieu about other

cultures and peoples. However, it is equally certain that the two forms of Orientalism built their relatively modern repertoires of systematic conventional wisdom by calling upon the views and biases of such prestigious figures as well as by drawing on ancient myth, legend, imagery, folklore and plain prejudice. Although much of this is well documented (directly and indirectly) in Said's book, still his work remains dominated by a unilinear conception of 'Orientalism' as somehow flowing straight through from Homer to Grunebaum. Furthermore, this unilinear, almost essentialistic, presentation of the origins and development of Orientalism renders a great disservice to the vital concerns of Edward's book, namely, preparing the ground for approaching the difficult question of 'how one can study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or nonrepressive and nonmanipulative, perspective,'⁶ and for eliminating, in the name of a common humanity, both 'Orient' and 'Occident' as ontological categories and classificatory concepts bearing the marks of racial superiority and inferiority. It seems to me that as a logical consequence of Said's tendency to view the origins and development of Orientalism in terms of such unilinear constancy, the task of combating and transcending its essentialistic categories, in the name of this common humanity, is made all the more difficult.

Another important result of this approach bears on Said's interpretation of the relationship supposedly holding between Cultural-Academic Orientalism as representation and disciplined learning on the one hand, and Institutional Orientalism as expansionary movement and socio-economic force on the other. In other words, when Said is leaning heavily on his unilinear conception of 'Orientalism' he produces a picture which says that this cultural apparatus known as 'Orientalism' is the real source of the West's political interest in the Orient, ie, that it is the real source of modern Institutional Orientalism. Thus, for him European and later on American political interest in the Orient was really created by the sort of Western cultural tradition known as Orientalism.⁷ Furthermore, according to one of his renderings, Orientalism is a distribution of the awareness that the world is made up of two unequal halves – Orient and Occident – into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philosophical texts. This awareness not only created a whole series of Occidental 'interests' (political, economic, strategic etc) in the Orient, but also helped to maintain them.⁸ Hence for Said the relationship between Academic Orientalism as a cultural apparatus and Institutional Orientalism as economic interest and political force is seen in terms of a '*preposterous* transition' from 'a merely textual apprehension, formulation or definition of the Orient to the putting of all this into practice in the Orient . . .'⁹ According to this interpretation Said's phrase 'Orientalism overrode the Orient'¹⁰ could mean only that the Institutional Orientalism which invaded and subjugated the East was really the legitimate child and product of that other kind of Orientalism, so intrinsic, it seems, to the minds, texts, aesthetics, representations, lore and imagery

of Westerners as far back as Homer, Aeschylus and Euripides! To understand properly the subjugation of the East in modern times, Said keeps referring us back to earlier times when the Orient was no more than an awareness, a word, a representation, a piece of learning to the Occident:¹¹

'What we must reckon with is a large and slow process of appropriation by which Europe, or the European awareness of the Orient, transformed itself from being textual and contemplative into being administrative, economic, and even military.'¹²

Therefore Edward Said sees the 'Suez Canal idea' much more as 'the logical conclusion of Orientalist thought and effort'¹³ than as the result of Franco-British imperial interests and rivalries (although he does not ignore the latter).

One cannot escape the impression that for Said somehow the emergence of such observers, administrators and invaders of the Orient as Napoleon, Cromer and Balfour was made inevitable by 'Orientalism', and that the political orientations, careers and ambitions of these figures are better understood by reference to d'Herbelot and Dante than to more immediately relevant and mundane interests. Accordingly, it is hardly surprising to see Said, when touching on the role of the European Powers in deciding the history of the Near Orient in the early twentieth century, select for prominent notice the 'peculiar epistemological framework through which the Powers saw the Orient',¹⁴ which was built by the long tradition of Orientalism. He then affirms that the Powers acted on the Orient the way they did because of that peculiar epistemological framework. Presumably, had the long tradition of Cultural-Academic Orientalism fashioned a less peculiar, more sympathetic and truthful epistemological framework, then the Powers would have acted on the Orient more charitably and viewed it in a more favourable light!

Raw reality and its representations

When Said is thinking and writing along these lines, it is hard to escape the strong impression that for him representations, images, words, metaphors, idioms, styles, universes of discourse, political ambiances, cultural sensitivities, highly mediated pieces of knowledge, extremely rarefied truths are, if not the very stuff of reality, then certainly much more important and informative substitutes for raw reality itself. If Academic Orientalism transmutes the reality of the Orient into the stuff of texts (as he says on page 86), then it would seem that Said sublimates the earthly realities of the Occident's interaction with the Orient into the etherial stuff of the spirit. One detects, therefore, a strong and unwarranted general anti-scientific bias in his book. This fact comes out most clearly in his constant inveighing against Cultural-Academic

Orientalism for having categorised, classified, tabulated, codified, indexed, schematised, reduced, dissected the Orient (and hence for having distorted its reality and disfigured its particular mode of being) as if such operations were somehow evil in themselves and unfit for the proper understanding of human societies, cultures, languages etc.

Yet Said himself admits readily that it is impossible for a culture, be it Eastern or Western or South American, to grasp much about the reality of another, alien culture without resort to categorisation, classification, schematisation and reduction – with the necessarily accompanying distortions and misrepresentations. If, as Said insists, the unfamiliar, exotic and alien is always apprehended, domesticated, assimilated and represented in terms of the already familiar, then such distortions and misrepresentations become inevitable. For Said:

‘... cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be.’¹⁵

He even finds ‘nothing especially controversial or reprehensible’ about the domestication of an exotic and alien culture in the terms of reference of another culture, because ‘such domestications of the exotic take place between all cultures, certainly between all men.’¹⁶ In fact Said elevates this to a general principle which emanates from ‘the nature of the human mind’ and which invariably governs the dynamics of the reception of one culture by another. Thus, ‘all cultures impose corrections upon raw reality, changing it from free-floating objects into units of knowledge’, because ‘it is perfectly natural for the human mind to resist the assault on it of untreated strangeness’.¹⁷

In fact, at one point Said goes so far as to deny entirely the possibility of attaining ‘objective truth’ about other cultures, especially if they seem exotic, alien and strange. The only means for approaching and receiving them are those of reduction, representation and schematisation with all the attending distortions and falsifications which such operations imply and impose. According to Said:

‘... the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (as I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the “truth”, which is itself a representation.’¹⁸

If, as the author keeps repeating (by way of censure and castigation), the Orient studied by Orientalism is no more than an image and a representation in the mind and culture of the Occident (the representer in this case) then it is also true that the Occident in doing so is behaving perfectly naturally and in accordance with the general rule – as stated

by Said himself – governing the dynamics of the reception of one culture by another. Accordingly the Occident in trying to deal (via its Orientalism) with the raw reality of the Orient does what all cultures do under the circumstances, namely:

1 domesticate the alien and represent it through its own familiar terms and frames of reference;

2 impose on the Orient those ‘complete transformations’ which Edward Said says cultures are prone to effect on each other so as to receive the strange, not as it is but as it ought to be, for the benefit of the receiver;

3 impose upon the raw reality of the Orient the necessary corrections needed to change it ‘from free-floating objects into units of knowledge’; and

4 follow the natural bent of the human mind in resisting ‘the assault on it of untreated strangeness’.

The representation of Islam by the West

One of the examples given by Said is of particular interest:

‘The reception of Islam in the West is a perfect case in point, and has been admirably studied by Norman Daniel. One constraint acting upon Christian thinkers who tried to understand Islam was an analogical one; since Christ is the basis of Christian faith, it was assumed – quite incorrectly – that Mohammed was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity. Hence the polemic name “Mohammedanism” given to Islam, and the automatic epithet “imposter” applied to Mohammed. Out of such and many other misconceptions “there formed a circle which was never broken by imaginative exteriorisation . . . The Christian concept of Islam was integral and self-sufficient”; Islam became an image – the word is Daniel’s but it seems to me to have remarkable implications for Orientalism in general – whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian.’¹⁹

The significance of the above argument lies in the fact that Said nowhere carries it to its logical conclusion in the light of what he had stated to be generally true about the reductive dynamics of the reception of one culture by another. As he knows very well, the reception of Christianity by Islam in the East differs little from the account given above. To make this point I shall present the gist of the above quoted passage with the following alterations:

‘One constraint acting upon Muslim thinkers who tried to understand Christianity was an analogical one; since Mohammed was no more than the Messenger of God it was assumed – quite incorrectly – that Christ was to Christianity as Mohammed was to Islam, namely, a plain Messenger of God or ordinary prophet. Hence the polemics against His

incarnation, sonship, divinity, crucifixion, resurrection, and the automatic epithet of "forgers" applied to the first guardians of the Holy Scriptures. Out of such and many other conceptions "there formed a circle which was never broken by imaginative exteriorisation . . . the Muslim concept of Christianity was integral and self-sufficient." Christianity became an image – the word is Daniel's but it seems to me to have remarkable implications for how one culture receives another in general – whose function was not so much to represent Christianity in itself as to represent it for the medieval Muslim.'

In the light of these critical remarks it should become clear: (a) why Said deals so harshly with Marx's attempts to understand and interpret Oriental societies; (b) why he deals so much more kindly with the Macdonald-Gibb view of Islam; and (c) why he deals so charitably and sympathetically with the mystico-theosophical extrapolations bred by Massignon's brand of Orientalism.

Said criticises and exposes the falsity of the sort of declarative assertions made by the Macdonald-Gibb variety of Orientalism about Islam and the Muslims. He attacks them for being abstract, metaphysical and untrue. Here is a sample of such assertions:

1 'It is plain, I think, and admitted that the conception of the Unseen is much more immediate and real to the Oriental than to the western peoples.'

2 'The essential difference in the Oriental mind is not credulity as to unseen things, but inability to construe a system as to seen things.'

3 'The difference in the Oriental is not essentially religiosity, but the lack of the sense of law.'²⁰ For him, there is no immovable order of nature.'

4 'It is evident that anything is possible to the Oriental. The supernatural is so near that it may touch him at any moment.'

5 'Until recently, the ordinary Muslim citizen and cultivator had no political interests or functions, and no literature of easy access except religious literature, had no festivals and no communal life except in connection with religion, saw little or nothing of the outside world except through religious glasses. *To him, in consequence, religion meant everything.*'²¹

The trouble with such affirmations does not lie only in their falsity, abstractness and metaphysical character. Certainly neither Macdonald nor Gibb were simple victims when making these declarations of the 'epistemological framework' built by the traditions of Orientalism, as Said intimates. In fact one can argue convincingly that in a certain very significant sense:

1 it is true that in general the Unseen is much more immediate and real to the common citizens of Cairo and Damascus than it is to the present inhabitants of New York and Paris;

2 it is true that religion 'means everything' to the life of Moroccan peasants in a way which must remain incomprehensible to present day American farmers;

3 it is true that the idea of an independent inviolable lawful order of nature is in many respects much more real, concrete and firmly established to the minds of the students of Moscow University than it is to the minds of the students of al-Azhar University (or any other university in the Muslim world for that matter).

What Edward fails to bring out is the fact that the affirmations of the Macdonald-Gibb brand of Orientalism are really declarative only in a very narrow sense. They masquerade as fully and genuinely declarative statements of permanent fact only to conceal a set of broad directives and instructions on how Occidentals should go about dealing with and handling the Orient and the Orientals, here and now. These directives are necessarily of a general nature and hence require a variety of 'operational definitions' to turn them into useful practical steps taken by such an assorted lot as Western missionaries, teachers, administrators, businessmen, army officers, diplomats, intelligence experts, politicians, policy-makers etc. For example, such people are guided by these implicit directives and instructions to allow for and take advantage of the fact that religious beliefs, tribal loyalties, theological explanations and so on still play a much more decisive role in the life of contemporary Oriental societies than they do in modern Western ones.

The very limitation of the declarative scope of the Macdonald-Gibb type of affirmations betrays not only their practical function and immediate relevance to actual situations, but also the profoundly ahistorical frame of mind and thought out of which they emanate. They pretend that the Unseen was always (and always will be) more immediate and real to the Orientals than to the Western peoples past, present and future. Similarly, they pretend that the idea of an independent lawful order of nature was always and will for ever be more real, concrete and firmly established to the Occidental's mind and life than it could ever be in the consciousness of Oriental human beings. The simple historical fact that at one time, say before the break-up of Christendom, the Unseen was as immediate and real to Occidentals, is not permitted to disturb the seemingly Olympian factual serenity of the Macdonald-Gibb pseudo-declaratives.

If one could speak of a hero when dealing with a book such as *Orientalism*, then Massignon emerges as the most favoured candidate for that role. This towering French Orientalist is praised for having surpassed all others in the almost impossible task of genuinely and sympathetically understanding Oriental Muslim culture, religion and mentality. Due to his profound humanism and compassion, Massignon, we are told, accomplished the feat of identifying with the 'vital forces' informing Eastern culture and of grasping its 'spiritual dimension' as no one else did before or since him in the West.²²

But, in the final analysis, is not Massignon's presumed identification with the 'vital forces' and 'spiritual dimension' of Eastern culture simply a personalised, idealised and reiterated version of the classical Orientalist representation of an Orient 'overvalued for its pantheism,

spirituality, longevity and primitivity',²³ a representation which Said has debunked so masterfully? Furthermore, we infer from the discussion of the meaning and importance of Massignon's work that he nowhere abandoned the cardinal assumption (and original sin, according to Said) of all Orientalism, namely, the insistence on the essentialistic separation of the world into two halves: an Orient and an Occident, each with its inherently different nature and traits. It is evident, then, that with Massignon, as with the work of any other Orientalist attacked by Said, Orient and Occident remain fundamental ontological categories and classificatory schemes with all their attending implications and applications.

We learn from Said's book: (a) that Massignon's Orient is completely consonant with the world of the Seven Sleepers and the Abrahamic prayers;²⁴ (b) that 'his repeated efforts to understand and report on the Palestine conflict, for all their profound humanism, never really got past the quarrel between Isaac and Ishmael';²⁵ (c) that for him the essence of the difference between East and West is between modernity and ancient tradition;²⁶ (d) that in his view the Islamic Orient is always spiritual, Semitic, tribalistic, radically monotheistic and not Aryan;²⁷ (e) that he was widely sought after as an expert on Islamic matters by colonial administrators;²⁸ and (f) that he was of the conviction that it was France's obligation to associate itself with the Muslims' desire to defend their traditional culture, the rule of their dynastic life and the patrimony of believers.²⁹

Now, the question to which I have no ready answer is, how can the most acute and versatile contemporary critic of Orientalism praise so highly an Orientalist who obviously subscribes to the entire apparatus of Orientalism's discredited dogmas?

Karl Marx and the Orient

The picture which emerges in Said's book concerning Marx's attitude towards the East runs more or less as follows:³⁰ Through his analyses of British rule in India, Marx arrived at 'the notion of an Asiatic economic system' (ie, the famous Asiatic mode of production) which acted as the solid foundation for a sort of political rule known as 'Oriental despotism'. At first, the violent destruction and transformation of India's traditional social organisation appalled Marx and shocked him as a human being and thinker. His humanity was moved, and sympathy engaged, by the human miseries and suffering attendant upon such a process of transformation. At this stage of his development Marx still identified with downtrodden Asia and sensed some fellowship with its wretched masses. But then Marx fell under the sway of Orientalist learning, and the picture quickly changed. The labels of Orientalism, its vocabulary, abstractions and definitions came to dominate his mind and emotions.

According to Said, Marx – who initially recognised the individuality of Asia – became the captive of that formidable censor created by the vocabulary, learning and lore of Orientalism. He cites what supposedly happened to Marx's thought as an instance of how 'non-Orientalist's human engagements are dissolved [and] then usurped by Orientalist generalisations'. The initial sympathy and gush of sentiment experienced by Marx disappeared as he encountered the unshakable definitions built up by Orientalist science and supported by the Oriental lore that was supposed to be appropriate to it. Briefly, the case of Marx shows how 'an experience was dislodged by a dictionary definition'.³¹

This is now Said sees the metamorphosis which led Marx to the view (highly objectionable to Said) that Britain was making possible a real social revolution in India, by acting as the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. In this instance Britain is viewed by Marx as acting simultaneously as an agency of destruction and regeneration in Asia. Said unambiguously traces this mature view of Marx to Orientalism's pseudo-learning and fancies about the East, especially in its 19th century messianic and romantic variety. For him Marx forms no exception to all the Europeans who dealt with the East in terms of Orientalism's basic category of the inequality between East and West. Furthermore, he declares flatly that Marx's economic analyses of Asia are perfectly suited to a standard Orientalist undertaking.

I think that this account of Marx's views and analyses of highly complex historical processes and situations is a travesty. Undoubtedly, Marx, like any other creative genius, was greatly influenced by the lexicographical learning, dictionary definitions, abstractions, representations, generalisations and linguistic norms prevalent in his time and milieu. But only Said's excessive fascination with the verbal, textual and linguistic could lead him to portray Marx's mind as somehow usurped and taken over (against his better judgement and nobler sentiments) by the vocabulary, lexicography and dictionary definitions of the Orientalist tradition in the West! With Said one stands at times on the verge of regression into belief in the magical efficacy of words.

Marx's manner of analysing British rule in India in terms of an unconscious tool of history – which is making possible a real social revolution by destroying the old India and laying the foundations of a new order – cannot be ascribed under any circumstances to the usurpation of Marx's mind by conventional Orientalistic verbiage. Marx's explanation (regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with it) testifies to his theoretical consistency in general, and to his keen realism in analysing specific historical situations. This is evident from the fact that Marx always tended to explain historical processes in terms of social agencies, economic struggles, political movements, and great personalities which simultaneously played the role of destroyers and creators. These were often cast by him in the guise of 'unconscious tools' of a history unfolding itself in stages and sometimes in inscrutable and unpredictable ways. There is nothing specific to either Asia or the

Orient in Marx's broad theoretical interpretations of the past, present and future. On this score his sources are thoroughly 'European' in reference and owe nothing to Orientalist learning. One only needs to recall those vivid passages in the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx portrays the modern European bourgeoisie in the double role of destroyer and creator: destroyer of the old inherited Europe, maker of its liberating present and usher of its proletarian future. Like the European capitalist class, British rule in India was its own grave-digger. There is nothing particularly 'Orientalist' about this explanation. Furthermore, Marx's call for revolution in Asia is more historically realistic and promising than any noble sentiments that he could have lavished on necessarily vanishing socio-economic formations.

I shall cite another example related neither to Orientalism nor to Asia or the realm of politics. This is how Marx described the dual role of the usurer's capital in the destruction of 'small-peasant and small-bourgeois production' and in the making of modern industrial Europe.³² On the one hand:

'[T]his usurer's capital impoverishes the mode of production, paralyses the productive forces instead of developing them . . . It does not alter the mode of production, but attaches itself firmly to it like a parasite and makes it wretched. It sucks out its blood, enervates it and compels reproduction to proceed under ever more pitiable conditions. Hence the popular hatred against usurers . . .'

On the other hand:

'Usury, in contradistinction to consuming wealth, is historically important, inasmuch as it is in itself a process generating capital . . . Usury is a powerful lever in developing the preconditions for industrial capital in so far as it plays the following double role, first, building up in general, an independent money wealth alongside that of the merchant, and, secondly, appropriating the conditions of labour, thereby, ruining the owners of the old conditions of labour.'

Said's accusation that Marx subscribed to the basic Orientalist idea of the superiority of the West over the East seems to derive plausibility only from the ambiguity underlying his own discussion of this matter. That 19th century Europe was superior to Asia and much of the rest of the world in terms of productive capacities, social organisation, historical ascendancy, military might and scientific and technological development is indisputable as a contingent historical fact. Orientalism, with its ahistorical bourgeois bent of mind, did its best to eternalise this mutable fact, to turn it into a permanent reality for the present and future. Hence Orientalism's essentialistic ontology of East and West. Marx, like anyone else, knew of the superiority of modern Europe over the Orient. But to accuse a radically historicist thinker such as Marx of turning this contingent fact into a necessary reality for

It should be evident that one of the significant features of Ontological Orientalism in Reverse is the typical Orientalist obsession with language, texts, philology and allied subjects. It simply imitates the great Orientalist masters – a poor imitation at that – when it seeks to unravel the secrets of the primordial Arab ‘mind’, ‘psyche’ or ‘character’ in and through words. In other terms, it has obediently and uncritically adopted what Said pejoratively called the Orientalists’ ‘textual’³⁸ attitude to reality. In the above instance of so-called analysis and comparison that I have cited, one can easily see the panglossian and even quixotic character of the attempt to capture something about such a complex historical phenomenon as the cultural, mental and psychic life of the Arabs, past and present, by literally applying what has been learned from Orientalist books and philological analyses.

This reversed Orientalism sins doubly because it tries to capture the essence of the ‘Arab mind’ by learning how to analyse Arabic words and texts from the words and texts of the master Orientalists. Like a platonic work of art, its textual attitude becomes twice removed from the original reality.

Thus Orientalism in Reverse presents us with variations on Renan’s racist theme as derived from his philological analyses and linguistic speculations. But the novel element is the conclusion of Orientalism in Reverse that comparative philological and linguistic studies prove the ontological superiority of the Oriental mind (the ‘Arab mind’ in this case) over the Occidental one. For, have we not shown that the sublime idea of the ‘brotherhood of man’ is innate and original to the ‘primordial Arab mind,’ while Hobbes’ base idea of ‘the war of all against all’ is innate and original to the ‘primordial European mind’?

In classical Orientalist fashion, the essence of the ‘Arab mind’ is explored by an Arab thinker through language only and in hermetic seclusion from such unwelcome intrusions as socio-economic infrastructures, politics, historical change, class conflicts, revolutions and so on. This primordial Arab ‘mind’, ‘psyche’ or ‘essence’, is supposed to reveal its potency, genius and distinguishing characteristics through the flux of historical events and the accidents of time, without either history or time ever biting into its intrinsic nature. Conversely, the series of events, circumstances and accidents forming the history of such a people as the Arabs can never be genuinely understood from this point of view, without reduction, through a series of mediations and steps, to the primary manifestations of the original unchanging nature of the Arab ‘mind’, ‘psyche’ or ‘essence’.

Here I shall cite another example. Said points out correctly that:

‘The exaggerated value heaped upon Arabic as a language permits the Orientalist to make the language equivalent to mind, society, history, and nature. For the Orientalist the language *speaks* the Arab Oriental, not vice versa.’³⁹

Orientalism in Reverse follows suit – not only faithfully but also more

recklessly and crudely. Thus, another Syrian author wrote the following on the unique status of the Arabic language and the wonders it reveals about the 'primitivity' of the Arab and his language:

'After having studied the vocal characteristics of every letter of the Arabic language I proceeded to apply their emotional and sensory connotations to the meanings of the words starting with those letters, or times ending with them, by means of statistical tables drawn from the dictionaries of the Arabic language. After carefully examining the marvellous results yielded by this study it appeared to me that the originality of the Arabic language transcends the limits of human potentialities thought then, that no logical and reasonable explanation of this miracle of a language can be supplied except in terms of the category of the primitivity of the Arab and his language.'⁴⁰

The crucial conclusion of this line of reasoning runs as follows:

'Thus, Arabic letters become transformed from here vocal containers filled with human sensations and emotions to the quintessence of the Arab, of his *'asabiya*, spirit and even of the constituents of his nationality.'⁴¹

In perfect Renanian fashion this notion of the primitivity of the Arab and his language is made to define a primary human type with its inimitable essentialistic traits out of which more specific forms of behaviour necessarily flow. This is very explicitly and roughly – hence candid and honestly – stated by still another Syrian ideologue in the following manner: 'The essence of the Arab nation enjoys certain absolute and essential characteristics which are: theism, spiritualism, idealism, humanism and civilisationism.'⁴²

Not unexpectedly it follows that this absolute essence of the Arab nation is also the implicit bearer of a civilising mission affecting the whole world. Given the decline of the West at the end of the twentieth century the Orient is supposed to rise under the leadership of the Arab nation and under the banner of its *mission civilisatrice* to guide humanity out of the state of decadence to which Western leadership has brought it. For, the 'western essence' produced such unmistakable signs of decadence as: 'mechanism, darwinism, freudianism, marxism, malthusianism, secularism, realism, positivism, existentialism, phenomenism, pragmatism, machiavellism, liberalism and imperialism', all of which are worldly doctrines manifesting 'a purely materialist essence.'⁴³

In contrast, 'The human universe' (i.e., man, humanity, the world, life, civilisation) is today awaiting its appointed encounter with 'the nation bearing that mission and chosen to lead it out of its impass'. Furthermore: 'No matter how tragic the condition of the Arab nation may be at present there is not a shred of doubt that this nation alone is the promised and awaited one, because it alone acquired perfectly, ages ago, all the ideal constituents, characteristics and features of a nation. Accordingly, it has come to possess, in a uniquely deep-rooted manner

all the various ideal human traits, excellences and virtues which render it capable and deserving of carrying out the lofty mission for which it was chosen . . . '.⁴⁴

I turn now to the second instance illustrating what has been defined as Ontological Orientalism in Reverse.

Islamic revivalism and Orientalism in Reverse

Under the impact of the Iranian revolutionary process, a revisionist Arab line of political thought has surfaced. Its prominent protagonists are drawn, in the main, from the ranks of the left: former radicals, ex-communists, unorthodox marxists and disillusioned nationalists of one sort or another. This nebulous political line found an enthusiastic response among a number of distinguished Arab intellectuals and writers, such as the poet Adonis, the progressive thinker Anwar 'Abd al Malek and the young and talented Lebanese critic Ilias Khoury. I would add also that its partisans proved themselves quite prolific, utilising various forums in Lebanon and Western Europe to make their views, analyses and ideas known to the reading public. Their central thesis may be summarised as follows: The national salvation so eagerly sought by the Arabs since the Napoleonic occupation of Egypt is to be found neither in secular nationalism (be it radical, conservative or liberal) nor in revolutionary communism, socialism or what have you, but in a return to the authenticity of what they call 'popular political Islam'. For purposes of distinctness I shall refer to this novel approach as the *Islamanic trend*.

I do not wish to dispute the above thesis of the Islamanics in this presentation. Instead, I would like to point out that the analyses, beliefs and ideas produced by the Islamanic trend in defense of its central thesis simply reproduce the whole discredited apparatus of classical Orientalist doctrine concerning the difference between East and West, Islam and Europe. This reiteration occurs at both the ontological and epistemological levels, only reversed to favour Islam and the East in its implicit and explicit value judgements.

A prominent feature in the political literature produced by the Islamanic trend is its insistence on replacing the familiar opposition of national liberation against imperialist domination by the more reactionary opposition of East against West.⁴⁵ In the West, the historical process may be moved by economic interests, class struggles and socio-political forces. But in the East the 'prime mover' of history is Islam, according to a recent declaration by Adonis.⁴⁶

Adonis explains himself by openly admitting that in studying Arab society and its internal struggles:

'I have attributed primacy to the ideological-religious factor because in Arab society, which is built completely on the basis of religion, the modes and means of production did not develop in a manner leading to

the rise of class consciousness. The religious factor remains its prime mover. Consequently, its movement cannot be explained by means of such categories as class, class consciousness, economics, let alone economism. This means that the struggle within Arab society has been in the main of an ideological-religious nature.⁴⁷

Adonis' sweeping conclusion is naturally enough, to 'do away with class struggle, oil and economics',⁴⁸ in order to arrive at a proper understanding of Oriental (Muslim, Arab, Iranian) social dynamics.

In other words: ideas, beliefs, philosophical systems and ideological superstructures are sufficient to explain the 'laws of motion' of Oriental societies and cultures. Thus, an enthusiastic Islamani announced that 'the Iranian Revolution reveals to us with the greatest emphasis... that the laws of evolution, struggle and unity in our countries and the Orient are other than and different from those of Europe and the West.'⁴⁹ A third Islamani assured us that 'all this permits Khomeini to translate his simple Islamic ideas into a social political earthquake which the most perfect and sophisticated theoretical/philosophical systems failed to detonate.'⁵⁰ Accordingly, the latest advice of the Islamanis to the Arab Left is to rearrange the priorities in such a way as to stand them on their head: 'to give ultimate importance to the cultural and ideological factors which move the masses and to proceed to reformulate scientific, economic and social truths on this basis'.⁵¹

According to an Orientalist such as H.A.R. Gibb (and others) the stable, unique, self-identical Islamic totality regulates the detailed workings of all human, cultural, social and economic phenomena subsumed under it. Furthermore, its coherence, placidity and inner strength are primarily imperilled by such foreign intrusions as class struggles, economic interests, secular nationalist movements, democratic ideas, 'Westernised' intellectuals, communist parties, etc. So, it is hardly surprising to see Adonis doing two things:

First, opposing 'nationalism, secularism, socialism, marxism, communism and capitalism'⁵² à la Gibb et al., on account of their Western source of these ideas and their corrosive influence on the inner structures of Islam which keep it oriental.⁵³

Secondly, interpreting the Iranian Revolution in terms of a simple emphatic formula: 'Islam is simply Islam', 'regardless and in spite of politics, the class struggle, oil and economics.' Here, Adonis is presenting as ultimate wisdom the barren tautology of Ontological Orientalism, so well brought out in Said's critique: 'The Orient is the Orient'. 'Islam is Islam'; and, following the illustrious footsteps of such Ontological Orientalists as Renan, Macdonald, Von Grunebau and Bernard Lewis, Adonis and the other Islamanis imagine that they can comprehend its essence in isolation from the economics, sociology, oil and politics of the Islamic peoples. As a result they are anxious to secure Islam's Orientalist ontological status not only as the 'prime

and the legal power of the Jewish community over its members was destroyed. It should be noted that both developments were simultaneous, and that the latter is even more important, albeit less widely known, than the former.

Since the time of the late Roman Empire, Jewish communities had considerable legal powers over their members. Not only powers which arise through voluntary mobilisation of social pressure (for example refusal to have any dealing whatsoever with an excommunicated Jew or even to bury his body), but a power of naked coercion: to flog, to imprison, to expel – all this could be inflicted quite legally on an individual Jew by the rabbinical courts for all kinds of offences. In many countries – Spain and Poland are notable examples – even capital punishment could be and was inflicted, sometimes using particularly cruel methods such as flogging to death. All this was not only permitted but positively encouraged by the state authorities in both Christian and Muslim countries, who besides their general interest in preserving ‘law and order’ had in some cases a more direct financial interest as well. For example, in Spanish archives dating from the 13th and 14th centuries there are records of many detailed orders issued by those most devout Catholic Kings of Castille and Aragon, instructing their no less devout officials to co-operate with the rabbis in enforcing observance of the Sabbath by the Jews. Why? Because whenever a Jew was fined by a rabbinical court for violating the Sabbath, the rabbis had to hand nine tenths of the fine over to the king – a very profitable and effective arrangement. Similarly, one can quote from the *responsa* written shortly before 1848 by the famous Rabbi Moshe Sopher of Pressburg (now Bratislava), in what was then the autonomous Hungarian Kingdom in the Austrian Empire, and addressed to Vienna in Austria proper, where the Jews had already been granted some considerable individual rights.² He laments the fact that since the Jewish congregation in Vienna lost its powers to punish offenders, the Jews there have become lax in matters of religious observance, and adds: ‘Here in Pressburg, when I am told that a Jewish shopkeeper dared to open his shop during the Lesser Holidays, I immediately send a policeman to imprison him’.

This was the most important social fact of Jewish existence before the advent of the modern state: observance of the religious laws of Judaism, as well as their inculcation through education, were enforced on Jews by physical coercion, from which one could only escape by conversion to the religion of the majority, amounting in the circumstances to a total social break and for that reason very impracticable, except during a religious crisis.³

However, once the modern state had come into existence, the Jewish community lost its powers to punish or intimidate the individual Jew. The bonds of one of the most closed of ‘closed societies’, one of the most totalitarian societies in the whole history of mankind were snapped. This act of liberation came mostly from *outside*; although

there were some Jews who helped it from within, these were at first very few. This form of liberation had very grave consequences for the future. Just as in the case of Germany (according to the masterly analysis of A.J.P. Taylor) it was easy to ally the cause of reaction with patriotism, because in actual fact individual rights and equality before the law were brought into Germany by the armies of the French Revolution and of Napoleon, and one could brand liberty as 'un-German', exactly so it turned out to be very easy among the Jews, particularly in Israel, to mount a very effective attack against all the notions and ideals of humanism and the rule of law (not to say democracy) as something 'un-Jewish' or 'anti-Jewish' – as indeed they are, *in a historical sense* – and as principles which may be used in the 'Jewish interest', but which have no validity *against* the 'Jewish interest', for example when Arabs invoke these same principles. This has also led – again just as in Germany and other nations of *Mitteleuropa* – to a deceitful, sentimental and ultra-romantic Jewish historiography, from which all inconvenient facts have been expunged.

So one will not find in Hanna Arendt's voluminous writings, whether on totalitarianism or on Jews, or on both,⁴ the smallest hint as to what Jewish society in Germany was really like in the 18th century: burning of books, persecution of writers, disputes about the magic powers of amulets, bans on the most elementary 'non-Jewish' education such as the teaching of correct German or indeed German written in the Latin alphabet.⁵ Nor can one find in the numerous English-language 'Jewish histories' the elementary facts about the attitude of Jewish mysticism (so fashionable at present in certain quarters) to non-Jews: that they are considered to be, literally, limbs of Satan, and that the few non-satani individuals among them (that is, those who convert to Judaism) are in reality 'Jewish souls' who got lost when Satan violated the Holy Lady (*Shekhinah* or *Matronit*, one of the female components of the Godhead, sister and wife of the younger male God according to the cabbala) in his heavenly abode. The great authorities, such as Gershom Scholem, have lent their authority to a system of deceptions in all the 'sensitive' areas, the more popular ones being the most dishonest and misleading.

But the social consequence of this process of liberalisation was that for the first time since about AD 200,⁶ a Jew could be free to do what he liked, within the bounds of his country's civil law, without having to pay for this freedom by converting to another religion. The freedom to learn and read books in modern languages, the freedom to read and write books in Hebrew not approved by the rabbis (as any Hebrew or Yiddish book previously had to be), the freedom to eat non-kosher food, the freedom to ignore the numerous absurd taboos regulating sexual life, even the freedom to think – for 'forbidden thoughts' are among the most serious sins – all these were granted to the Jews of Europe (and subsequently of other countries) by modern or even absolutist European regimes, although the latter were at the same time antisemitic and oppressive. Nicholas I of Russia was a notorious

The Jewish religion and its attitude to non-Jews

antisemite and issued many laws against the Jews of his state. But he also strengthened the forces of 'law and order' in Russia – not only the secret police but also the regular police and the gendarmerie – with the consequence that it became difficult to murder Jews on the order of their rabbis, whereas in pre-1795 Poland it had been quite easy. 'Official' Jewish history condemns him on *both* counts. For example, in the late 1830s a 'Holy Rabbi' (*Tzadik*) in a small Jewish town in the Ukraine ordered the murder of a heretic by throwing him into the boiling water of the town baths, and contemporary Jewish sources note with astonishment and horror that bribery was 'no longer effective' and that not only the actual perpetrators but also the Holy Man were severely punished. The Metternich regime of pre-1848 Austria was notoriously reactionary and quite unfriendly to Jews, but it did not allow people, even liberal Jewish rabbis, to be poisoned. During 1848, when the regime's power was temporarily weakened, the first thing the leaders of the Jewish community in the Galician city of Lemberg (now Lvov) did with their newly regained freedom was to poison the liberal rabbi of the city, whom the tiny non-Orthodox Jewish group in the city had imported from Germany. One of his greatest heresies, by the way, was the advocacy and actual performance of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, which had recently been invented.

In the last 150 years, the term 'Jew' has therefore acquired a dual meaning, to the great confusion of some well-meaning people, particularly in the English-speaking countries, who imagine that the Jews they meet socially are 'representative' of Jews 'in general'. In the countries of east Europe as well as in the Arab world, the Jews were liberated from the tyranny of their own religion and of their own communities *by outside forces*, too late and in circumstances too unfavourable for genuine internalised social change. In most cases, and particularly in Israel, the old concept of society, the same ideology – especially as directed towards non-Jews – and the same utterly false conception of history have been preserved. This applies even to some of those Jews who joined 'progressive' or leftist movements. An examination of radical, socialist and communist parties can provide many examples of disguised Jewish chauvinists and racists, who joined these parties merely for reasons of 'Jewish interest' and are, in this region, in favour of 'anti-gentile' discrimination. One need only check how many Jewish 'socialists' have managed to write about the kibbutz without taking the trouble to mention that it is a racist institution from which non-Jewish citizens of Israel are rigorously excluded, to see that the phenomenon we are alluding to is by no means uncommon.⁷

Avoiding labels based on ignorance or hypocrisy, we thus see that the word 'Jewry' and its cognates describe *two different and even contrasting social groups*, and because of current Israeli politics the continuum between the two is disappearing fast. On the one hand there is the traditional totalitarian meaning discussed above; on the other

hand there are Jews by descent who have accepted and *internalised* the complex of ideas which Karl Popper has called 'the open society' (There are also some, particularly in the USA, who have not internalised these ideas, but try to make a show of acceptance.)

It is important to note that *all* the supposedly 'Jewish characteristics' – by which I mean the traits which vulgar so-called intellectuals in the West attribute to 'the Jews' – are *modern* characteristics, quite unknown during most of Jewish history, and appeared only when the totalitarian Jewish community began to lose its power. Take, for example, the famous Jewish sense of humour. Not only is humour very rare in Hebrew literature before the 19th century (and is only found during few periods, in countries where the Jewish upper class was relatively free from the rabbinical yoke, such as Italy between the 14th and 17th centuries or Muslim Spain) but humour and jokes are strictly forbidden by the Jewish religion – except, significantly, jokes against other religions. Satire against rabbis and leaders of the community was never internalised by Judaism, not even to a small extent, as it was in Latin Christianity. There were no Jewish comedies, just as there were no comedies in Sparta, and for a similar reason.⁸ Or take the love of learning. Except for a purely religious learning, which was itself in a debased and degenerate state, the Jews of Europe (and to a somewhat lesser extent also of the Arab countries) were dominated, before about 1780, by a supreme contempt and hate for all learning (excluding the Talmud and Jewish mysticism). Large parts of the Old Testament, a non-liturgical Hebrew poetry, most books on Jewish philosophy were not read and their very names were often anathematised. Study of all languages was strictly forbidden, as was the study of mathematics and science. Geography,⁹ history – even Jewish history – were completely unknown. The critical sense, which is supposedly so characteristic of Jews, was totally absent, and nothing was so forbidden, feared and therefore persecuted as the most modest innovation or the most innocent criticism.

It was a world sunk in the most abject superstition, fanaticism and ignorance, a world in which the preface to the first work on geography in Hebrew (published in 1803 in Russia) could complain that very many great rabbis were denying the existence of the American continent and saying that it is 'impossible'. Between that world and what is often taken in the West to 'characterise' Jews there is nothing in common except the mistaken name.

However, a great many present-day Jews are nostalgic for *this* world, their lost paradise, the comfortable closed society from which they were not so much liberated as expelled. A large part of the Zionist movement always wanted to restore it – *and this part has gained the upper hand*. Many of the motives behind Israeli politics, which bewilder the poor confused western 'friends of Israel', are perfectly explicable once they are seen simply as reaction, reaction in the political sense which this word has had for the last two hundred years: a force

and in many respects innovative, and therefore illusory, return to the closed society of the Jewish past.

Obstacles to understanding

Historically it can be shown that a closed society is not interested in a description of itself, no doubt because any description is in part a form of critical analysis and so may encourage critical 'forbidden thoughts'. The more a society becomes open, the more it is interested in reflecting, at first descriptively and then critically, upon itself, its present working as well as its past. But what happens when a faction of intellectuals desires to drag a society, which has already opened up to a considerable extent, back to its previous totalitarian, closed condition? Then the very means of the former progress – philosophy, the sciences, history and especially sociology – become the most effective instruments of the 'treason of the intellectuals'. They are perverted in order to serve as devices of deception, and in the process they degenerate.

Classical Judaism¹⁰ had little interest in describing or explaining itself to the members of its own community, whether educated (in talmudic studies) or not.¹¹ It is significant that the writing of Jewish history, even in the driest annalistic style, ceased completely from the time of Josephus Flavius (end of first century) until the Renaissance, when it was revived for a short time in Italy and in other countries where the Jews were under strong Italian influence.¹² Characteristically, the rabbis feared Jewish even more than general history, and the first modern book on history published in Hebrew (in the sixteenth century) was entitled 'History of the kings of France and of the Ottoman kings'. It was followed by some histories dealing only with the persecutions that Jews had been subjected to. The first book on Jewish history proper¹³ (dealing with ancient times) was promptly banned and suppressed by the highest rabbinical authorities, and did not reappear before the 19th century. The rabbinical authorities of east Europe furthermore decreed that all non-talmudic studies are to be forbidden, even when nothing specific could be found in them which merits anathema, because they encroach on the time that should be employed either in studying the Talmud or in making money – which should be used to subsidise talmudic scholars. Only one loophole was left, namely the time that even a pious Jew must perforce spend in the privy. In that unclean place sacred studies are forbidden, and it was therefore permitted to read history there, provided it was written in Hebrew and was completely secular, which in effect meant that it must be exclusively devoted to non-Jewish subjects. (One can imagine that those few Jews of that time who – no doubt tempted by Satan – developed an interest in the history of the French kings were constantly complaining to their neighbours about the constipation they were suffering from . . .). As a consequence, two hundred years ago the vast majority of Jews were

totally in the dark not only about the existence of America but also about Jewish history and Jewry's contemporary state; and they were quite content to remain so.

There was however one area in which they were not allowed to remain self-contented – the area of Christian attacks against those passages in the Talmud and the talmudic literature which are specifically anti-Christian or more generally anti-Gentile. It is important to note that this challenge developed relatively late in the history of Christian Jewish relations – only from the thirteenth century on. (Before that time, the Christian authorities attacked Judaism using either Biblical or general arguments, but seemed to be quite ignorant as to the contents of the Talmud.) The Christian campaign against the Talmud was apparently brought on by the conversion to Christianity of Jews who were well versed in the Talmud and who were in many cases attracted by the development of Christian philosophy, with its strong Aristotelian (and thus universal) character.¹⁴

It must be admitted at the outset that the Talmud and the talmudic literature – quite apart from the general anti-Gentile streak that runs through them, which will be discussed in greater detail in the Appendix – contain very offensive statements and precepts directed specifically against Christianity. For example, in addition to a series of scurrilous sexual allegations against Jesus, the Talmud states that his punishment in hell is to be immersed in boiling excrement – a statement not exactly calculated to endear the Talmud to devout Christians. Or one can quote the precept according to which Jews are instructed to burn, publicly if possible, any copy of the New Testament that comes into their hands. (This is not only still in force but actually practised today; thus on 2 March 1980 hundreds of copies of the New Testament were publicly and ceremonially burnt in Jerusalem under the auspices of Ya'akov Le'akhim, a Jewish religious organisation subsidised by the Israeli Ministry of Religions.)

Anyway, a powerful attack, well based in many points, against talmudic Judaism developed in Europe from the thirteenth century. We are not referring here to ignorant calumnies, such as the blood libel propagated by benighted monks in small provincial cities, but to serious disputations held before the best European universities of the time and on the whole conducted as fairly as was possible under medieval circumstances.¹⁵

What was the Jewish – or rather the rabbinical – response? The simplest one was the ancient weapon of bribery and string-pulling. In most European countries, during most of the time, anything could be fixed by a bribe. Nowhere was this maxim more true than in the Rome of the Renaissance popes. The *Editio Princeps* of the complete Code of Talmudic law, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* – replete not only with the most offensive precepts against all Gentiles but also with explicit attacks on Christianity and on Jesus (after whose name the author

adds piously, 'May the name of the wicked perish') – was published unexpurgated in Rome in the year 1480 under Sixtus IV, politically a very active pope who had a constant and urgent need for money. (A few years earlier, the only older edition of *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius from which the violent attack on Christianity had not been removed was also published in Rome . . .) Alexander VI Borgia was also very liberal in this respect.

Even during that period, as well as before it, there were always countries in which for a time a wave of anti-Talmud persecution set in. But a more consistent and widespread onslaught came with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which induced a higher standard of intellectual honesty as well as a better knowledge of Hebrew among Christian scholars. From the 16th century, all the talmudic literature, including the Talmud itself, was subjected to Christian censorship in various countries. In Russia this went on until 1917. Some censors, such as in Holland, were more lax, while others were more severe; and the offensive passages were expunged or modified.

All modern studies on Judaism, particularly by Jews, have evolved from that conflict, and to this day they bear the unmistakable marks of their origin: deception, apologetics or hostile polemics, indifference or even active hostility to the pursuit of truth. Almost all the so-called *Jewish studies in Judaism*, from that time to this very day, are polemics against an external enemy rather than an internal debate.

It is important to note that this was *initially* the character of historiography in all known societies (except ancient Greece, whose early liberal historians were attacked by later sophists for their insufficient patriotism!). This was true of the early Catholic and Protestant historians, who polemicised against each other. Similarly, the earliest European national histories are imbued with the crudest nationalism and scorn for all other, neighbouring nations. But sooner or later there comes a time when an attempt is made to understand one's national or religious adversary and at the same time to criticise certain deep and important aspects of the history of one's own group; and both these developments go together. Only when historiography becomes – as Pieter Geyl put it so well – 'a debate without end' rather than a continuation of war by historiographic means, only then does a humane historiography, which strives for both accuracy and fairness, become possible; and it then turns into one of the most powerful instruments of humanism and self-education.

It is for this reason that modern totalitarian regimes rewrite history or punish historians.¹⁶ When a whole society tries to return to totalitarianism, a totalitarian history is written, not because of compulsion from above but under pressure from below, which is much more effective. This is what happened in Jewish history, and this constitutes the first obstacle we have to surmount.

What were the detailed mechanisms (other than bribery) employed by

Jewish communities, in cooperation with outside forces, in order to ward off the attack on the Talmud and other religious literature? Several methods can be distinguished, all of them having important political consequences reflected in current Israeli policies. Although it would be tedious to supply in each case the Beginistic or Labour-zionist parallel, I am sure that readers who are somewhat familiar with the details of Middle East politics will themselves be able to notice the resemblance.

The first mechanism I shall discuss is that of *surreptitious defiance, combined with outward compliance*. As explained above, talmudic passages directed against Christianity or against non-Jews¹⁷ had to go or to be modified – the pressure was too strong. This is what was done: a few of the most offensive passages were bodily removed from all editions printed in Europe after the mid-sixteenth century. In all other passages, the expressions ‘Gentile’, ‘non-Jew’, ‘stranger’ (*goy*, *ein yehudi*, *nokhri*) – which appear in all early manuscripts and printings as well as in all editions published in Islamic countries – were replaced by terms such as ‘idolator’, ‘heathen’ or even ‘Canaanite’ or ‘Samaritan’ terms which could be explained away but which a Jewish reader could recognise as euphemisms for the old expressions.

As the attack mounted, so the defence became more elaborate, sometimes with lasting tragic results. During certain periods the Tsarist Russian censorship became stricter and, seeing the above-mentioned euphemisms for what they were, forbade them too. Thereupon the rabbinical authorities substituted the terms ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ (in Hebrew, *Yishma‘eli* – which means both) or occasionally ‘Egyptian’ correctly calculating that the Tsarist authorities would not object to this kind of abuse. At the same time, lists of *Talmudic Omissions* were circulated in manuscript form, which explained all the new terms and pointed out all the omissions. At times, a general disclaimer was printed before the title page of each volume of talmudic literature, solemnly declaring, sometimes on oath, that all hostile expressions in the volume are intended only against the idolators of antiquity, or even against the long-vanished Canaanites, rather than against ‘the people in whose land we live’. After the British conquest of India, some rabbis hit on the subterfuge of claiming that any particularly outrageous derogatory expression used by them is only intended against the Indians. Occasionally the aborigines of Australia were also added as whipping-boys.

Needless to say, all this was a calculated lie from beginning to end and following the establishment of the State of Israel, once the rabbis felt secure, all the offensive passages and expressions were restored without hesitation in all new editions. (Because of the enormous cost which new edition involves, a considerable part of the talmudic literature, including the Talmud itself, is still being reprinted from the old editions. For this reason, the above-mentioned *Talmudic Omissions* have now been published in Israel in a cheap printed edition, under

the title *Hesronot Shas*.) So now one can read quite freely – and Jewish children are actually taught – passages such as that¹⁸ which commands every Jew, whenever passing near a cemetery, to utter a blessing if the cemetery is Jewish, but to curse the mothers of the dead¹⁹ if it is non-Jewish. In the old editions the curse was omitted, or one of the euphemisms was substituted for ‘Gentiles’. But in the new Israeli edition of Rabbi ‘Adin Steinsalz (complete with Hebrew explanations and glosses to the Aramaic parts of the text, so that schoolchildren should be in no doubt as to what they are supposed to say) the unambiguous words ‘Gentiles’ and ‘strangers’ have been restored.

Under external pressure, the rabbis deceptively eliminated or modified certain passages – but not the actual practices which are prescribed in them. It is a fact which must be remembered, not least by Jews themselves, that for centuries our totalitarian society has employed barbaric and inhumane customs to poison the minds of its members, and it is still doing so. (These inhumane customs cannot be explained away as mere reaction to antisemitism or persecution of Jews; they are gratuitous barbarities directed against each and every human being. A pious Jew arriving for the first time in Australia, say, and chancing to pass near an Aboriginal graveyard, must – as an act of worship of ‘God’ – curse the mothers of the dead buried there.) Without facing this real social fact, we all become parties to the deception and accomplices to the process of poisoning the present and future generations, with all the consequences of this process.

The deception continues

Modern scholars of Judaism have not only continued the deception, but have actually improved upon the old rabbinical methods, both in impudence and in mendacity. I omit here the various histories of antisemitism, as unworthy of serious consideration, and shall give just three particular examples and one general example of the more modern ‘scholarly’ deceptions.

In 1962, a part of the Maimonidean Code referred to above, the so-called Book of Knowledge, which contains the most basic rules of Jewish faith and practice, was published in Jerusalem in a bilingual edition, with the English translation facing the Hebrew text.²⁰ The latter has been restored to its original purity, and the command to exterminate Jewish infidels appears in it in full: ‘It is a duty to exterminate them with one’s own hands’. In the English translation this is somewhat softened to ‘It is a duty to take active measures to destroy them’. But then the Hebrew text goes on to specify the prime examples of ‘infidels’ who must be exterminated: ‘Such as Jesus of Nazareth and his pupils, and Tzadoq and Baitos²¹ and their pupils, may the name of the wicked rot’. *Not one word* of this appears in the English text on the facing page (78 a). And, even more significant, in spite of the wide circulation of

this book among scholars in the English-speaking countries, not one of them has, as far as I know, protested against this glaring deception.

The second example comes from the USA, again from an English translation of a book by Maimonides. Apart from his work on the codification of the Talmud, he was also a philosopher and his *Guide to the Perplexed* is justly considered to be the greatest work of Jewish religious philosophy and is widely read and used even today. Unfortunately, in addition to his attitude towards non-Jews generally and Christians in particular, Maimonides was also an anti-Black racist. Towards the end of the *Guide*, in a crucial chapter (book iii, chapter 5) he discusses how various sections of humanity can attain the supreme religious value, the true worship of God. Among those who are incapable of even approaching this are 'some of the Turks [i.e., the Mongol race] and the nomads in the North, and the Blacks and the nomads in the South, and those who resemble them in our climates. And the nature is like the nature of mute animals, and according to my opinion they are not on the level of human beings, and their level among existing things is below that of a man and above that of a monkey, because they have the image and the resemblance of a man more than a monkey does.'

Now, what does one do with such a passage in a most important and necessary work of Judaism? Face the truth and its consequences? God forbid! Admit (as so many Christian scholars, for example, have done in similar circumstances) that a very important Jewish authority held also rabid anti-Black views, and by this admission make an attempt at self-education in real humanity? Perish the thought. I can almost imagine Jewish scholars in the USA consulting among themselves 'what is to be done?' – for the book *had* to be translated, due to the decline in the knowledge of Hebrew among American Jews. Whether by consultation or by individual inspiration, a happy 'solution' was found: in the popular American translation of the *Guide* by one Friedlander, first published as far back as 1925 and since then reprinted in many editions including several in paperback, the Hebrew word *Kushim*, which means Blacks, was simply transliterated and appears as 'Kushites', a word which means nothing to those who have no knowledge of Hebrew, or whom an obliging rabbi will not give an *oral* explanation.²² During these years, not a word has been said to point out the initial deception or the social facts underlying its continuation – and this throughout the excitement of Martin Luther King's campaigns, which were supported by so many rabbis, not to mention other Jewish figures, some of whom must have been aware of the anti-Black racist attitude which forms part of their Jewish heritage.²³

Surely one is driven to the hypothesis that quite a few of Martin Luther King's rabbinical supporters were either anti-Black racists who supported him for tactical reasons of 'Jewish interest' (wishing to win Black support for American Jewry and for Israel's policies) or were accomplished hypocrites, to the point of schizophrenia, capable

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passing very rapidly from a hidden enjoyment of rabid racism to a proclaimed attachment to an anti-racist struggle – and back – and back again.

The third example comes from a work which has far less serious scholarly intent – but is all the more popular for that: *The Joys of Yiddish* by Leo Rosten. This light-hearted work – first published in the USA in 1968, and reprinted in many editions, including several times as Penguin paperback – is a kind of glossary of Yiddish words often used by Jews or even non-Jews in English-speaking countries. For each entry, in addition to a detailed definition and more or less amusing anecdotes illustrating its use, there is also an etymology stating (quite accurately, on the whole) the language from which the word came into Yiddish and its meaning in that language. The entry *Shaygets* – whose main meaning is ‘a Gentile boy or young man’ – is an exception: there the etymology cryptically states ‘Hebrew origin’, without giving the form or meaning of the original Hebrew word. However, under the entry *Shiksa* – the feminine form of *Shaygets* – the author does give the original Hebrew word, *shegetz* (or, in his transliteration, *sheques*) and defines its Hebrew meaning as ‘blemish’. This is a bare-faced lie, as every speaker of Hebrew knows. The *Megiddo Modern Hebrew-English dictionary*, published in Israel, correctly defines *shegetz* as follows: ‘unclean animal; loathsome creature, abomination; colloquial – pronounced shaygets) wretch, unruly youngster; Gentile youngster’.

My final, more general example is, if possible, even more shocking than the others. It concerns the attitude of the Hassidic movement towards non-Jews. Hassidism – a continuation (and debasement!) of Jewish mysticism – is still a *living* movement, with hundreds of thousands of active adherents who are fanatically devoted to their ‘holy abbas’, some of whom have acquired a very considerable political influence in Israel, among the leaders of most parties and even more so at the higher echelons of the army.

What, then, are the views of this movement concerning non-Jews? As an example, let us take the famous *Hatanya*, fundamental book of the Habbad movement, one of the most important branches of Hassidism. According to this book, all non-Jews are totally satanic creatures in whom there is absolutely nothing good’. Even a non-Jewish embryo is qualitatively different from a Jewish one. The very existence of a non-Jew is ‘inessential’, whereas all of creation was created solely for the sake of the Jews.

This book is circulated in countless editions, and its ideas are further propagated in the numerous ‘discourses’ of the present hereditary Tzhehrer of Habbad, the so-called Lubavitcher rabbi, M.M. Schneersohn, who leads this powerful world-wide organisation from his New York headquarters. In Israel these ideas are widely disseminated among the public at large, in the schools and in the army. (According to the testimony of Shulamit Aloni, Member of the Knesset, this Habbad propaganda was particularly stepped up before Israel’s invasion of

Lebanon in March 1978, in order to induce military doctors and nurses to withhold medical help from 'Gentile wounded'. This Nazi-like advice did not refer specifically to Arabs or Palestinians, but simply to 'Gentiles', *goyim*.) Two former Israeli Presidents, Shazar and Katzir were ardent adherents of Habad, and many top Israeli and American politicians – headed by Prime Minister Begin and Vice President Mondale – publicly court and support it. This, in spite of the considerable unpopularity of the Lubavitcher rabbi – in Israel he is widely criticised because he refuses to come to the Holy Land even for a visit and keeps himself in New York for obscure messianic reasons, while in New York his anti-Black attitude is notorious.

The fact that, *despite* these pragmatic difficulties, Habad can be publicly supported by so many top political figures owes much to the thoroughly disingenuous and misleading treatment by almost all scholars who have written about the Hassidic movement and its Habad branch. This applies particularly to all who have written or are writing about it in English. They suppress the glaring evidence of the old Hassidic texts as well as the latter-day political implications that follow from them, which stare in the face of even a casual reader of the Israeli Hebrew press, in whose pages the Lubavitcher rabbi and other Hassidic leaders constantly publish the most rabid bloodthirsty statements and exhortations against all Arabs.

A chief deceiver in this case, and a good example of the power of the deception, was Martin Buber. His numerous works eulogising the whole Hassidic movement (including Habad) never so much as hint at the real doctrines of Hassidism concerning non-Jews. The crime of deception is all the greater in view of the fact that Buber's eulogies of Hassidism were first published in German during the period of the rise of German nationalism and the accession of Nazism to power. But while ostensibly opposing Nazism, Buber glorified a movement holding and actually teaching doctrines about non-Jews not unlike the Nazi doctrines about Jews. One could of course argue that the Hassidic Jews of seventy or fifty years ago were the victims, and a 'white lie' favouring a victim is excusable. But the consequences of deception are incalculable. Buber's works were translated into Hebrew, were made a powerful element of the Hebrew education in Israel, have greatly increased the power of the bloodthirsty Hassidic leaders, and have thus been an important factor in the rise of Israeli chauvinism and hate of all non-Jews. If we think about the many human beings who died of their wounds because Israeli army nurses, incited by Hassidic propaganda, refused to tend them, then a heavy onus for their blood lies on the head of Martin Buber.

I must mention here that in his adulation of Hassidism Buber far surpassed other Jewish scholars, particularly those writing in Hebrew (or formerly, in Yiddish) or even in European languages but purely for a Jewish audience. In questions of internal Jewish interest, there has once been a great deal of justified criticism of the Hassidic movement.

Their mysogynism (much more extreme than that common to all Jewish Orthodoxy), their indulgence in alcohol, their fanatical cult of their hereditary 'holy rabbis' who extorted money from them, the numerous superstitions peculiar to them – these and many other negative traits were critically commented upon. But Buber's sentimental and deceitful romanticisation has won the day, especially in the US and Israel, because it was in tune with the totalitarian admiration of anything 'genuinely Jewish' and because certain 'left' Jewish circles in which Buber had a particularly great influence have adopted this position.

Nor was Buber alone in his attitude, although in my opinion he was by far the worst in the evil he propagated and the influence he has left behind him. There was the very influential sociologist and biblical scholar, Yehezkiel Kaufman, an advocate of genocide on the model of the Book of Joshua, the idealist philosopher Hugo Shmuel Bergman, who as far back as 1914-15 advocated the expulsion of all Palestinians to Iraq, and many others. All were outwardly 'dovish', but employed formulas which could be manipulated in the most extreme anti-Arab sense, all had tendencies to that religious mysticism which encourages the propagation of deceptions, and all seemed to be gentle persons who, even when advocating expulsion, racism and genocide, seemed incapable of hurting a fly – and just for this reason the effect of their deceptions was the greater.

It is against the glorification of inhumanity, proclaimed not only by the rabbis but by those who are supposed to be the greatest and certainly the most influential scholars of Judaism, that we have to struggle; and it is against those modern successors of the false prophets and dishonest priests that we have to repeat – even in the face of an almost unanimous opinion within Israel and among the majority of Jews in countries such as the US – Lucretius' warning against surrendering one's judgement to the declamations of religious leaders: *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* – 'To such heights of evil are men driven by religion'. Religion is not always (as Marx said) the opium of the people, but it can often be so, and when it is used in this sense by prevaricating and misrepresenting its true nature, the scholars and intellectuals who perform this task take on the character of opium smugglers.

But we can derive from this analysis another, more general conclusion about the most effective and horrific means of compulsion to do evil, to cheat and to deceive and, while keeping one's hands quite clean of violence, to corrupt whole peoples and drive them to oppression and murder. (For there can no longer be any doubt that the most horrifying acts of oppression in the West Bank are motivated by Jewish religious fanaticism.) Most people seem to assume that the worst totalitarianism employs physical coercion, and would refer to the imagery of Orwell's *1984* for a model illustrating such a regime. But it seems to me that this common view is greatly mistaken, and that the intuition of Isaac Asimov, in whose science fiction the worst oppression is always internalised, is the more true to the dangers of human nature. Unlike

Stalin's tame scholars, the rabbis – and even more so the scholar attacked here, and with them the whole mob of equally silent middle brows such as writers, journalists, public figures, who lie and deceive more than them – are not facing the danger of death or concentration camp, but only social pressure; they lie out of patriotism because they believe that it is their duty to lie for what they conceive to be the Jewish interest. They are *patriotic liars*, and it is the same patriotism which reduces them to silence when confronted with the discrimination and oppression of the Palestinians.

In the present case we are also faced with another group loyalty, but one which comes from outside the group, and which is sometimes even more mischievous. Very many non-Jews (including Christian clergies and religious laymen, as well as some marxists from all marxist groups) hold the curious opinion that one way to 'atone' for the persecution of Jews is not to speak out against evil perpetrated by Jews but to participate in 'white lies' about them. The crude accusation of 'antisemitism' (or, in the case of Jews, 'self-hate') against anybody who protests at the discrimination of Palestinians or who points out any fact about the Jewish religion or the Jewish past which conflicts with the 'approved version' comes with greater hostility and force from non-Jewish 'friends of the Jews' than from Jews. It is the existence and great influence of this group in all western countries, and particularly in the US (as well as the other English-speaking countries) which has allowed the rabbis and scholars of Judaism to propagate their lies not only without opposition but with considerable help.

In fact, many professed 'anti-stalinists' have merely substituted another idol for their worship, and tend to support Jewish racism and fanaticism with even greater ardour and dishonesty than were found among the most devoted stalinists in the past. Although this phenomenon of blind and stalinistic support for any evil, so long as it is 'Jewish' is particularly strong from 1945, when the truth about the extermination of European Jewry became known, it is a mistake to suppose that it began only then. On the contrary, it dates very far back, particularly in social-democratic circles. One of Marx's early friends, Moses Hess, widely known and respected as one of the first socialists in Germany, subsequently revealed himself as an extreme Jewish racist whose views about the 'pure Jewish race' published in 1858 were not unlike comparable bilge about the 'pure Aryan race'. But the German socialists, who struggled against German racism, remained silent about this Jewish racism.

In 1944, during the actual struggle against Hitler, the British Labour Party approved a plan for the expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine which was similar to Hitler's early plans (up to about 1941) for the Jews. This plan was approved under the pressure of Jewish members of the party's leadership, many of whom have displayed a stronger 'kith and kin' attitude to every Israeli policy than the Conservative 'kith and kin' supporters of Ian Smith ever did. But the stalinistic taboos on the

to successive stages of the union: at one point the goddess approaches with her handmaidens, at another the god puts his arm around her neck and fondles her breast, and finally the sexual act is supposed to take place.

Other prayers or religious acts, as interpreted by the cabbalists, are designed to deceive various angels (imagined as minor deities with a measure of independence) or to propitiate Satan. At a certain point in the morning prayer, some verses in Aramaic (rather than the more usual Hebrew) are pronounced.⁸ This is supposed to be a means for tricking the angels who operate the gates through which prayers enter heaven and who have the power to block the prayers of the pious. The angels only understand Hebrew and are baffled by the Aramaic verses; being somewhat dull-witted (presumably they are far less clever than the cabbalists) they open the gates, and at this moment all the prayers, including those in Hebrew, get through. Or take another example: both before and after a meal, a pious Jew ritually washes his hands, uttering a special blessing. On one of these two occasions he is worshipping God, by promoting the divine union of Son and Daughter; but on the other he is worshipping Satan, who likes Jewish prayers and ritual acts so much that when he is offered a few of them it keeps him busy for a while and he forgets to pester the divine Daughter. Indeed, the cabbalists believe that some of the sacrifices burnt in the Temple were intended for Satan. For example, the seventy bullocks sacrificed during the seven days of the feast of Tabernacles,⁹ were supposedly offered to Satan in his capacity as ruler of all the Gentiles,¹⁰ in order to keep him too busy to interfere on the eighth day, when sacrifice is made to God. Many other examples of the same kind can be given.

Several points should be made concerning this system and its importance for the proper understanding of Judaism, both in its classical period and in its present political involvement in Zionist practice.

First, whatever can be said about this cabbalistic system, it cannot be regarded as monotheistic, unless one is also prepared to regard Hinduism, the late Graeco-Roman religion, or even the religion of ancient Egypt, as 'monotheistic'.

Secondly, the real nature of classical Judaism is illustrated by the ease with which this system was adopted. Faith and beliefs (except nationalistic beliefs) play an extremely small part in classical Judaism. What is of prime importance is the ritual act, rather than the significance which that act is supposed to have or the belief attached to it. Therefore in times when a minority of religious Jews refused to accept the cabbala (as is the case today), one could see some few Jews performing a given religious ritual believing it to be an act of worship of God, while others do exactly the same thing with the intention of propitiating Satan – but so long as the act is the same they would pray together and remain members of the same congregation, however much they might dislike

each other. But if instead of the *intention* attached to the ritual washing of hands anyone would dare to introduce an innovation in the *mann* of washing,¹¹ a real schism would certainly ensue.

The same can be said about all sacred formulas of Judaism. Provided the wording is left intact, the meaning is at best a secondary matter. For example, perhaps the most sacred Jewish formula, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one', recited several times each day by every pious Jew, can at the present time mean two contrary things. It can mean that the Lord is indeed 'one'; but it can also mean that a certain stage in the union of the male and female deities has been reached or is being promoted by the proper recitation of this formula. However, when Jews of a Reformed congregation recite this formula in any language other than Hebrew, all Orthodox rabbis, whether they believe in unity or in the divine sexual union, are very angry indeed.

Finally, all this is of considerable importance in Israel (and in other Jewish centres) even at present. The enormous significance attached to mere formulas (such as the 'Law of Jerusalem'); the ideas and motivations of Gush Emunim; the urgency behind the hate for non-Jews presently living in Palestine; the fatalistic attitude towards all peace attempts by Arab states—all these and many other traits of Zionist politics, which puzzle so many well-meaning people who have a false notion about classical Judaism, become more intelligible against this religious and mystical background. I must warn, however, against falling into the other extreme and trying to explain all Zionist politics in terms of this background. Obviously, the latter's influences vary in extent. Ben-Gurion was adept at manipulating them in a controlled way for specific ends. Under Begin the past exerts a much greater influence upon the present. But what one should never do is to ignore the past and its influences, because only by knowing it can one transcend its blind power.

Interpretation of the Bible

It will be seen from the foregoing example that what most supposed well-informed people think they know about Judaism may be very misleading, unless they can read Hebrew. All the details mentioned above can be found in the original texts or, in some cases, in modern books written in Hebrew for a rather specialised readership. In English one would look for them in vain, even where the omission of such socially important facts distorts the whole picture.

There is yet another misconception about Judaism which is particularly common among Christians, or people heavily influenced by Christian tradition and culture. This is the misleading idea that Judaism is a 'biblical religion'; that the Old Testament has in Judaism the same central place and legal authority which the Bible has for Protestant and even Catholic Christianity.

Again, this is connected with the question of interpretation. We have seen that in matters of belief there is great latitude. Exactly the opposite holds with respect to the legal interpretation of sacred texts. Here the interpretation is rigidly fixed – but by the Talmud rather than by the Bible itself.¹² Many, perhaps most, biblical verses prescribing religious acts and obligations are ‘understood’ by classical Judaism, and by present-day Orthodoxy, in a sense which is quite distinct from, or even contrary to, their literal meaning as understood by Christian or other readers of the Old Testament, who only see the plain text. The same division exists at present in Israel between those educated in Jewish religious schools and those educated in ‘secular’ Hebrew schools, where in the whole the plain meaning of the Old Testament is taught.

This important point can only be understood through examples. It will be noted that the changes in meaning do not all go in the same direction from the point of view of ethics, as the term is understood now. Apologetics of Judaism claim that the interpretation of the Bible, originated by the Pharisees and fixed in the Talmud, is always more liberal than the literal sense. But some of the examples below show that this is far from being the case.

Let us start with the Decalogue itself. The Eighth Commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal’ (*Exodus*, 20, 15), is taken to be a prohibition against ‘stealing’ (that is, kidnapping) *a Jewish person*. The reason is that according to the Talmud all acts forbidden by the Decalogue are capital offences. Stealing property is not a capital offence (while kidnapping of Gentiles by Jews is allowed by talmudic law) – hence the interpretation. A virtually identical sentence – ‘Ye shall not steal’ (*Leviticus*, 19, 11) – is however allowed to have its literal meaning.

The famous verse ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ etc. (*Exodus*, 21, 24) is taken to mean ‘eye-money for eye’, that is payment of a fine rather than physical retribution.

Here is a notorious case of turning the literal meaning into its exact opposite. The biblical text plainly warns against following the bandwagon in an unjust cause: ‘Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgement’ (*Exodus*, 23, 2). The last words of this sentence – ‘Decline after many to wrest judgement’ – are torn out of their context and interpreted as an injunction to follow the majority!

The verse ‘Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk’ (*Exodus*, 23, 19) is interpreted as a ban on mixing any kind of meat with any milk or milk product. Since the same verse is repeated in two other places in the Pentateuch, the mere repetition is taken to be a treble ban, forbidding a Jew (i) to eat such a mixture, (ii) to cook it for any purpose and (iii) to enjoy or benefit from it in any way.¹³

5 In numerous cases general terms such as 'thy fellow', 'stranger', or even 'man' are taken to have an exclusivist chauvinistic meaning. The famous verse 'thou shalt love thy fellow¹⁴ as thyself' (*Leviticus*, 19, 1) is understood by classical (and present-day Orthodox) Judaism as an injunction to love one's fellow *Jew*, not any fellow human. Similarly the verse 'neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy fellow' (*ibid*, 16) is supposed to mean that one must not stand idly by when the life ('blood') of a fellow *Jew* is in danger; but, as will be seen in the Appendix, a Jew is in general forbidden to save the life of a Gentile because 'he is not thy fellow'. The generous injunction to leave the gleanings of one's field and vineyard 'for the poor and the stranger' (*ibid*, 9-10) is interpreted as referring exclusively to the *Jewish* poor and to converts to Judaism. The taboo laws relating to corpses begin with the verse 'This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come in the tent . . . shall be unclean seven days' (*Numbers*, 19, 16). But the word 'man' (*adam*) is taken to mean 'Jew', so that only a Jewish corpse is taboo (that is, both 'unclean' and sacred). Based on this interpretation, pious Jews have a tremendous magic reverence towards Jewish corpses and Jewish cemeteries, but have no respect towards non-Jewish corpses and cemeteries. Thus hundreds of Muslim cemeteries have been utterly destroyed in Israel (in one case in order to make room for the Tel-Aviv Hilton) but there was a great outcry because the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives was damaged under Jordanian rule. Examples of this kind are too numerous to quote. Some of the inhuman consequences of this type of interpretation will be discussed in the Appendix.

6 Finally, consider one of the most beautiful prophetic passages: Isaiah's magnificent condemnation of hypocrisy and empty ritual, an exhortation to common decency. One verse (*Isaiah*, 1, 15) in this passage is: 'And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.' Since Jewish priests 'spread their hands' when blessing the people during service, this verse is supposed to mean that a priest who commits accidental homicide is disqualified from 'spreading his hands' in blessing (even if repentant) because they are 'full of blood'.

It is quite clear even from these examples that when Orthodox Jews today (or all Jews before about 1780) read the Bible, they are reading a very different book, with a totally different meaning, from the Bible read by non-Jews or non-Orthodox Jews. This distinction applies even in Israel, although both parties read the text in Hebrew. Experience particularly since 1967, has repeatedly corroborated this. Many Jews in Israel (and elsewhere), who are not Orthodox and have little detailed knowledge of the Jewish religion, have tried to shame Orthodox Israel (or right-wingers who are strongly influenced by religion) out of their inhuman attitude towards the Palestinians, by quoting at them ver-

from the Bible in their plain humane sense. It was always found, however, that such arguments do not have the slightest effect on those who follow classical Judaism; they simply do not understand what is being said to them, because to them the biblical text means something quite different than to everyone else.

If such a communication gap exists in Israel, where people read Hebrew and can readily obtain correct information if they wish, one can imagine how deep is the misconception abroad, say among people educated in the Christian tradition. In fact, the more such a person reads the Bible, the less he or she knows about Orthodox Judaism. For he latter regards the Old Testament as a text of immutable sacred formulas, whose recitation is an act of great merit, but whose meanings are wholly determined elsewhere. And, as Humpty Dumpty told Alice, behind the problem of who can determine the meaning of words, there stands the real question: 'Which is to be master?'

Structure of the Talmud

It should therefore be clearly understood that the source of authority for all the practices of classical (and present-day Orthodox) Judaism, the determining base of its legal structure, is the Talmud, or, to be precise, the so-called Babylonian Talmud; while the rest of the talmudic literature (including the so-called Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud) acts as a supplementary authority.

We cannot enter here into a detailed description of the Talmud and talmudic literature, but confine ourselves to a few principal points needed for our argument. Basically, the Talmud consists of two parts. First, the Mishnah – a terse legal code consisting of six volumes, or *tractates*, written in Hebrew, redacted in Palestine around AD 200 out of the much more extensive (and largely oral) legal material composed during the preceding two centuries. The second and by far predominant part is the Gemarah – a voluminous record of discussions on and around the Mishnah. There are two, roughly parallel, sets of Gemarah, one composed in Mesopotamia ('Babylon') between about AD 200 and 400, the other in Palestine between about AD 200 and some unknown date long before 500. The Babylonian Talmud (that is, the Mishnah plus the Mesopotamian Gemarah) is much more extensive and better arranged than the Palestinian, and it alone is regarded as definitive and authoritative. The Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud is accorded a decidedly lower status as a legal authority, along with a number of compilations, known collectively as the 'talmudic literature', containing material which the editors of the two Talmuds had left out.

Contrary to the Mishnah, the rest of the Talmud and talmudic literature is written in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, the latter language predominating in the Babylonian Talmud. Also, it is not limited to legal matters. Without any apparent order or reason, the legal discussion can

suddenly be interrupted by what is referred to as 'Narrative' (*Aggadah* – a medley of tales and anecdotes about rabbis or ordinary folk biblical figures, angels, demons, witchcraft and miracles.¹⁵ These narrative passages, although of great popular influence in Judaism through the ages, were always considered (even by the Talmud itself) as having secondary value. Of greatest importance for classical Judaism are the legal parts of the text, particularly the discussion of cases which are regarded as problematic. The Talmud itself defines the various categories of Jews, in ascending order, as follows. The lowest are the totally ignorant, then come those who only know the Bible, then those who are familiar with the Mishnah or Aggadah, and the superior class are those who have studied, and are able to discuss the legal part of the Gemarah. It is only the latter who are fit to lead their fellow Jews in all things.

The legal system of the Talmud can be described as totally comprehensive, rigidly authoritarian, and yet capable of infinite development without however any change in its dogmatic base. Every aspect of Jewish life, both individual and social, is covered, usually in considerable detail, with sanctions and punishments provided for every conceivable sin or infringement of the rules. The basic rules for every problem are stated dogmatically and cannot be questioned. What can be and is discussed at very great length is the elaboration and practical definition of these rules. Let me give a few examples.

'Not doing any work' on the sabbath. The concept *work* is defined as comprising exactly 39 types of work, neither more nor less. The criterion for inclusion in this list has nothing to do with the arduousness of a given task; it is simply a matter of dogmatic definition. One forbidden type of 'work' is writing. The question then arises: How many characters must one write in order to commit the sin of writing on the sabbath? (Answer: Two). Is the sin the same, irrespective of which hand is used? (Answer: No). However, in order to guard against falling into sin, the primary prohibition on writing is hedged with a secondary ban on touching any writing implement on the sabbath.

Another prototypical work forbidden on the sabbath is the grinding of grain. From this it is deduced, by analogy, that any kind of grinding of anything whatsoever is forbidden. And this in turn is hedged by a ban on the practice of medicine on the sabbath (except in cases of danger to Jewish life), in order to guard against falling into the sin of grinding medicament. It is in vain to point out that in modern times such danger does not exist (nor, for that matter, did it exist in many cases even in talmudic times); for, as a hedge around the hedge, the Talmud explicitly forbids liquid medicines and restorative drinks on the sabbath. What has been fixed remains for ever fixed, however absurd. Tertullian, one of the early Church Fathers, had written, 'I believe because it is absurd'. This can serve as a motto for the majority of talmudic rules, with the word 'believe' replaced by 'practise'.

business of the borrower, stipulating two conditions. First, that the borrower will pay the lender at an agreed future date a stated sum of money (in reality, the interest in the loan) as the lender's 'share in the profits'. Secondly, that the borrower will be presumed to have made sufficient profit to give the lender his share, unless a claim to the contrary is corroborated by the testimony of the town's rabbi or rabbinical judge etc. – who, by arrangement, refuse to testify in such cases. In practice all that is required is to take a text of this dispensation, written in Aramaic and entirely incomprehensible to the great majority, and put it on a wall of the room where the transaction is made (a copy of this text is displayed in all branches of Israeli banks) or even to keep it in a chest – and the interest-bearing loan between Jews becomes perfectly legal and blameless.

2 *The sabbatical year.* According to talmudic law (based on *Leviticus*, 25) Jewish-owned land in Palestine¹⁶ must be left fallow every seventh ('sabbatical') year, when all agricultural work (including harvesting) on such land is forbidden. There is ample evidence that this law was rigorously observed for about one thousand years, from the fifth century BC till the disappearance of Jewish agriculture in Palestine. Later, when there was no occasion to apply the law in practice, it was kept theoretically intact. However, in the 1880s, with the establishment of the first Jewish agricultural colonies in Palestine, it became a matter of practical concern. Rabbis sympathetic to the settlers helpfully devised a dispensation, which was later perfected by their successors in the religious Zionist parties and has become an established Israeli practice.

This is how it works. Shortly before a sabbatical year, the Israeli Minister of Internal Affairs gives the Chief Rabbi a document making him the legal owner of all Israeli land, both private and public. Armed with this paper, the Chief Rabbi goes to a non-Jew and sells him all the land of Israel (and, since 1967, the occupied territories) for a nominal sum. A separate document stipulates that the 'buyer' will 'resell' the land back after the year is over. And this transaction is repeated every seven years, usually with the same 'buyer'.

Non-Zionist rabbis do not recognise the validity of this dispensation,¹⁷ claiming correctly that, since religious law forbids Jews to sell land in Palestine to Gentiles, the whole transaction is based on a sin and hence null and void. The Zionist rabbis reply, however, that what is forbidden is a real sale, not a fictitious one!

3 *Milking on the sabbath.* This has been forbidden in post-talmudic times, through the process of increasing religious severity mentioned above. The ban could easily be kept in the diaspora, since Jews who had cows of their own were usually rich enough to have non-Jewish servants, who could be ordered (using one of the subterfuges described below) to do the milking. The early Jewish colonists in Palestine

employed Arabs for this and other purposes, but with the forcible imposition of the Zionist policy of exclusive Jewish labour there was need for a dispensation. (This was particularly important before the introduction of mechanised milking in the late 1950s.) Here too there was a difference between Zionist and non-Zionist rabbis.

According to the former, the forbidden milking becomes permitted provided the milk is not white but dyed blue. This blue Saturday milk is then used exclusively for making cheese, and the dye is washed off in the whey. Non-Zionist rabbis have devised a much subtler scheme (which I personally witnessed operating in a religious kibbutz in 1952). They discovered an old provision which allows the udders of a cow to be emptied on the Sabbath, purely for relieving the suffering caused to the animal by bloated udders, and on the strict condition that the milk run to waste on the ground. Now, this is what is actually done: On Saturday morning, a pious kibbutznik goes to the cowshed and places pails under the cows. (There is no ban on such work in the whole of the Talmudic literature.) He then goes to the synagogue to pray. Then comes his colleague, whose 'honest intention' is to relieve the animals' pain and let their milk run to the floor. But if, by chance, a pail happens to be standing there, is he under any obligation to remove it? Of course not. He simply 'ignores' the pails, fulfills his mission of mercy and goes to the synagogue. Finally a third pious colleague goes into the cowshed and discovers, to his great surprise, the pails full of milk. So he puts them in cold storage and follows his comrades to the synagogue. No harm at all is well, and there is no need to waste money on blue dye.

4 *Mixed crops.* Similar dispensations were issued by Zionist rabbis in respect of the ban (based on *Leviticus*, 19, 19) against sowing two different species of crop in the same field. Modern agronomy has however shown that in some cases (especially in growing fodder) mixed sowing is the most profitable. The rabbis invented a dispensation according to which one man sows the field lengthwise with one kind of seed, and later that day his comrade, who 'does not know' about the former, sows another kind of seed crosswise. However, this method was felt to be wasteful of labour, and a better one was devised: One man makes a heap of one kind of seed in a public place and carefully covers it with sack or piece of board. The second kind of seed is then put on top of the cover. Later, another man comes and exclaims, in front of witnesses, 'I need this sack (or board)' and removes it, so that the seeds mix 'naturally'. Finally, a third man comes along and is told, 'Take this and sow the field,' which he proceeds to do.¹⁸

5 *Leavened substances* must not be eaten or even kept in the possession of a Jew during the seven (or, outside Palestine, eight) days of Passover. The concept 'leavened substances' was continually broadened and the aversion to so much as seeing them during the festival approached hysteria. They include all kinds of flour and even

nground grain. In the original talmudic society this was bearable, because bread (leavened or not) was usually baked once a week; a peasant family would use the last of the previous year's grain to bake unleavened bread for the festival, which ushers in the new harvest season. However, in the conditions of post-talmudic European Jewry the observance was very hard on a middle-class Jewish family and even more so on a corn merchant. A dispensation was therefore devised, by which all those substances are sold in a fictitious sale to a Gentile before the festival and bought back automatically after it. The one thing that must be done is to lock up the taboo substances for the duration of the festival. In Israel this fictitious sale has been made more efficient. Religious Jews 'sell' their unleavened substances to their local rabbis, who in turn 'sell' them to the Chief Rabbis; the latter sell them to a Gentile, and by a special dispensation this sale is presumed to include also the unleavened substances of non-practising Jews.

Sabbath-Goy. Perhaps the most developed dispensations concern the 'Goy (Gentile) of Sabbath'. As mentioned above, the range of tasks banned on the sabbath has widened continually; but the range of tasks that must be carried out or supervised to satisfy needs or to increase comfort also keeps widening. This is particularly true in modern times, but the effect of technological change began to be felt long ago. The ban against grinding on the sabbath was a relatively light matter for a Jewish peasant or artisan, say in second-century Palestine, who used a hand-mill for domestic purposes. It was quite a different matter for a tenant of a water-mill or windmill – one of the most common Jewish occupations in eastern Europe. But even such a simple human problem' as the wish to have a hot cup of tea on a Saturday afternoon becomes much greater with the tempting samovar, used regularly on weekdays, standing in the room. These are just two examples out of a very large number of so-called 'problems of sabbath observance'. And we can state with certainty that for a community composed exclusively of Orthodox Jews they were quite insoluble, at least during the last eight or ten centuries, without the 'help' of non-Jews. This is even more true today in the 'Jewish State', because many public services, such as water, gas and electricity, fall in this category. Classical Judaism could not exist even for a whole week without using some non-Jews.

But without special dispensations there is a great obstacle in employing non-Jews to do these Saturday jobs; for talmudic regulations forbid Jews to order or ask a Gentile to do on the sabbath any work which they themselves are banned from doing.¹⁹ I shall describe two of the many types of dispensation used for such purposes.

First, there is the method of 'hinting', which depends on the casuistic logic according to which a sinful demand becomes blameless if it is phrased slyly. As a rule, the hint must be 'obscure', but in cases of extreme need a 'clear' hint is allowed. For example, in a recent booklet on religious observance for the use of Israeli soldiers, the latter are

taught how to talk to Arab workers employed by the army as sabbath Goyim. In urgent cases, such as when it is very cold and a fire must be lit, or when light is needed for a religious service, a pious Jewish soldier may use a 'clear' hint and tell the Arab: 'It is cold (or dark) here'. But normally an 'obscure' hint must suffice, for example: 'It would be more pleasant if it were warmer here'.²⁰ This method of 'hinting' is particularly repulsive and degrading inasmuch as it is normally used to non-Jews who, due to their poverty or subordinate social position, are wholly in the power of their Jewish employer. A Gentile servant (or employee of the Israeli army) who does not train himself to interpret 'obscure hints' as orders will be pitilessly dismissed.

The second method is used in cases where what the Gentile is required to do on Saturday is not an occasional task or personal service, which can be 'hinted' at as the need arises, but a routine or regular job without constant Jewish supervision. According to this method – called 'implicit inclusion' (*havla'ah*) of the sabbath among weekdays – the Gentile is hired 'for the whole week (or year)', without the sabbath being so much as mentioned in the contract. But in reality the work is only performed on the sabbath. This method was used in the past in hiring a Gentile to put out the candles in the synagogue after the sabbath eve prayer (rather than wastefully allowing them to burn out). Modern Israeli examples are: regulating the water supply or watching over water reservoirs on Saturdays.²¹

A similar idea is used also in the case of Jews, but for a different end. Jews are forbidden to receive any payment for work done on the sabbath, even if the work itself is permitted. The chief example here concerns the sacred professions: the rabbi or talmudic scholar who preaches or teaches on the sabbath, the cantor who sings only on Saturdays and other holy days (on which similar bans apply), the sexton and similar officials. In talmudic times, and in some countries even several centuries after, such jobs were unpaid. But later, when they became salaried professions, the dispensation of 'implicit inclusion' was used, and they were hired on a 'monthly' or 'yearly' basis. In the case of rabbis and talmudic scholars the problem is particularly complicated, because the Talmud forbids them to receive any payment for preaching, teaching or studying talmudic matters even on weekdays. For them an additional dispensation stipulates that their salary is not really a salary at all but 'compensation for idleness' (*dmey batalah*). As a combined result of these two fictions, what is in reality payment for work done mainly, or even solely, on the *sabbath* is transmogrified into payment for being *idle* on *weekdays*.

Social aspects of dispensations

Two social features of these and many similar practices deserve special mention.

First, a dominant feature of this system of dispensations, and of classical Judaism inasmuch as it is based on them, is deception – deception primarily of God, if his word can be used for an imaginary being so easily deceived by the rabbis, who consider themselves cleverer than him. No greater contrast can be conceived than that between the God of the Bible (particularly of the greater prophets) and of the God of classical Judaism. The latter is more like the early Roman Jupiter, who was likewise bamboozled by his worshippers, or the gods described in Frazer's *Golden Bough*.

From the ethical point of view, classical Judaism represents a process of degeneration, which is still going on; and this degeneration into a ribal collection of empty rituals and magic superstitions has very important social and political consequences. For it must be remembered that it is precisely the superstitions of classical Judaism which have the greatest hold on the Jewish masses, rather than those parts of the Bible or even the Talmud which are of real religious and ethical value. (The same can be observed also in other religions which are now undergoing revival.) What is popularly regarded as the most 'holy' and solemn occasion of the Jewish liturgical year, attended even by very many Jews who are otherwise far from religion? It is the *Kol Nidrey* prayer on the eve of Yom Kippur – a chanting of a particularly absurd and deceptive dispensation, by which all private vows made to God in the following year are declared in advance to be null and void.²³ Or, in the area of personal religion, the *Qadish* prayer, said on days of mourning by sons for their parents in order to elevate their departed souls to paradise – a recitation of an Aramaic text, incomprehensible to the great majority. Quite obviously, the popular regard given to these, the most superstitious parts of the Jewish religion, is not given to its better parts.

Together with the deception of God goes the deception of other Jews, mainly in the interest of the Jewish ruling class. It is characteristic that no dispensations were allowed in the specific interest of the Jewish poor. For example, Jews who were starving but not actually on the point of death were never allowed by their rabbis (who did not often go hungry themselves) to eat any sort of forbidden food, though kosher food is usually more expensive.

The second dominant feature of the dispensations is that they are in large part obviously motivated by the spirit of profit. And it is this combination of hypocrisy and the profit motive which increasingly dominated classical Judaism. In Israel, where the process goes on, this is dimly perceived by popular opinion, despite all the official brain-washing promoted by the education system and the media. The religious establishment – the rabbis and the religious parties – and, by association, to some extent the Orthodox community as a whole, are quite unpopular in Israel. One of the most important reasons for this is precisely their reputation for duplicity and venality. Of course, popular opinion (which may often be prejudiced) is not the same thing as social analysis; but in this particular case it is actually true that the Jewish

religious establishment does have a strong tendency to chicanery and graft, due to the corrupting influence of the Orthodox Jewish religion. Because in general social life religion is only one of the social influences, its effect on the mass of believers is not nearly so great as on the rabbis and leaders of the religious parties. Those religious Jews in Israel who are honest, as the majority of them undoubtedly are, are so not because of the influence of their religion and rabbis, but in spite of it. On the other hand, in those few areas of public life in Israel which are wholly dominated by religious circles, the level of chicanery, venality and corruption is notorious, far surpassing the 'average' level tolerated by the general, non-religious Israeli society.

In Part III we shall see how the dominance of the profit motive in classical Judaism is connected with the structure of Jewish society and its articulation with the general society in the midst of which Jews live in the 'classical' period. Here I merely want to observe that the profit motive is not characteristic of Judaism in all periods of its history. On the platonist confusion which seeks for the metaphysical timeless 'essence' of Judaism, instead of looking at the historical changes in Jewish society, has obscured this fact. (And this confusion has been greatly encouraged by Zionism, in its reliance on 'historical right' ahistorically derived from the Bible.) Thus, apologists of Judaism claim, quite correctly, that the Bible is hostile to the profit motive while the Talmud is indifferent to it. But this was caused by the very different social conditions in which they were composed. As was pointed out above, the Talmud was composed in two well-defined areas, in a period when the Jews living there constituted a society based on agriculture and consisting mainly of peasants – very different indeed from the society of classical Judaism.

In the Appendix we shall deal in detail with the hostile attitudes and deceptions practised by classical Judaism against non-Jews. But more important as a social feature is the profit-motivated deception practised by the rich Jews against poor fellow Jews (such as the dispensation concerning interest on loans). Here I must say, in spite of my opposition to Marxism both in philosophy and as a social theory, that Marx was quite right when, in his two articles about Judaism, he characterised it as dominated by profit-seeking – provided this is limited to Judaism as it knew it, that is, to classical Judaism which in his youth had already entered the period of its dissolution. True, he stated this arbitrarily ahistorically and without proof. Obviously he came to his conclusion by intuition; but his intuition in this case – and with the proper historical limitation – was right.

(To be concluded in Khamsin 9)

References to Part I

- 1 The Jews themselves universally described themselves as a religious community or, to be precise, a *religious nation*. 'Our people is a people only because of the *Torah* (Religious Law)' – this saying by one of the highest authorities, Rabbi Sa'adia Hagga'on who lived in the ninth century, has become proverbial.
- 2 By Emperor Joseph II in 1782.
- 3 All this is usually omitted in vulgar Jewish historiography, in order to propagate the myth that the Jews kept their religion by miracle or by some peculiar mystic force.
- 4 For example, in her *Origins of totalitarianism*, a considerable part of which is devoted to Jews.
- 5 Before the end of the 18th century, German Jews were allowed by their rabbis to write German in Hebrew letters only, on pain of being excommunicated, flogged, etc.
- 6 When by a deal between the Roman Empire and the Jewish leaders (the dynasty of the *Nesi'im*) all the Jews in the Empire were subjected to the fiscal and disciplinary authority of these leaders and their rabbinical courts, who for their part undertook to keep order among the Jews.
- 7 I write this, being a non-socialist myself. But I will honour and respect people with whose principles I disagree, if they make an honest effort to be true to their principles. In contrast, there is nothing so despicable as the dishonest use of universal principles, whether true or false, for the selfish ends of an individual or, even worse, of a group.
- 8 In fact, many aspects of orthodox Judaism were apparently derived from Sparta, through the baneful political influence of Plato. On this subject, see the excellent comments of Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture, Fusion and Diffusion*, Columbia University Press, 1959.
- 9 Including the geography of Palestine and indeed its very location. This is shown by the orientation of all synagogues in countries such as Poland and Russia: Jews are supposed to pray facing Jerusalem, and the European Jews, who had only a vague idea where Jerusalem was, always assumed it was due east, whereas for most of them it was in fact more nearly due south.
- 10 Throughout this essay I use the term 'classical Judaism' to refer to rabbinical Judaism as it emerged after about AD 800 and lasted up to the end of the 18th century. I avoid the term 'normative Judaism', which many authors use with roughly the same meaning, because in my view it has unjustified connotations.
- 11 The works of Hellenistic Jews, such as Philo of Alexandria, constitute an exception. They were written before classical Judaism achieved a position of exclusive hegemony. They were indeed subsequently suppressed among the Jews and survived only because Christian monks found them congenial.
- 12 During the whole period from AD 100 to 1500 there were written two travel books and one history of talmudic studies – a short, inaccurate and dreary book, written moreover by a despised philosopher (Abraham ben-David, Spain, c. 1170).
- 13 *Me'or 'Eynayim* by 'Azarya de Rossi of Ferrara, Italy, 1574.
- 14 The best known cases were in Spain; for example (to use their adopted Christian names) Master Alfonso of Valladolid, converted in 1320 and Paul of Santa Maria, converted in 1390 and appointed bishop of Burgos in 1415. But many other cases can be cited from all over west Europe.
- 15 Certainly the tone, and also the consequences, were very much better than

in disputations in which Christians were accused of heresy – for example those in which Peter Abelard or the strict Franciscans were condemned.

16 The stalinist and Chinese examples are sufficiently well known. However, it is worth mentioning that the persecution of honest historians in Germany began very early. In 1874, H. Ewald, a professor at Goettingen, was imprisoned for expressing ‘incorrect’ views on the conquests of Frederick II, a hundred years earlier. The situation in Israel is analogous: the worst attacks against me were provoked not by the violent terms I employ in my condemnations of zionism and the oppression of Palestinians, but by an early article of mine about the role of Jews in the slave trade, in which the latest case quoted dated from 1870. That article was published before the 1967 war; nowadays its publication would be impossible.

17 In the end a few other passages also had to be removed, such as those which seemed theologically absurd (for example, where God is said to pray to Himself or physically to carry out some of the practices enjoined on the individual Jew) or those which celebrated too freely the sexual escapades of ancient rabbis.

18 *Tractate Berakhot*, p 58b.

19 ‘Your mother shall be sore confounded; she that bare you shall be ashamed ...’, *Jeremiah*, 50, 12.

20 Published by Boys Town, Jerusalem, and edited by Moses Hyamson, one of the most reputable scholars of Judaism in Britain.

21 The supposed founders of the Sadducean sect.

22 I am happy to say that in a recent new translation (Chicago University Press) the word ‘Blacks’ does appear, but the heavy and *very expensive* volume is unlikely, as yet, to get into the ‘wrong’ hands. Similarly, in early nineteenth century England, radical books (such as Godwin’s) were allowed to appear, provided they were issued in a very expensive edition.

23 An additional fact can be mentioned in this connection. It was perfectly possible, and apparently respectable, for a Jewish scholar of Islam, Bernard Lewis (who formerly taught in London and is now teaching in the USA) to publish an article in *Encounter*, in which he points out many passages in Islamic literature which in his view are anti-Black, but none of which even approaches the passage quoted above. It would be quite impossible for anyone now, or in the last thirty years, to discuss in any reputable American publication the above passage or the many other offensive anti-Black Talmudic passages. But without a criticism of *all* sides the attack on Islam alone reduces to mere slander.

References to Part II

1 Editor’s note: as pointed out in note 10 to Part I, the author uses the term ‘classical Judaism’ to refer to rabbinical Judaism in the period from about AD 800 up to the end of the 18th century. This period broadly coincides with the Jewish Middle Ages, since for most Jewish communities medieval conditions persisted much longer than for the west European nations, namely up to the period of the French Revolution. Thus what the author calls ‘classical Judaism’ can be regarded as *medieval* Judaism.

2 *Exodus*, 15, 11.

3 *Ibid*, 20, 3-6.

4 *Jeremiah*, 10; the same theme is echoed still later by the Second Isaiah, see *Isaiah*, 44.

5 The cabbala is of course an esoteric doctrine, and its detailed study was confined to scholars. In Europe, especially after about 1750, extreme measures were taken to keep it secret and forbid its study except by mature scholars and under strict supervision. The uneducated Jewish masses of eastern Europe had no real knowledge of cabbalistic doctrine; but the cabbala percolated to them in the form of superstition and magic practices.

6 Many contemporary Jewish mystics believe that the same end may be accomplished more quickly by war against the Arabs, by the expulsion of the Palestinians, or even by establishing many Jewish settlements on the West Bank. The growing movement for building the Third Temple is also based on such ideas.

7 The Hebrew word used here – *yihud*, meaning literally union-in-seclusion – is the same one employed in legal texts (dealing with marriage etc.) to refer to sexual intercourse.

8 The so-called *Qedushah Shlishit* (Third Holiness), inserted in the prayer *Uva Letzion* towards the end of the morning service.

9 *Numbers*, 29.

10 The power of Satan, and his connection with non-Jews, is illustrated by a widespread custom, established under cabbalistic influence in many Jewish communities from the 17th century. A Jewish woman returning from her monthly ritual bath of purification (after which sexual intercourse with her husband is mandatory) must beware of meeting one of the four satanic creatures: Gentile, pig, dog or donkey. If she does meet any one of them she must take another bath. The custom was advocated (among others) by *Shevet Musar*, a book on Jewish moral conduct first published in 1712, which was one of the most popular books among Jews in both eastern Europe and Islamic countries until early this century, and is still widely read in some Orthodox circles.

11 This is prescribed in minute detail. For example, the ritual hand-washing must not be done under a tap; each hand must be washed singly, in water from a mug (of prescribed minimal size) held in the other hand. If one's hands are really dirty, it is quite impossible to clean them in this way, but such pragmatic considerations are obviously irrelevant. Classical Judaism prescribes a great number of such detailed rituals, to which the cabbala attaches deep significance. There are, for example, many precise rules concerning behaviour in a lavatory. A Jew relieving nature in an open space must not do so in a North-South direction, because North is associated with Satan.

12 'Interpretation' is my own expression. The classical (and present-day Orthodox) view is that the talmudic meaning, even where it is contrary to the literal sense, was always the operational one.

13 According to an apocryphal story, a famous 19th century Jewish heretic observed in this connection that the verse 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' is repeated only twice. 'Presumably one is therefore forbidden to eat adultery or to cook it, but enjoying it is all right.'

14 The Hebrew *re'akha* is rendered by the King James Version (and most other English translations) somewhat imprecisely as 'thy neighbour'. See however *II Samuel*, 16, 17, where exactly the same word is rendered by the King James Version more correctly as 'thy friend'.

15 The Mishnah is remarkably free of all this, and in particular the belief in demons and witchcraft is relatively rare in it. The Babylonian Talmud, on the other hand, is full of gross superstitions.

16 Or, to be precise, in many parts of Palestine. Apparently the areas to which

the law applies are those where there was Jewish demographic predominance around AD 150-200.

17 Therefore non-zionist Orthodox Jews in Israel organise special shops during sabbatical years, which sell fruits and vegetables grown by Arabs on Arab land.

18 In the winter of 1945-46, I myself, then a boy under 13, participated in such proceedings. The man in charge of agricultural work in the religious agricultural school I was then attending was a particularly pious Jew and thought it would be safer if the crucial act, that of removing the board, should be performed by an orphan under 13 years old, incapable of being, or making anyone else, guilty of a sin. (A boy under that age cannot be guilty of a sin; his father, if he has one, is considered responsible.) Everything was carefully explained to me beforehand, including the duty to say 'I need this board', when in fact it was not needed.

19 For example, the Talmud forbids a Jew to enjoy the light of a candle lit by a Gentile on the sabbath, unless the latter had lit it for his own use before the Jew entered the room.

20 One of my uncles in pre-1939 Warsaw used a subtler method. He employed a non-Jewish maid called Marysia and it was his custom upon waking from his Saturday siesta to say, first quietly, 'How nice it would be if' – and then, raising his voice to a shout, '... Marysia would bring us a cup of tea!' He was held to be a very pious and God-fearing man and would never dream of drinking a drop of milk for a full six hours after eating meat. In his kitchen he had two sinks, one for washing up dishes used for eating meat, the other for milk dishes.

21 Occasionally regrettable mistakes occur, because some of these jobs are quite cushy, allowing the employee six days off each week. The town of Bney Braq (near Tel-Aviv), inhabited almost exclusively by Orthodox Jews, was shaken in the 1960s by a horrible scandal. Upon the death of the 'sabbath-Goy' they had employed for over twenty years to watch over their water supplies on Saturdays, it was discovered that he was not really a Christian but a Jew! So when his successor, a Druse, was hired, the town demanded and obtained from the government a document certifying that the new employee is a Gentile of pure Gentile descent. (Being Jewish or not depends on one's descent through the female line, not on one's actual faith, according to Jewish religious law.) It is reliably rumoured that the Shin Bet was asked to research this matter.

22 In contrast, elementary Scripture teaching can be done for payment. This was always considered a low-status job and was badly paid.

23 Another 'extremely important' ritual is the blowing of a ram's horn on Rosh Hashanah, whose purpose is to confuse Satan.

Why the Reversion to Islamic Archaism?

Lafif Lakhdar

In order to gain a critical understanding of the persistence of Islamic archaism and all its paraphernalia, one must approach it through the logic of its own history, as well as that of the Arabo-Muslim bourgeoisie of the 19th and 20th centuries, which is radically different from the process of European history and from the residual folkloric Christianity of the present-day West.

Islamic integralism – not a Reformation

Let me explain: some orientalists, such as the American Richard Michel, see in the activist Islamic movements a potential for reforming Islam. In other words, a way of rationalising it, thus bringing it closer to western liberalism. Such writers have clearly succumbed to the comic temptation of analogy and to the lazy facility of repetition. For, if one sets up a parallel between the contemporary Islamic Brotherhoods and the European Reformation, one is just making a mockery of concrete history.

Seen historically, the Reformation is an integral part of the making of the modern world, of the birth of nations and their languages from the ruins of the Holy Roman Empire and its celestial counterpart – the Church. This process led, through a long route of development, to the explosion of the third estate – a fact of decisive importance, without parallel in the modern history of Islam – an explosion which brought forth the French Revolution and hence modern nations and classes.

The Islamic movements are located in a completely different historical context. To conflate this context with that of the Reformation is to misunderstand the origins and development of the current movement of Islamic integralism, as well as its historical antecedent – the pan-Islamic movement of the 19th century.

Pan-Islamism took form under the political direction of the Ottoman sultan himself and the ideological direction of al-Afghani and 'Abduh. Its aim was to defend the caliphate (the empire) which was slowly but surely breaking up as a result of the combined thrusts of European economic and ideological penetration, and of the nationalist demands of the Balkan peoples, especially the Serbs and the Bulgars who were

struggling for emancipation both from the domination of the Ottoman rulers and from the religious domination of the ecumenical patriarchate who still hankered after the idea of a grand new empire with Greece at its centre. Blinded by their pro-Ottoman prejudices, the believers in pan-Islamism did not realise that times had changed and that the era of modern nation-states had succeeded that of the empires of former times. True to itself, pan-Islamism was keenly opposed to the secular and liberal anti-Ottoman tendency of the Arab Christians – Shibli Shumayyil, the darwinist, was one of their leading spokesmen – during the last quarter of the 19th century. This latter tendency considered the only answer to European penetration and Ottoman despotism to be the complete adoption of the European model of civilisation as well as the separation of the Arab provinces from the empire and hence the formation of a modern nation.

Pan-Islamism countered these liberal demands with its famous old rubbish about the need for a just despot modelled on the second caliph, 'Umar, who would impose on his subjects a bovine discipline for fifteen years before guiding them step by step to the age of reason. To the idea of the formation of a secular Arab nation comprising Muslims, Christians and Jews, pan-Islamism replied with the Muslim nation in the Koranic meaning of the term – that is a community of believers. They even thought that they could stop the Arabo-Muslim provinces of the empire from breaking away by unifying Sunni Islam through the merging of its four rites.

This response to the challenge of European modernism was not only anachronistic – it was also uncertain. The leading spokesman of pan-Islamism, al-Afghani, vacillated from one position to another. This high priest of pan-Islamism sometimes opted for pan-Arabism which implied the break up of the empire; a staunch pro-Ottoman, he at times advocated the Arabisation of the empire, which would mean that the Turks, the dominant element in the empire, would be in an inferior position; a militant opponent of socialism, as a theory imported from Europe, he at times predicted the universal factory of socialism; an ideologist of Islamic fundamentalism, he at times (probably under the influence of Free-Masonry, of which he was a member) advocated the merging of the three monotheistic religions in a new synthesis which would be superior to each of them. This idea was openly heretical. His disciple 'Abduh, after having taken part in the 'Urabi uprising (1881 – an anti-British and anti-authoritarian revolt, violently condemned by the sultan) later recanted.

This confusion and incoherence of pan-Islamism are closely linked to the decline of the Arab-Muslim world since the second half of the thirteenth century, and to its having been conquered, for the first time in its history, by bourgeois Europe.

In the last analysis the followers of pan-Islamism reflected the feelings of the big pro-Ottoman land-owners. These landowners owed their position to the first attempt at privatisation of the crown domanial

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estates, which was carried out in the semi-modern, semi-oriental state of Muhammad 'Ali. They were aware of the threat which European influence presented to their interests. Besides, British domination was to encourage, at their expense, the growth of a new rural class based on small and medium land-owners. It is this very class which constituted the core of the modern Arab bourgeoisie.

The pan-Islamism of the 19th century, known as *al-Nahda* (Awakening), is in no way comparable to the Reformation and still less to the Renaissance, which was a return to the pre-Christian values of pagan Graeco-Roman civilisation. Even the Counter-Reformation was a progressive movement in comparison with contemporary Muslim integralism. The latter began in 1928, that is after the first world war, which marks the beginning of the decline of the capitalist mode of production, whose crisis since then has been permanent. Henceforth all variants of the bourgeoisie are regressive. Besides, one cannot, without making a fool of oneself, identify the path of the history of the Arabo-Islamic world with that of modern Europe. The dynamics are quite different.

An impassioned criticism of the religious illusion; successive revolutions – commercial, cultural, scientific, philosophic, bourgeois, industrial – and finally the creation of the nation-state; this sums up the essence of Europe's history since the Renaissance.

The Copernican earthquake, the heresies, the Enlightenment, 1792, 1848, 1871, 1917 were so many mortal blows to religion and to mystical obscurantism. Priests had already become a species doomed to extinction and Christianity is a shadow of its former self thanks to the anti-Christian currents which the French Revolution brought forth. From the fury of the direct democracy of the Revolution, year II to Freud, who demonstrated that the mechanisms and pulsations of the unconscious owe nothing to a Great Supervisor, religious indifference bordering on atheism became internalised in the collective unconscious of the greatest number. Whereas in the Islamic world the mosque still wishes to dominate everything, in the West television every evening plays admirably the roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and thus turns church, family, and soon school, into as many anachronisms.¹

God having been put to death by the bourgeois revolution, and the church having become marginalised, the nation-state appears upon the altar at which all citizens, irrespective of racial and religious origin, take communion.

Within this profoundly profane Europe the nation-state imposed itself through the dual process of assimilation of the bourgeoisies and of ethnic or religious minority groups, and the marginalisation of national and religious particularisms. It was that outcome of the bourgeois revolution which cut the umbilical cord linking the modern bourgeoisie to its medieval ancestors.

Bourgeoisie without bourgeois revolution

In the Arabo-Muslim world this process has not taken place and the nation-state did not see the light of dawn. The modern Arab state – an abortion of the project for a state which Napoleon attempted to implement in Egypt, which was taken over by Muhammad 'Ali and which still survives today with a modernistic façade and caliphate foundations – has not succeeded in rising to the rank of the nation-state. It has remained a confessional state, subject to the following cycle: composition, decomposition, recomposition. It has in the main remained inveterately despotic and denominational. Religion, in this case Islam, plays the role of a catalyst for the collective memory of the *umma*, the Koranic nation, undifferentiated and cemented by divine law. As the bourgeois *patrie* has not been created, the wars that the Arabo-Muslim bourgeoisie has been fighting from one decade to the next are not patriotic wars but jihads.

For lack of a bourgeois revolution, the Arab state, although bourgeois in its social and anti-proletarian role, has not been able to attain its true development into a self-sufficient modern state which does not need to lean on the crutches of Islam. Its denominational character, since Islam is proclaimed the state religion, prevents it to date from creating a true national cohesion. This could only be carried out in a non-denominational state which would result from a fusion and recasting of all the present components of its national bourgeoisie. Since they have not succeeded in this respect, each Arab state is a mosaic of particularisms of all sorts whose creeds, ethnic loyalties, dialects and mental outlooks are different and contradictory. Syria, Iraq and Lebanon are dramatic examples of this. This explains why at times of crisis regional, tribal, ethnic or confessional bonds often blunt the edge of social interests and the horizontal division of Arabo-Islamic society, which is unconsciously experienced as a juxtaposition of clannish partisanships (*'asabiyat*) rather than as a society of open class struggle.

The fact that there is still no secular dimension within the Arab state means that the Christians and the Jews, not the mention the free thinkers, are still subject in effect to a status of *dhimmi* (tributary) as they were fourteen centuries ago.

The secularisation of the Arabo-Muslim state, so bitterly opposed both by the pan-Islamism of the 19th century and by present-day Islamic integralism, was never insisted on by any party or Arabo-Muslim thinker. True, al-Kawakibi recommended the union of Christian and Muslim Arabs – but within the framework of the sacrosanct Islamic caliphate whose caliph must be a Qurayshi (Arab from Muhammad's tribe). Similarly, the Arab uprising of 1916-1919, which was supported by Great Britain, only attacked the Ottoman empire in order to appeal to 'all true Muslims to overthrow the atheist government which had dethroned the sultan and confiscated his property'.² Even the Egyptian National Party which considered itself to be Jacobin

was fiercely anti-secular. They attacked Qasim Amin for having recommended a measure of emancipation for Muslim women within the confines of a slightly re-interpreted Islam. Their leader Mustafa Kamil jumped for joy when a law court annulled the marriage of a Muslim lady with a Copt journalist. Worse still, the party's paper, *al-Mu'ayyad* made a concerted attack on the Copts for not having converted to Islam.

The present leaders of the Arab bourgeoisie are in this respect faithful to their predecessors. Qadafi has recently stated that 'Arab nationalism is part of Islam . . . It is not normal that there be in the Arab homeland an Arab who is not a Muslim. The Christian Arab has no right to belong to the Arab nation, whose religion is not his own.'³ Just as the fully fledged subject in medieval Europe was a Christian, the true 'citizen' in the Arab world is a Muslim.

Qadafi says out loud what his Arabo-Muslim colleagues whisper to each other. King Faisal told Sadat when the latter had come to tell him of his decision (along with Syria) to open hostilities against Israel in 1973: 'It would be catastrophic to declare war together with a Syria governed by the Ba'thists and the 'Alawis [a sect of Shi'i Islam]. To ally with Ba'thists is to risk disaster. But with 'Alawis especially, it would be tantamount to courting a double disaster.'⁴ This morbid confessionalism is explained by the conditions which gave rise to the Arabo-Muslim bourgeoisie and by its vital need to resort to Islam for its survival. This bourgeoisie emerged not in a revolution but as the result of a lame compromise with its colonialist opposite number; for it was born from agriculture and not from industry. Finally it is a late arrival on the scene, a class whose birth, after the first world war, coincided with the beginning of the decline of the bourgeoisie on a world level. In order to remain in command when faced with the challenge of the 'people', it could only rely (apart from the armed forces) on Allah and Islam as the principal mystification of the toiling masses, since it had not succeeded, due to its immense economic backwardness, in setting up the modern mystifications inherent in political and trade union pluralism. Its incapacity to create a prosperous economy capable of satisfying the quantitative demands of the proletariat left only Islam as an ideological weapon for paralysing the social dynamics, blocking the intellect of the masses, maintaining the sub-animal status of women and mystifying the class struggle. The struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed degenerated – often through the efforts of the political and religious establishments – into a sterile confrontation between Muslims and non-Muslims, Sunnis and Shi'is. In short, Islam, as its etymological meaning indicates, was able to force its subjects into submission.

Being decadent from birth, the Arab bourgeoisie was incapable of creating either its own market or its own national unity. Hence its allegiance to the imperialisms of today and to the Ottoman empire of former times. 'Urabi, in the midst of the war against the British

expeditionary force, refused to publish and to refute his excommunication as an '*asiy* (rebel) by the Ottoman sultan – this excommunication was obtained moreover thanks to the promises and threats of the British. When the Khedive and the British spread it about in the Egyptian army the latter became demoralised. The soldiers of the first national Egyptian uprising no longer wished to die as rebels rather than as martyrs bearing the blessing of a Turkish sultan. More than forty years later, Sa'd Zaghlul – the father of secular Egyptian nationalism – refused to support the abolition of the Ottoman empire by the Turks themselves, 'because,' he said, 'the multitude is very sensitive to this subject'. Muhammad Farid, leader of the Egyptian National Party, went even further when he wrote that 'The Muslims of Egypt owe it to themselves to link themselves forever to Turkey, which is the capital of the Islamic caliphate, without the slightest consideration for their history in Egypt or elsewhere.' We find in the words of an Egyptian Jacobin the fundamental thesis of the pan-Islamism of Afghani: 'The nationality of Muslims is only their religion'.

From failed pan-Islamism to ineffectual modernism

Although the ideological demarcations between the discourse and the confessional practices of the Arab-Muslim bourgeoisie on the one hand and pan-Islamic fundamentalism on the other are tangled, a new fact did emerge – the defeat of pan-Islamism. In 1919, Islam appears to be the loser. The 'Home of Islam', apart from North Yemen, Afghanistan and what was to become Saudi Arabia, was totally under European domination. The recipe of the pan-Islamists – an Islam reunified and purified by a return to the sources and thus able to defy the European challenge – turned out to be ineffectual. Its original contradiction, between the need to accede to power and therefore to modernism, and the tendency to regress to a primitive Islam full of taboos, incompatible with the demands of power and modernity, became flagrant. This contradiction in fact expresses the historical impossibility of the realisation of this double aim. In the epoch of permanent crisis, it was impossible for the Islamic bourgeoisie to catch up with advanced capitalism; and at a time when the world market was being unified under the dictatorship of mass consumption, it was impracticable to return to a pure and undiluted, austere and inward-looking Islam.

The abolition of the Islamic caliphate by Ataturk in 1924 and the separation of the Arab provinces from Turkey meant that pan-Islamism, whose centre was the Ottoman empire, became meaningless. By setting up, thirty-three years after Jules Ferry, republican schools which were compulsory and non-denominational and opting for the European model of life, Ataturk rehabilitated the tendency of Shibli Shumayyil, the rival of pan-Islamism. Moreover, this was to be the tendency of the new westernised Arab-Muslim intelligentsia which

began to emerge between the two world wars. Traditionalist Islamic discourse was no longer a central theme. Their leading spokesman, Taha Husain, even went as far as to mock the rhetoric of the Koran which was unanimously considered as the one and only divine miracle to authenticate the message of Muhammad. He crossed swords with the traditionalists whose writings were nothing more than nauseating lamentations about the Judaeo-Christian 'plot' to undermine Islam. Taha Husain was condemned even by the most enlightened leaders of the Arab bourgeoisie. He and his fellow-thinkers were more representative of their Parisian teachers than of their own feeble-minded bourgeoisie which did not put up with the slightest criticism.

The intelligentsia of the period between the two world wars was in advance of the bourgeoisie, but behind the times – and failed in its absurd attempt to reconcile fundamentalist authenticity with commercial modernism, the specificity of traditionalism with the uniformisation which the world market imposed. In short, they wanted to identify with the bourgeoisie and to be themselves at one and the same time. Drawing their own conclusion from their failure, almost all the modernist intellectuals recanted before the end of the 1940s and tuned into the religious stupidity of the bourgeoisie, which had in the main remained prisoner of the bric-à-brac of 'Abduh's pan-Islamism, but within the confines of an Islam which had definitively broken up.

in the meantime, in Egypt – epicentre of the Arabo-Muslim world, and the model for its evolution – the liberal bourgeoisie under the leadership of the Wafd, a bi-denominational and therefore implicitly secular party, also failed in its task of modernising the economy. The other bourgeoisies came to the same impasse. When the failure of the liberal faction of the bourgeoisie was complete, the statist faction took over: 1952 in Egypt, 1954 in Syria, 1958 in Iraq and finally the civilian Neo-Destour in Tunisia, 1956.

Once in power, the modernist, authoritarian faction of the Arab bourgeoisie, with its belief in a planned economy, appeared to the old-fashioned faction of the Muslim bourgeoisie as 'communist' in Egypt, Syria and Algeria and as 'westernised' in Tunisia. All the more so as the pro-Soviet tendencies of the former and the pro-western tendencies of the latter were obvious. In the Middle East the pan-Arab message checked the influence of pan-Islamism. Some agrarian reforms, while not greatly improving the situation of the fallahin, encroached upon the interest of the old landed bourgeoisie, which in many cases included or had close ties with the clergy.

The Arab state, even under the modernists, remained true to form, hypocritical and bigoted; the speeches of people such as Bourguiba or Nasser were constantly interspersed with as many quotations from the Koran as they were with statistics. Nevertheless the reform projects were ill-suited to a profoundly traditionalist Islam. The 1962 Charter in Egypt prattled about scientific socialism, as did the Charters of Algeria

and Syria in 1964. In Tunisia a code of personal law was introduced in 1957 which was ultra-modern and quite unique in the Muslim world. It forbade polygamy, which is permitted in the Koran. Divorce, reduced to a business transaction, was made symmetric, whereas Islam – the summit of male chauvinism – makes it the sole privilege of the husband. To get an idea of the Muslim clergy's hostility to measures of this type, recall that immediately upon achieving power, the Khomeinist government repealed the restrictions that the previous regime had imposed upon a husband's unilateral right to divorce his wife.

The ultimate in the relinquishing of Islamic dogmas was Bourguiba's abolition of the fast during the month of Ramadan in 1958 in an attempt to deal with the drastic fall in production caused by the fast.

As a result of the economic and legislative measures taken by the modernist bourgeoisie where in power, society began to break up and the family to fall apart. The rapid rise to riches of the new bourgeoisie, legendary for its corruption, favoured the emergence – in societies in which family or community solidarity was still a matter of honour – of a utilitarian outlook bent on money and success. In short, the old form of society was eroded and the traditional economy was destroyed without anything new taking their place. The failure of the modernisation of the economy was ubiquitous. To this economic failure, the modernising bourgeoisie added in 1967 the military defeat by Israel. The occupation of the whole of Jerusalem, the second most sacred place of Islam, afforded the bitterly persecuted Muslim Brotherhoods another unhoped for argument to set the middle classes, the social mainstay of those in power, not only against Israel and the USSR but also against the Arab governments whose 'lack of faith brought about the whole catastrophe'.⁵

Internal causes of Islamic integralism

The old liberal bourgeoisie of land-owners and compradors, seriously weakened and discredited by its own failure, could no longer claim to be able to replace the more modern statist bourgeoisie. Only the religious faction, who moreover had the advantage of never having directly exercised power, could do that. All the more so as they were alone in having dared to face those in authority even when the latter seemed to be at the height of their glory.

The anguish evoked by the defeat, the permanent crisis of the regimes, which the consequences of the war only deepened, and finally the black sun of melancholy which hardly ever sets in this region, favoured those birds who only fly in the twilight moments of history – the religious pulpiteers. At times when the air is filled with doubts and questions, they come forward to offer the afflicted masses their demagogic recipe – a return to Islamic archaism.

Why the Reversion to Islamic Archaism?

The fact that the Islamic integralists are the only mass opposition party in the Arab world is due not only to the successive failures of both the liberal and statist factions of the bourgeoisie. There are other reasons, both internal and external, which interact with each other. These deserve a closer look.

Christianity was first modernised to adapt it to the new Europe. Since the Renaissance it has been exposed to implacable criticism from Copernicus to Freud, not to mention heresies and revolutions. For lack of a powerful industrial Arab-Muslim bourgeoisie with its own intelligentsia, contemporary Islam has remained sheltered from any sort of subversive criticism. However, as much, if not more than other religions it is sensitive to any type of criticism be it social or scientific. For the Koran has its own bit to add to the biblical absurdities of Genesis. The earth is flat; the sun 'goes down in a boiling spring near to a people'; the stars 'of the neighbouring sky' are destined to be 'thrown at demons'; 'seven heavens and as many earths' were created by Allah. The Universe, it is true, is infinitely huge and poor Allah might well be unable to make head or tail of it. But when it comes to man – a minute being – there is less excuse. From among a myriad of examples: sperm, if we are to believe a verse in the Koran, is not secreted by the testicles but comes from somewhere 'between the loins and the ribs'. Woe betide the Creator who does not even know the anatomy of his own creatures.

Even well-informed Muslims do not yet know that Allah, who swore in the Koran 'to always keep his word', did not keep his promise to keep the Koran intact. 'Uthman, the third caliph, when collating the Koran, put on one side the three other versions brought by three distinguished Companions of Muhammad: Ubayy, Ibn Mas'ud and 'Ali who was to become the fourth caliph. Similarly they are not aware that their Koran was inspired not only by Allah but also by Satan: the 'satanic verses', which for some time permitted the people to worship the idols of the Meccans in order to win them over.

The Arab intellectuals of today shun any criticism of Islam, of the most abominable of its dogmas, and even the translation or publication of books clarifying the genesis of Islam such as Maxime Rodinson's *Mohammed*. The main explanation for this is the fact that the Arab intelligentsia as a whole has made a compact with the left and right factions of the bourgeoisie – factions which differ from each other as much as Tweedledum from Tweedledee.

In the Arab world, those who think for themselves and are capable of elaborating a criticism of all the sacred or profane mystifications come up against the political and religious censorship of the present Arab state – a censorship which is infinitely worse than that of the caliphate state. The fact is that the best Arab poets and thinkers of the early centuries of Islam would not be able to exist in the present-day Arab world – people like Abu Nuwas, who loved wine and good-looking boys; al-Ma'arri, who was radically anti-religious; or even

al-Jahiz with his free libertine style, who was nevertheless considered as one of the leading thinkers of the mu'tazilite school.

As proof, consider the tentacles of a censorship which has not even spared the translations of the works of antiquity and of modern times. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the chaos of the beginnings of the world has been transformed into a certain order of Allah. Plato's *Republic* and *Symposium* and the Greek tragedies and comedies are radically purged of any references to homosexuality or remarks which outrage conventional morality. In the *Divine Comedy*, Muhammad is no longer to be found in the eighth circle of the Inferno. In 1954, 'Abd al-Rahman Badwi collected and translated the articles of the Arab freethinkers of the Middle Ages, entitling the collection *Atheism and Islam*. The book was rapidly withdrawn from circulation, and nothing more was heard about it. In Syria, since 1971, the censorship has been preventing the publication of the translation of Marx's *German Ideology*. My own writings, published in Lebanon before the 1973 war, are forbidden everywhere else. They sometimes manage to get through the *cordon sanitaire* which extends from the Gulf to the Atlantic, thanks to the practice of smuggling, not always for purely commercial aims.

This stupid and totalitarian censorship is part of an unspeakable generalised dictatorship. The Arab bourgeoisie's only means of mitigating the under-development in the techniques for lying in the mass media – its television is still not credible – are strong-arm methods from which the whole of society suffers. There is no legal means of defending oneself. Even the few appearances of democracy left by the European colonisers such as the liberty of the press, the party system, the right to strike – are abolished in the name of sacrosanct economic development. While retaining a veneer of westernisation, the *dirigiste* Arab state has retrieved its memory of the caliphate.

In the Maghreb, the masses, given their desire for a Messiah and the demagogy of the nationalist elites, imagined that independence would be a home-coming, a return to their traditional culture and to their community solidarity where 'all Muslims are brothers'. The nationalist elites, once in power, did not of course keep their promises. For them independence meant their own independence from the masses. Worse still, the post-colonial state behaved towards the latter with the same cruelty as the colonial state.

In this claustrophobic and decadent Arab society which had no perspective, the most ridiculous mysticisms could develop. The context, it is true, was ideal. A profound and generalised falsification of both social and inter-personal relations, the fatalism of Islam which, once internalised, prevents a person from being himself or herself, from thinking and acting as oneself from seeking the truth of one's own destiny in oneself and not in Allah.

The occupation by Israel of the Arab territories provided the integralists with an un hoped-for pretext: it could be interpreted as a 'just

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punishment from Allah on all those who had abandoned his religion'.

The integralist Muslim sects, haloed with their martyrs from 1954 to 1966, especially in Egypt, swarmed clandestinely. Worse still, they became credible. All the more so since they were favoured by the fact that the unspeakable authoritarianism of those in power left practically no means of expression or autonomous organisation. Only the mosques were protected from censorship. They became places where the masses whose ranks were broken by despotism received a politico-religious indoctrination.

Then came the October war with its parade of intense Islamic propaganda, and the oil boom which enabled Libya and especially Saudi Arabia to distribute their petro-dollars to the integralist groups everywhere in order to undermine left-wing extremists, or pro-Soviet groups as in Syria. Even at the time when the modernist statist bourgeois faction was still credible, Saudi Arabia was used as the prototype by repressed or persecuted Islamic archaism; and its emergence following the October war on the ruins of Nasser's Egypt as the leader of the Arab world gave the Brotherhoods of Sunni Islam not only more subsidies, but the model of an Islam true to itself. The propaganda pounded out by western media – depicting Saudi Arabia as the new giant with the power of life and death over western civilisation – stimulated, in old and young alike, the nostalgic old desire for the return of Islam to its former strength.

External causes

These are the *internal* causes which favour a massive return to Islam. There are also external causes: the decline of the West, and its attempt to take advantage of the Islamic movements.

The decline of the West has become obvious. Its dying throes shake the economic, ethical and aesthetic order; its traditional ideologies – 'socialist' as well as liberal – are dead. In short, it no longer presents even for itself a feasible project for civilisation. The Arab-Muslim intelligentsia, which had formerly earned its daily bread by circulating the latest cultural fashions of this same western civilisation, is now thrown back on its own resources and outdated values. As though by some magic power, it has now begun to rediscover the long-forgotten virtues of the celebrated Return to the Source advocated by the pan-Islamism of a bygone age. Thus Zaki Najib Mahmud, grown grey in the service of American positivism, realises at the end of his life that he had 'considerably under-estimated' *al-turath*, the Arab-Islamic heritage, which – if we are to believe him – is capable after all of rejuvenating good old Arab society! Others in turn have suddenly discovered, more than two generations after the Dadaists, the bankruptcy of 18th century rationalism which had promised to usher in the reign of reason in everyday life – a belated discovery of a bankruptcy which was already clearly

visible in the debris of the First World Butchery. Yet others have discovered that the alcoholism, drug addiction and youth vandalism rampant in the West are all due to the decline of religious feelings, and they would like to protect their own society from these evils. In short, the fact that the Arab-Muslim intelligentsia as a whole, which only yesterday was looking to the West, is now withdrawing into itself is grist to the mill of Islamic integralism.

The monotheistic religions arose from the ashes of ancient civilisations. The present return to religious archaism (which, in varying degrees, is taking place all over the world) is nourished by the putrescence of 'our' civilisation, which constantly reminds man of death and makes the apocalypse a daily occurrence. Within one generation it has led to two world carnages which resulted in twenty and fifty million deaths and several hundred million wounded and permanently shocked. There is now talk of a third world war. Two great powers, the USA and the USSR, have at their disposal sufficient nuclear arms to destroy our planet five times over. In the industrialised societies people are dying of obesity. In the third world, fifty million human beings – of whom fifteen million are children – die from malnutrition every year. That is, as many people die of malnutrition every year, as died in the second world war.

The West does not only encourage the return to Islamic archaism by its own decline, but even more by its intrigues. Both Europeans and Americans have long been forced to seek the help of Islam in the suppression of embryonic social struggles in Muslim countries and in opposing their Soviet rival. Moreover, the latter used to try to exploit Nasser's pan-Arabism against the West.

M. Copland, the former chief of the CIA in the Middle East, revealed in his book *The Game of Nations* that as from the 1950s the CIA began to encourage the Muslim Brotherhood to counteract the communist influence in Egypt. This trend has become more pronounced since then.

We hear the same tune from Giscard d'Estaing, who confided to members of his cabinet before taking the plane for the Gulf in March 1980: 'To combat Communism we have to oppose it with another ideology. In the West, we have nothing. This is why we must support Islam.'⁶ Brzezinski, the chief adviser to the White House, discovers in religious wars still other virtues: 'The religious troubles in the Middle East could arouse a common desire to find a definitive settlement between the Arabs and Israel.'⁷ It is therefore clear that the coming to power of Khomeinism in Iran has in no way altered the West's determination to manipulate militant Islam. Future Islamic governments would be, especially at the outset, difficult clients, but clients all the same.

Restructuring the Arab world

The West's need to ally with Islam is considerably more compelling

than the brevity of the declarations would lead us to believe. As in Latin America, the American bourgeoisie attempts to democratise as far as possible outdated dictatorships of the Iranian type within its sphere of influence in the Islamic world. In fact, the traditionalist caste-like dictatorships, the clannish patriarchal type of governments – as in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates in the Gulf, or elsewhere – which forbid any change in power, are incompatible with two major requirements: that of the new international division of labour and that of the remodelling of the map of the Arab-Muslim world.

The restructuring of the saturated world market, demanded by the new reorganisation of the international division of labour undertaken by the multinationals, requires in turn a restructuring of the political powers in the regions concerned, so that they can play their role there. The leading technology on which the development of the highly profitable economic sectors of the future depend, such as computers or micro-electronics, will be the monopoly of the West with the USA in the lead; the outdated or polluting industries (steel, naval construction), specialisation in certain types of agriculture and some sub-contracted industries, will be the lot of the third world. The possessors of the manna, in the form of petro-dollars, will have to play the role of international bankers financing the projects evolved by western experts for the 'development' of certain underdeveloped countries. The implementation of this new international division of labour is dependent in the Arab-Muslim world on the remodelling of its map.

The balance of power in this area between the Ottomans, British and Russians, which was upset by the consequences of the first world war, was restored by a new balance between British and French. These two divided between them the spoils of the defeated Ottoman Empire. In their turn, the consequences of the second world war meant the wane of British and French imperialism and the rise of American and Russian imperialism. In 1920 there was the Treaty of Sèvres and in 1945 there was Yalta. But after the departure of the British and the French and their replacement by the Americans and the Russians there was no proper agreement to ratify the new *de facto* balance of power. The Arab-Muslim world has remained a shady area open to all rivalries. The intensification of the world crisis now demands a new imperialist distribution of the energy market (the USSR needs 18 per cent of the Middle East oil), access to raw materials and spheres of influence. In short, a new Yalta, or world settlement, is required for oil, since the alternative is open bargaining or open confrontation.

All the states, apart from Israel, and perhaps Egypt, will probably have to change their frontiers, their populations, their name and, naturally, their patrons.

The map which will emerge from this new Yalta will probably be an outcome of the break-up of the present states into denominational mini-states, which may then be regrouped into federations or confederations. The keystone of this attempt to politically re-structure the Arab-

Muslim area will be the rise of the new middle classes. Local technocracies have considerably developed due to the export of oil and to the spread of education. Their ambition is to participate in public affairs, hitherto monopolised by the tribal-dynastic castes. This participation, which implies a degree of modernisation of the states in question, is (if we are to believe the specialists of the multinationals and their computers) going to prevent both autonomous popular movements and possible pro-Soviet *coups d'état*, even in Saudi Arabia. But how can this be achieved? In Brzezinski's own words, by the manipulation of the 'existing forces' with the aim of changing the out-dated socio-economic *status quo*, before Moscow does so to its advantage.

Henceforth, it would be preferable not to risk military *coups d'état* except in cases of extreme emergency. True, armies have for decades been the agents of change which the West has manipulated as it desired; but the situation has now changed. Thirty years ago, given the widespread weakness of all the social classes, they were the only organised force capable of disciplining the toiling masses which were too turbulent at the time. Then they failed in their task of modernising the economy. Worse still: a series of *coups d'état* – beginning with Egypt, then in Syria, Algeria, Libya and finally Ethiopia – had started off in Washington and ended up in Moscow.

When the tactic of the *coup d'état* had been exhausted, the West thought it had found a replacement in the religious movements. These movements were the mouthpiece of the urban and rural middle classes, and of the mystified sub-proletariat which crowded into the poverty belts surrounding the prodigal capitals. It is possible that the idea was not to give over all the power to the clergy but preferably to manipulate the religious and secular opposition as a whole to clear the way for the technocrats. Once the battle was won, the clergy would return to their flocks and would busy themselves with the management of their estates. (However, the example of Iran is not too encouraging . . .) In short, the idea was to replace the anachronisms by modernist, liberal formations with a religious outlook or backing. *Modernist* means: capable of setting up an economy enmeshed, by the very constraints of the laws of the market, with that of the West. It also implies the ability to maintain an army efficiently equipped and trained, but closely linked to the western system of defense. There is also the need to look after the interests of the multinationals whose guardians they are to be. *Liberal* means: capable of exploiting to the utmost parliamentary mystification and political and trade-unionist pluralism in order to enlarge and consolidate the social basis of the régime. *Religious outlook or backing* means: the re-forging of the good old alliance between the sword and the Koran in order to check any rebirth of radical social movements, and if possible to destabilise the Muslim republics in the USSR. Translated into Koranic terms, this is what Carter wanted to see implemented in this area – 'friendly governments, Islamic and liberal, who respect human rights'.

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Given the explosive contradictions at work, the economic situation approaching bankruptcy almost everywhere, there is nothing to ensure that the will of the Master of the White House be done. Neither the crowned monarchy nor the jackbooted republic was able to extricate this part of the world from its chronic, general crisis. Will the turbaned republic be able to do so?

Nothing is less likely. The Islamic movements, given their composite social nature and especially their lack of an even remotely credible programme, are not capable of coming to power, or of staying there for any length of time.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The double failure of the first rising of the modern Egyptian bourgeoisie in 1919 which achieved neither independence nor a constitutional government; Atatürk's abolition of the Islamic caliphate in 1923; the rise of fascism in Italy which impressed the majority of the average traditionalist Muslim intelligentsia; the rise of stalinism in the USSR which attracted the attention of the left-wing Christian intellectuals, who were also fascinated by the impotent cult of power; finally the grimness of the inter-war period dominated by the general feeling of defeat of western civilisation with its basis in the cult of science and of reason – all these created an environment which favoured the irruption of the irrational into contemporary history.

In this setting, the Fraternity of Muslim Brethren was founded in Egypt in 1928, only a few months before the emergence of the crisis of 1929 which was to lead to the second world war. Their organisational model was based both on esoteric Muslim sects of the Middle Ages and on modern fascism. Article 2 of their statutes states that members must undertake 'to submit to iron discipline and to carry out the orders of their superiors'. Their charismatic 'Supreme Guide' is, like a caliph, beyond all questioning. As from their founding, the Brethren chose to collaborate with the régime in power. Thus they immediately came to terms with the 'iron hand' government of Muhammad Mahmud, then with that of the dictator Isma'il Sidqi and even with the Suez Canal Company; the latter contributed £500 to their funds, in order to encourage them to dampen the ardour of the youth of the secular Wafd party, which at that time had broken with the British. (The Brethren were the only Egyptian group to have a newspaper.)

In fact, their nostalgic appeals for the restoration of the Golden Age of Islam, the crossed swords and the Koran which served them as emblems, symbolising to perfection the morbid ideal of the practice of death, attracted to their cause a whole part of the frustrated petty bourgeois youth, who were horribly repressed, a prey to all sorts of fears and hostile to any pleasurable activity. In short, the palace and the British used the Brethren as an anaesthetic.

During the second world war, despite their sympathy for the Axis, the Brethren supported the Allies, apparently for tactical reasons. In effect, they were able to use the mosques for their propaganda and to establish themselves especially in the schools and in the countryside.

As a result of their truly Machiavellian tactics, the organisation of the Brethren became, in less than thirteen years, the most formidable mass party. In 1941, the Brethren allied with the Sa'dists, the party in power, which was close to the palace. As soon as the latter was ousted from the harem, they had not the slightest hesitation in joining forces with its rival and successor, the Wafd. When the Wafd was in turn eliminated from office, they allied once again with the same Sa'dists who, it is true, allowed them to set up a para-military organisation, *al-Jawwala*, with 20,000 members. Later they allied with the National Committee of Students and Workers, spear-headed by the communists. Not long after, they opposed the Committee by supporting the government of the famous Isma'il Sidqi, leader of the Sa'dists. But just before the elections, the latter broke his alliance with the Brotherhood, which by that time numbered half a million members and sympathisers. In December 1948, suspecting that the Brotherhood wished to take power, al-Naqrashi, the head of the government, outlawed the movement. Their response was immediate. Al-Naqrashi was assassinated by a medical student, a member of the movement. For a whole year, the authorities manoeuvred Hasan al-Banna', the Supreme Guide of the Brethren, from one compromise to another, until he disowned his own followers by publicly declaring that 'they are not brethren and even less Muslims'. He was finally killed in 1949. His successor, the magistrate Hasan al-Hudaibi, allied the Brotherhood once again with the palace, and was even solemnly received by King Faruq, who stated in his presence and with his agreement: 'Since the British will soon leave Egypt, our only enemy now is communism'. But when Faruq was ousted by Nasser in 1952, the Brethren supported the latter with the same fervour. However, the honeymoon did not last long. When Nasser decided to limit landed property holdings to 200 acres, the Brethren suggested the figure of 500 and demanded at the same time that the new government undertake to re-Islamise society and the state. In 1954 they attempted to assassinate the Ra'is. Their Brotherhood was disbanded. In 1959, it was clandestinely re-formed, and once again decapitated in 1965. Sadat, himself a former member of the Brotherhood, allowed them to reappear in 1972 and to publish a journal, *al-Da'wa* (the Sermon). Similarly, the Muslim International founded by al-Banna' in the 1930s was reconstituted in Cairo. Through it, Egypt, amongst others, gave aid to the armed Mujahidin, who are at present fighting the Syrian i

In the writings of the Brethren, any social programme in his absence. Al-Banna' justified his refusal to outline

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his desire to 'avoid the possibility of a great schism between the various Muslim rites and confessions'. When one fine day the leaders of the para-military organisation of the Brotherhood informed him that they were in a position to take power, he challenged them to submit to him within a week an Islamic radio programme for the first week of the *coup d'état* – a task which they were incapable of fulfilling.

After the death of the leader, it fell to Muhammad al-Ghazali, an ideologist of the Brotherhood, to risk undertaking this project. In his book *Islam and the Economic Orders* he devotes a whole chapter to the 'intermediate economic order' of Islam. After dismissing 'that Jew, Marx' with a few words, he reveals to us the secret of the Islamic economic order, 'alone capable of saving humanity'. What is it? 'It is the economic order', he writes, 'which was implemented in fascist Italy, in Nazi Germany, and which is still in force in Britain, thanks to state control of the big firms and to the state holding over 50 per cent of the shares in these firms'.⁸ Clearly, 'the Islamic economy' is simply state control and militarisation of the economy, as practised since the first world war. Rather more subtly, Sayyid Qutb, another of the Brotherhood's thinkers, does not have faith in any programme. In 1964, one year before his execution by Nasser, he published his swan-song whose title sounds as a call for the re-Islamisation by the sword of an apostate society: *The Jahiliya of the 20th Century (Jahiliyat al-qarn al-'ishrin)*. The *Jahiliya*, the period of pre-Islamic paganism, is usually depicted as 'inadmissibly permissive', full of *joie de vivre* and with no ethic other than love, wine and hunting. And Qutb says: 'Give us power and you shall see; we shall obliterate all trace of this paganism'.

In other countries, other Islamic organisations proved equally incapable of elaborating a programme for their Islamic state. In 1972, when the government of the United Arab Emirates invited Hasan al-Turabi, the Supreme Guide of the Brethren in the Sudan, to write an Islamic Constitution, his reply was at first negative – 'This is a difficult task', he said. But they would not take no for an answer, and with the help of petro-dollars he managed to do it. This was the constitution which allowed Shaikh Zaid Ibn Sultan to be the absolute boss of Abu Dhabi.

Even the Syrian Muslim Brethren have not been able to overthrow a hard-pressed minority régime with which they had been openly at war, despite massive aid from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere – mainly because they are incapable of producing a programme likely to attract the other forces hostile to the régime.

In my opinion, this is an open admission of the historic impossibility of the implementation for any length of time of an Islamic society in a world which commodity production and its consequences have unified and predisposed to an alternative order, where the return to religion has no place.

Return to what?

Given their inability to address the downtrodden masses with a programme that makes any sense, the integralists – consummate demagogues that they are – have opted for the facile slogan of return to primitive Islam, the Islam of the four *al-Rashidun*, the ‘rightly guided’ early caliphs, who supposedly differed from all their successors in their strict respect for the Koran and their adherence to the procedure of consulting the communal council of believers. Al-Afghani even speaks of a return to the era of the libertine caliph, Harun al-Rashid, when Islam – more than in any other period – played the role of a mere state ideology. It is therefore a question of a return to the imperial power of Islam but not to the Islam which respects its dogmas.

It will be obvious that the Koran, the transhistorical constitution of the Islamic *Umma*, has never been entirely respected, even by the four caliphs. Muhammad never hesitated for a moment to cut out verses which the evolution of his sermons, or the demands of his alliances had rendered anachronistic. Thus the well-known Meccan verse in favour of the *mustad‘afin* (the downtrodden) was replaced by another favouring those with property: ‘We have, said Allah, favoured some and not others as far as riches are concerned’. Muhammad however had a water-tight alibi – did he not claim to be in touch with Allah himself, whose acts are unscrutable?

The period of the four caliphs was in no way the ‘Golden Age’ which contemporary legend depicts. There were cruel struggles for power. Of the four ‘rightly guided’ caliphs, only Abu Bakr died a natural death – and *his* caliphate was exceptionally short. The three others were assassinated: ‘Umar by a Persian slave; ‘Uthman at the hands of one of Abu Bakr’s own sons, ‘Abd al-Rahman; and ‘Ali by Muslims just as pious as himself. Less than 37 years after the founding by Muhammad of the first Arab-Muslim state at Medina, the Community of Believers, whom he had always instructed to remain united in the faith and in the law, in one monolithic block, split into two groups, which were mortal enemies.

Since the caliphate of Mu‘awiya, the fifth caliph, and the consolidation of the conquering Arabo-Muslims as a ruling class, the Koran has been continually trampled underfoot by the caliphs of Islam, who only used it as a sort of philosophy of history, a state ideology, to justify the redistribution of power and of goods.

The Shi‘ites do not demand a return to the times of the four caliphs. Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman are described as ‘usurpers’. Indeed, ‘Ali was reluctant to swear allegiance to them, and disapproved of their rule. And if ‘Uthman beat him in the bid for power, it was effectively because he refused to follow the example of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. The insurgents who assassinated ‘Uthman were moreover in league with him.

Iran

A return to 'Ali's caliphate – from first to last a period of open civil war – would mean a return to one of the most troubled times of the whole history of Islam. In this respect, Iran has succeeded.

Some Islamic ideologists consider that in Khomeini's Iran, Islam has gone beyond the confines of Wahhabi reformism, with its pan-Islamism and its creed of the Jihad, and has entered upon its ultimate evolution: the revolutionary stage. Intellectually incapable of understanding their own period, they do not realise that Khomeinism, in a period when the revolution can only be social, contains absolutely no project which is in any way progressive.

On the contrary, in Iran Islam can congratulate itself on having caught up, five centuries too late, with the Europe of the Inquisition. Recently, Bani Sadr, the Head of State, wondered in his *Inqilab Islami*: 'Is it true that an Inquisition-like tribunal has been set up in the university?'. But the Holy Inquisition was set up throughout the country at the outset under the crosier of that blood-thirsty psychopath, Ayatollah Khalkhali.

This inquisition is not the work of the Islamic Republican Party alone, but of all those in power. They are incapable of dealing with the crisis, and can only resort to appeals for austerity and the practice of violent repression. The Iranian working class lost more than 70,000 members in the struggle to get rid of the Shah. Their only reward is a medieval religious dictatorship plus the horrors of inflation (70 per cent), of unemployment (4 million unemployed), and the humiliation of public whipping for the simple act of drinking beer, or because a woman bathed on a beach reserved for men. The two million drug addicts, mainly located in South Tehran, were given six months to kick the habit – otherwise they will be executed.

This cult of death may well fascinate a large number of middle class youths, who are the victims of emotional blocks, and are frightened of freedom and libertarian ways. It is however no solution in face of the real problems which shake the very foundations of Iranian society.

A person such as Khomeini, who suffers from historical sclerosis, and who in his book *Islamic Government* deals with such serious problems as the buggery of a poor donkey by a poor Muslim, and who is incapable of creating an Iranian bourgeoisie, can only return to the American fold or fall under Soviet influence. 'We are less independent today', admits Bani Sadr, 'than we were under the Shah. Our budget depends on the credit of foreign banks. Our dependence on arms and foreign military experts is quite simply tragic.'⁹ Has Bani Sadr, the spiritual son of the Imam, finally grasped that in a world unified by the violence of the laws of the market Iran cannot be independent, whether the Imam, present or absent, likes it or not? Has he understood that the Koran cannot be applied in one area of capital importance: the banking system? Before the Shah left, this Islamic economist calmly promised

those who wanted to listen that he would abolish the banking system, 'as it is incompatible with the prohibition of usury in the Koran'. Has he now realised that this abolition requires the fulfilment of nineteen conditions which would take nineteen years? Obviously, the logic of capital is stronger than all the prohibitions of all the religions.

The middle classes, who at first idolised Khomeini in the belief that they had found in him the universal miracle cure, now turn away from him to await the *coup d'état*. The sub-proletariat, who served him as cannon fodder, now suffer more than ever with the repression of Khalkhali. The proletariat are engaged in a permanent struggle in their work-places to counter the intervention of the Islamic committees, and only stop specific strikes to return to their permanent go-slow.

Contrary to what Islamic propaganda claims, and many western leftists believe, today's Iran does not represent the reinvigoration of Islam but its swan-song, except that it lacks any beauty.

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The fallacy of a new Islam, which many people have fallen for, is now beginning to be dispelled. The awakening of the 'ordinary people' could be fatal for it. In fact, the 'ordinary people', although contaminated by the plague of Koranic fatalism, are everywhere dissatisfied by this over-abstract Allah – too distant and too impenetrable to play a role in their daily life. This is why the ordinary Muslim, both in Africa and in Asia, is so fond of totemic and pagan cults under the façade of Islam. He reveres fetishes, amulets, marabouts and tombs which help him to deal with the suffering of everyday life, to cure ills and to foretell the future. This humble Muslim, once the first surprise and the enthusiasm is over, appears as unwilling and even resistant to a literal application of Koranic barbarity which condemns him to asceticism, castration, flagellation and stoning. In a moment of frankness, Hasan al-Banna' admitted in 1947 to the members of his Brotherhood that the first obstacle they would meet on the path to the re-Islamisation of secular Muslim society, in his opinion, would be the hostility of the people. 'I must tell you', he said, 'that your preaching is still a closed book to the majority. The day when they discover it and realise what it aims for they will resist violently and oppose you tenaciously'. He added – 'You will first have to confront the ignorance of ordinary people concerning the truth of Islam.'¹⁰ In fact, for the people Islam is more of a refuge than a set of deadly dogmas – take for example the public transgression this year of the fast of Ramadan in countries such as Egypt and Iran where Islamic discourse dominates.

The return to Islamic archaism is part of the process of totalitarian uniformisation of all the aspects of cultural consumption. Outside the confines of the dominant model – that of Islam for the Muslim and of Christianity for the Christian, that of Judaism for the Jew and that of the media for all – thinking is forbidden. There is no room left for free

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and critical reflection. The arbitrary in Khomeini's Iran encroaches even on the freedom of choice in clothing for women and in choice of food for all.

Under the rule of a mercantile civilisation, which impoverishes more each day and is in its own way bigoted, any creation becomes necessarily heretical. When Khomeinist moralism becomes the norm, any reflection or 'abnormal' act can only be punished.

Apart from its exemplary punishments, Islamic archaism has nothing new to offer. It appears to me to be part of the process of the break-up of the state in a world which is becoming ungovernable. If the Islamic movements were to take power following the failure and the expected fall of Khomeinism, they could only profoundly destabilise the Islamic world which is already smitten with crisis, terrorism and open or masked civil war. It is however obvious that Islamic archaism cannot come to power, or remain in power in an acceptable manner. Its force is already spent before it begins.

'After the death of God', says Nietzsche, 'the most difficult thing to overcome is his shadow'.

His sinister shadow is this stupid and stupefying society, which produces and reproduces religion and spectacle; this society of exploitation, of radical alienation, of emotional plague, of loneliness, of insecurity, of degeneration, of generalised passivity, of representations which represent nothing but themselves, of waste and malnutrition, of fear and war. If religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, it will cease to exist when that creature is no longer oppressed but has become the creator of his own daily history.

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Iran:

Islam and the struggle for socialism

Mohammad Ja'far and Azar Tabari

This article is partly based on a talk given at a Khamsin public forum in February 1980. An earlier and briefer version of it appeared in Issues, May 1980. The present article has since been expanded and new sections have been added.

Almost two years have elapsed since the fall of the shah and the establishment of the Islamic regime in Iran. Whereas before and shortly after the February 1979 overthrow of the monarchy in Iran events in that country were given prominent, and often exuberant, coverage in the pages of the left press, it has since been demoted to occasional references concerning this or that new repressive move by the regime or, more frequently, the trotting out of the same old rhetorical clichés against US imperialism and other familiar non-problematic targets.

It is no exaggeration to say that literally none of the expectations, predictions and prognoses of left circles, whether inside or outside Iran, have been confirmed by the passage of time. The speed with which a highly repressive and deeply reactionary regime has emerged, in the wake of colossal mass mobilisations involving millions, has left many in political shock and disillusionment.

There are lessons, however, that have to be drawn, particularly for revolutionaries from Muslim societies; for it is clear that an Islamic 'alternative' has succeeded in gaining mass political allegiance in Iran. The repercussions are not limited to that country alone. Signs of shi'ite revivalism are evident in Iraq and other Arab countries. A new growth of pan-Islamism seems likely. To avoid impressionistic generalisations and hasty conclusions, a thorough critical balance-sheet of Iranian events from a revolutionary socialist viewpoint is long overdue.

I. WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN IRAN?

The key to understanding the events of the past two years in Iran is the character of the mass movement. At its height, the struggle against the shah engulfed the overwhelming majority of the urban population in street demonstrations involving the most enormous mass mobilisations since the Chinese revolution. The very breadth of the movement, and the fact that it was fighting one of the world's most repressive and powerful dictatorships, presented a picture too alluring to be marred by

any unpleasant observations about its goals or leadership. The apparent ability of the Islamic clergy to dominate events was dismissed as incidental. It was often simply denied that the Islamic hierarchy genuinely commanded mass allegiance. Alternatively, those who were unable to convince themselves that Islam was secondary or irrelevant, fastened their gaze in another direction. Perhaps the mullahs did stand in the forefront of the movement, but if so, it was primarily because of their intransigent opposition to the shah. The implication was that masses of people could not possibly be drawn into action around a mystical or backward-looking programme. Or if they were temporarily so moved, their consciousness would automatically undergo a progressive evolution as the struggle unfolded.

In fact, there is no reason, logical or sociological, why the oppressed cannot be mobilised in a sustained fight for reactionary objectives. Indeed, history is sadly laden with such instances. Moreover, far from being an empty abstraction, a political system based on Islamic precepts is inherently retrograde, regardless of the forces opposing its establishment. A reactionary struggle is not rendered progressive simply because its opponents are themselves reactionary.

Despite its mass character, the anti-shah movement was not undifferentiated. Its politically coherent core was made up of the traditional urban petty bourgeoisie, organised through the many mosques and various religious societies. The political and social programme behind which these masses mobilised was embodied in the concept of 'Islamic government'. The shi'ite clerical hierarchy, the theological student body, and the many young enthusiasts finding the embodiment of their social ideals in Islam provided the ideologues and political leaders with whose aid the traditional petty bourgeoisie was able to draw the rest of the urban population in its wake.

In its upper range, this traditional petty bourgeoisie overlapped, sociologically and politically, with sections of the traditional traders of the bazaar and with a certain portion of the bourgeoisie that had remained unconnected to the state apparatus that burgeoned around the Pahlavi court and its entourage since the late 1950s. This section of the bourgeoisie lacked access to one of the crucial mechanisms of 'primitive accumulation': state handouts and subsidies. Since state agencies dominated most investment opportunities, this sector was deprived of outlets by its lack of access to top state functionaries.

The political representatives of these layers were the remnants of the National Front, headed by Sanjabi, and the Freedom Movement, headed by Bazargan. Since the days of Mosaddeq in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the National Front had lost much of its social base and most of its political influence. Part of the former was integrated into the growing modern bourgeoisie, finding its place in the new state apparatus and taking full advantage of a booming economy. Another significant part had declared its disillusionment with the National Front by breaking away in the early 1960s and founding the Freedom Movement,

an attempt to amalgamate Iranian nationalism and Islam and thus to mend relations with the more traditional religious currents.

In its lower reaches, the traditional urban petty bourgeoisie shaded into the multi-million masses of urban poor: pauperised artisans and shopkeepers and uprooted peasant migrants. The already appalling living conditions of the urban poor became unberable as the Iranian economy sank into crisis in 1975-76. By the time of the Amouzgar cabinet (1976) unemployment was approaching one million and the official inflation rate stood near 30 per cent. Rising unemployment and inflation made everyday life precarious and inculcated in the urban poor a desperation that would later find expression in militancy. Their traditional fatalism and longing hopes for a better life were fused in the promised paradise of social justice offered by the clergy under the banner of Islam. The absence of any unemployment benefits or other welfare and social services gave the clergy the unique opportunity to disburse part of their traditional charity funds (*zakât*) in order to lend some material force to their promises.

The major battalions of the working class entered the fight in the last few months before February 1979. Deprived of any independent political or organisational experience as a class, disillusioned by the failure of both 'socialism' (as embodied for them by stalinism internationally and the Tudeh Party nationally) and bourgeois nationalism, and impatient with parliamentarism of the National Front, the working class let itself be drawn behind the petty bourgeoisie. The Islamic ideologues used the calamities of 'communism' and the collapse of nationalism as evidence of the inevitability of the rise of Islam: Cambodia and Egypt became their favourite talking points. The Mujahdeen's reinterpretation of *Jame'a Tawhidi* (unitarian society) as the classless society was an instance of the ideological aberrations through which the working class was enticed to the utopias of the petty bourgeois masses.

The revolt against history

The impact of capitalist development in Iran over the past two decades threatened the very existence of the traditional urban middle class. Innumerable independent small producers and distributors were driven into bankruptcy by factory production of traditional consumer goods and the emergence of large-scale distribution networks. Others barely survived by intensifying family labour and reducing their living standards. Still others, who enjoyed some increased prosperity because of the relative expansion of the internal market, nevertheless resented the striking widening of differentials in income and living standards. They were also hit in 1975-77 when the shah reacted to worsening economic difficulties by making further inroads on small-scale production. Bank credits were restricted, import controls relaxed, and import tariffs lowered. Campaigns against 'over-pricing' hit this layer hardest.

It thus became a matter of life and death to resist the regime. The dissatisfied bazaari merchants provided the funds, the desperate urban poor the militants and combativity, the clergy and *tullab* (the theological student body) the organising cadre. Shi'ite Islam offered the ideal ideological adhesive. Thus the revolt of the urban petty bourgeoisie against the pitiless realities of capitalism took shape

But it was a revolt against the present and the future, to reconquer a mythical past that had never really existed. In a sense it was a 'revolt against history', as 'Ali Shari'ati had called shi'ism.

The ideological origins of shi'ite Islam itself provided the starting point. Islam generally was suited to become the ideology of a society based on commerce and petty commodity production; but shi'ism *in particular* prided itself on being the 'idealist essence' of Islam. It arose as a revolt against the institutionalisation of an Islamic state structure, to which it counter-posed primitive semi-tribal patriarchal custom. Its inevitable defeat drove it increasingly into obscure mystification in the name of preserving the purity of Islam.

This endowed shi'ite Islam with a rich historical tradition of protest and martyrdom. In Iran, the many shi'ite sects had provided the organisational and ideological medium for repeated urban and rural revolts. Since it lacked any coherent vision and was inherently contradictory (fighting the *existing* governmental authority, but also denying the authority of *any* government in the absence of the Twelfth Imam), it usually led those protest movements to martyrdom rather than salvation. Its one famous success, the Sarbedaran revolt (mid-fourteenth century in western Khorasan), was short-lived. And shi'ite authorities deny that the Safavid period (sixteenth century) represented a true shi'ite experience, since the Safavids, once in power, abandoned shi'ism and became corrupt earthly rulers. In mid-nineteenth century Iran the clergy again provided the cadre and ideology for revolt. That experience, however, was quite different from the present one, as we shall see.

A combination of current economic, social, and political factors *has now given shi'ite Islam a unique and wholly unprecedented opportunity to actualise its programme*. Not only have political and social factors made it a plausible alternative to wide sectors of the population, but probably for the first time in the turbulent history of shi'ism economic conditions are exceptionally favourable to its project. Never before has an autarkic national economy been as *potentially viable* in Iran as it is today. The country has sufficient natural resources to provide for domestic consumption, particularly once Khomeini's austere standards are imposed on the mass of the population. What it lacks in resources, it can simply buy with oil revenues. No other contemporary social formation is so well placed to adhere to the motto 'small is beautiful'. In the long run, of course, trends towards class differentiation and capital accumulation will compel the Iranian economy to open up once again. But in the short run economic autarky will permit the most reactionary policies.

Moreover, the traditional political-ideological contradiction of shi'ism has been resolved through the concepts developed in recent years by Shari'ati and Khomeini. Shari'ati has emphasised that the task of government is properly the province of an elite that understands shi'ism and thus deserves to lead the rest of the community. Khomeini's essay, *Velayat-e Faghih* (first published in 1971, and often referred to as *The Islamic Government*), develops the same notion of clerical political responsibility more systematically, explicitly designating the clergy as the governing elite.

The 'nation' in the wake of the petty bourgeoisie

(We have put *nation* between inverted commas because Iran is in fact a multi-national state.)

It is undeniable that other forces and social classes that backed the revolt of the urban petty bourgeoisie did not share its 'historical vision'. Sectors of the bourgeoisie and the bazaari supporters of the Islamic Republic hoped for a 'rationalisation' of capitalism and 'democratisation' of the dictatorship. They yearned for access to state power and a larger, 'more just' share of the internal market and its investment opportunities. In backing the clergy and Khomeini, their political representatives, the National Front and the Freedom Movement, were reviving their traditional alliance with the shi'ite clergy. The top echelon of the clergy, always closely linked to the merchants of the bazaar, provided the natural ligature of the alliance.

Attention has sometimes been drawn to a similar alliance of bourgeois nationalists and the clergy during the 1905-1911 Constitutional Revolution. The contrasts, however, are more striking than the analogies. The bourgeois nationalists had the upper hand in the constitutional movement, barely tolerating their clerical allies. Seventy years later the opposite balance obtains. the clergy dominating its bourgeois allies. In the constitutional movement the clergy attempted to formulate religious justification for what were then *new concepts* of parliamentary democracy. Clerics laboured to demonstrate that all western constitutions were 'actually' derived from the Islamic *shari'a* (legal code), which meant that democracy was 'Islamic'. Seventy years later, the bourgeois nationalists of the Freedom Movement and the National Front were striving to weave a democratic cloak for Islamic theocracy, trying to show that Islam is the most democratic system. In the Constitutional Revolution, it was the bourgeois nationalists who enjoyed mass support for their concepts of political democracy and constitutional reform; they succeeded in out-manoeuvring the clergy, and introduced a constitution that declared that 'the national government is derived from the people'. Seventy years on, the popular imagination, disappointed by the bourgeois nationalists, disenchanted by what they knew as 'socialism', and repelled by the record of the Tudeh Party, was

gripped by the clergy. Betrayed by earthly doctrines, the masses put their trust in heavenly promises. With this support, the clergy was now in a position to take its revenge against its secular allies. Khomeini's 'experts' have drafted a constitution that declares that the Islamic Republic is based 'on belief in God, and on the principle that government and *tashri'* (legislation) belong to God, and on the willingness to accept submission to His orders'. It was now the clergy's turn to out-manoeuvre the bourgeois nationalists by establishing their theocratic state.

It is quite evident that nearly all components of the mass upsurge against the shah's dictatorship supported the idea of the Islamic Republic (as indicated by the overwhelming vote in the referendum of 30-31 March 1979). But, except for the bastions of the traditional urban petty bourgeoisie, this support is merely a result of their false identification of their own demands and aspirations with the programme of an Islamic Republic.

The public-sector employees and the working class, whose prolonged general strike halted the very functioning of the shah's regime, were fighting for improved social conditions and democratic rights, such as freedom of press and association, freedom of trade-unions, and the right to strike. But given the overwhelming political hegemony of the clergy in the anti-shah movement, these progressive struggles and tendencies could have come to fruition *only if they had broken from the clergy and come forward as an independent pole of attraction*. Once the clergy captured state power through the events of February 1979, the clergy, now wielding the weapon of the state, became an immediate and mortal threat to any advance of the class struggle.

The reason for this lies in the very nature of 'Islamic government'. Islam is not simply a system of religious thought and practices regulating the mystical relation of man to 'his god'. It is above all a body of social, economic, and political precepts on whose basis the Islamic community is to be governed in its earthly existence. The particularly reactionary and dangerous character of the clergy's hegemony does not arise primarily from its *particular* social and economic *policies*, although these are reactionary enough, ranging from oppressive laws against women to reactionary populist-sounding schemes, like trying to eliminate unemployment by granting each unemployed person a small amount of capital to set up a small workshop, or granting each homeless family land and construction materials to build its own hovel. Rather, the most menacing feature of the clergy's rule stems from its *concept of government*, as formulated in the many writings on the subject by Khomeini and others, and as implemented since February 1979. Government, the clerics maintain, is properly the business of the direct representatives of God on earth. The task of ruling is reserved for the spokesmen of God, and in the last instance for the supreme *faghih* (the person most knowledgeable in Islamic law), final arbiter of what is good for the Islamic community economically, politically, morally,

and socially. The scope of control extends even to the most trivial details of everyday life.

Khomeini himself has put it thus: 'Islamic government is the government of the laws of God over people. This is the main difference between Islamic government and constitutional monarchies or republics. That is, in the latter types of government the king or the representatives of the people engage in the act of legislation, while in Islam the legislative power, the act of *tashri'*, belongs solely to God. The holy Islamic *shari'a* is the only legislative power. No one else has the right to legislate. No law other than the divine decree can be implemented. For this reason, in the Islamic government instead of a legislative assembly . . . one has only a planning assembly that arranges the work of different ministries according to Islamic laws.

'The body of Islamic law, as collected in the Koran and the *sunna*, is accepted and obeyed by the Muslims. This acceptance and agreement makes the task of government easy . . . The Islamic government is a government of law, the governing belongs to God, and the law is the law and order of God. Islamic law, that is, the divine decree, has absolute authority over everyone and over the Islamic government.'

He then concludes, quite logically, that under the Islamic government those who are knowledgeable in Islamic law and who are just must rule. Hence: 'If the rulers are to follow Islam, they must follow the *faghihs* about the laws and decrees. Under such circumstances, it is clear that the *faghihs* are really ruling. Therefore the act of government must formally belong to the *faghihs* and not to those who due to their ignorance of the law must follow the *faghihs* . . .

'These characteristics of knowledge in law and justice are present in many of our contemporary *faghihs*. If they get together, they would be able to form a just government throughout the world.

'If a suitable person who has these two characteristics arises and forms a government . . . obedience to him is obligatory upon all people.'

Such a government of 'just *faghihs*' would enact all the Islamic laws, 'would implement all the *hads* and *qasas* [Islamic punishments], . . . would collect all the *khoms*, *zakât*, the charities, the *jizya*, and *kharaj* [Islamic taxes] and would decide how to spend it for the benefit of Muslims . . .

'These just *faghihs* must become the rulers, must implement the laws, and establish the Islamic social order.' (All quotations are from the essay *Velayat-e Faghih*.)

Independent thought and action have no place whatever in such a system of government. Mass activity is encouraged only when it unfolds under the control of the *faghihs* or in their support; it is ruthlessly crushed the moment it steps beyond such limits. Complete conformity is the rule. This is only logical in a system whose final authority rests beyond human judgement. What is most dangerous in this project, and distinguishes it from others, is that it is based on the complete negation

of all popular sovereignty; the rulers are not accountable to the ruled *even in theory*.

The nefarious effects of this project on the consciousness of the workers and urban and rural poor should not be underestimated. The consolidation of Khomeini's authority, backed by his success in ousting the shah, has increasingly meant surrender by the masses of all their confidence and independence in favour of trust in God and obedience to his Imam. Since February 1979, important struggles and strikes in factories and in the army have been stifled not through armed force or the threat of force, but at the order of the Imam.

After February 1979: problems of power based on conformism

Efforts to implement this political project have been at the centre of events in Iran since February 1979. On each major issue the clergy has set itself in opposition to progressive change, the exigences of Islamic government contradicting those of social progress. Consequently, mass participation in efforts to recast Iranian society implicitly threatens the Islamic project, unless directly controlled by clerics or their agents. The success of the clergy's political rule therefore hinges on its ability to check or suppress all the independent struggles that had arisen with the crisis and collapse of the shah's regime: the struggles of the nationalities for self-determination; the fight for democratic rights; the struggle of women for equality; and finally, some primarily economic struggles of workers and peasants.

These latter have been contained quite easily. In and of themselves, the struggles of workers for higher wages and better working conditions, of the unemployed for jobs, and of the peasants for land pose no particular challenge to the political project of the clergy. On the other hand, the struggle for independent workers' and peasant organisations had been led into the blind alley of corporatist Islamic councils, with the obliging cooperation of the confused left and the theoretical elaborations of the Mujahedeen. Two years after the collapse of the Pahlavi dictatorship, *no independent workers' movement exists in Iran*.

Inevitably, conflict on the issue of women's rights followed the seizure of power by the clergy. Islam upholds unambiguously reactionary and oppressive codes and laws for women. Any move towards implementing them was bound to meet strenuous opposition from those women who had hoped that the overthrow of the shah's regime would open a new era of the flowering of their rights. Despite the vicissitudes of women's struggles during the past two years, this remains one of the major 'problem' areas for the clergy. It also offers one of the key challenges and hopes for revolutionary socialists. (These issues are discussed in greater detail in 'Enigma of the Veiled Iranian Woman', *Feminist Review* no 5, 1980.) For the first time in the history of Iran,

the nature of the political regime makes quite likely the emergence of a women's movement similar to the suffragist movements of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Europe. Issues of legal and political equality will tend to come to the fore of women's struggles.

The collapse of the highly centralised Pahlavi state naturally set in motion a fresh round of battles for national self-determination all over Iran, a patchwork of nationalities and ethnic groupings. The modern state was born of the bloody suppression of national struggles and has indulged in continual acts of repression to forstall any new uprisings. Any endeavour by oppressed nationalities to determine their own fate, in particular to erect their own political structures, had to clash with the clergy's project of instituting a centralised theocracy. That the majority of these nationalities and ethnic minorities are sunnis aggravated the issue. Since February 1979, there have been intermittent clashes between Khomeini's supporters and the forces for local autonomy or self-government in Gonbad, Khuzistan, Kurdistan, Baluchistan, and Azarbaijan. Despite the vicious, chauvinist campaign launched against the Kurds in August 1979, Khomeini's forces did not succeed in defeating them. In the other regions the relationship of forces has been more favourable to the regime. The single greatest obstacle to the consolidation of clerical rule has remained the struggle of the oppressed nationalities, especially the Kurds.

The collapse of the shah's dictatorship temporarily ended a twenty-five year period of suppression of all democratic rights. The flood of newspapers and books, the gatherings and meetings that proliferated in workshops, universities and schools, and the formation of political parties and other associations, including the many grass-roots committees, all reflected the popular thirst for democracy.

Contrary to a common misconception on the left, the numerous committees that sprang up throughout the country during the first few months of 1979 were in no way soviet-type formations. Most of the neighbourhood committees were set up through the local mosques, directly under the clergy's control. Other committees, set up at workplaces, colleges, and secondary schools, often began as strike committees and nearly always remained concerned with local issues, or with coordination of mobilisations against the shah's regime (in support of the journalists' strike against censorship, for example). Some of these committees were taken over by Khomeini's supporters after February 1979 and quickly lost all independence. Where they remained genuinely independent bodies elected by workers, employees, or students, they devoted themselves exclusively to local issues of this or that factory, office, or school. At no time did these bodies begin to act (or conceive themselves) as organs of a new power. Primarily they reflected a genuine desire for grass-roots democracy that remained limited to local issues. Exactly for this reason, the new rulers found it relatively easy gradually to transform these bodies into corporatist *consultative* councils. The highest degree of political development occurred

in the south, amongst oil workers, whose council issued a statement calling for a workers' representative to be placed on the Revolutionary Council, since 'workers had played such a significant role in the downfall of the shah'. Even this modest proposal, however, was never followed up by the workers.

But the very existence of such independent committees, the outpouring of newspapers and books, the formation of parties and organisations, and the exercise of freedom of speech and assembly inevitably threatened the establishment and consolidation of the government of God on earth. In the first months after it came to power, Khomeini's regime set out systematically to stamp out this threat.

The August attacks

There were two periods in this process, separated from each other by the August 1979 attacks against the press, the left, and Kurdistan. In the early period, the regime was not capable of launching an all-out assault, nor was such drastic action necessary.

Despite the attempts of the leading factions around Bazargan and Khomeini to effect a smooth transition of power that would preserve all the main military and repressive instruments of the state intact, the bulk of the Iranian army collapsed and SAVAK premises were taken over and often burnt down during the February 1979 days. Several months of confronting mass street demonstrations had severely undermined the morale of the soldiers, leading to widespread desertion and indiscipline. The execution of many leading figures of the army and SAVAK (advocated and implemented by Khomeini's supporters over Bazargan's objections) further sapped army morale, especially among the officers. What remained of the army was an ineffective body whose soliders were temporarily more concerned with experiments in rank-and-file democracy than with drills and other army exercises. The reconstruction of the army, or the construction of new repressive instruments such as the Islamic militias, the Pasdaran, required time.

Meanwhile, political preparations were under way to demoralise and demobilise those sectors of the mass movement that were not politically shaped and organisationally dominated by the clergy. Months of careful preparation preceded the August 1979 crackdown, the regime testing the balance of forces as it went along. (The move against certain newspapers in June 1979, though unsuccessful, was one example.)

The leitmotif of Khomeini's policy during the pre-August period was the elimination of any popular participation in directing the affairs of the country *independent of the clergy*. Independent committees were often dissolved; non-conformist elements were demoralised and driven out of those that remained. The foundation for later political developments was laid by the referendum on the Islamic Republic. The oft-promised constituent assembly was postponed several times. Had such

a body been convened earlier, an even more solid and genuine majority for Khomeini's supporters might have been returned. But early elections would have run against the long-term political goals of establishing a 'chosen' (as opposed to an *elected*) government. It would have strengthened that element in mass consciousness that favoured free and democratic elections and an elective system of government. Elections had first to be reduced from a positive action of a determinative character to an act of consultation or mere ratification. The majority of the population (and not just the solid bastions of the urban petty bourgeoisie) had to be either demoralised and reduced to political apathy and inactivity or convinced that only 'Islamic experts' are fit to govern. Concepts of political democracy were deemed 'western', 'corrupt', and defunct. After all, wasn't the whole system of imperialist exploitation based on bourgeois democracy? So the argument went. Primitive populism was declared superior.

For months hesitant discontent was held in check by constant harping on themes such as 'the threat of counter-revolution', 'the danger of restoration', 'the impending imperialist and zionist intervention'. Meanwhile, the imposition of Islamic codes began to drive home the message that this was going to be a genuinely Islamic government. The left was most obliging to the clergy on the former themes, and kept silent on the latter. Some may have shared the prudish and cruel codes of behaviour the clergy was imposing. Others dismissed them as irrelevant details of no real concern to the working masses. When the clergy began executing prostitutes, for example, not a single voice was raised in defence of the victims. By allowing the all-embracing imposition of Islamic codes without challenge, the left effectively cooperated in preparing the rope for its own strangulation.

Revenge against the past became the overriding theme of everyday life. This was not simply intended to divert popular attention from more 'mundane' problems of today and tomorrow, nor was it merely a means of fostering an atmosphere of generalised fear, terror, and uncertainty. It was, in addition, part of the revival of Islamic tradition and values, among which was the importance of revenge and punishment, as opposed to what Muslims have often considered the passive Christian tradition of forgiveness. The most important Islamic tradition to be revived, however, was the Friday prayers. Every major city and town in Iran today has a Friday Imam appointed by Khomeini, who unfailingly conveys the latest political message in his Friday *khotba* (the sermon preceding the actual prayer).

Once the regime felt strong enough, it scrapped the constituent assembly in favour of a farcical 'Assembly of Experts'. The absence of any organised resistance to these 'elections' apparently convinced Khomeini that the time was ripe to rid himself of potential critics and irritants to his rule. He understood the meaning of the large rate of abstention – less than half the electorate participated in the vote – much better than the left. Far from indicating an active boycott or

rising dissent, it reflected the fact that disillusionment with the Islamic Republic was generating a mood of apathy and demoralisation. Most of the electorate felt that their votes were either futile or unnecessary. Those dissatisfied with the prevailing state of affairs were already feeling impotent, and some of the supporters of the Islamic regime felt secure enough not to bother with registering their support.

In the aftermath of the election of the Assembly of Experts, a wave of protest by certain groups, including some of the clergy around Shari'atmadari, expressed belated grievances against the electoral practices, thereby signalling a potential threat to Khomeini's project. Feeble though these protests were, they were intolerable in a political system that demands total submission and conformity. The continued strength of the Kurdish movement also loomed as a danger to a centralised theocracy. It was time to put an end to the independent press, the left, and the Kurds, each of which, in varying ways, constituted an obstacle to the clergy's project.

The campaign was launched with a speech by Khomeini on the occasion of the Day of Jerusalem, in which he said that it had been a mistake not to have acted in a sufficiently revolutionary manner after the seizure of power:-

'When we broke down the corrupt regime, and destroyed this very corrupt dam, had we acted in a revolutionary manner from the beginning, had we closed down this hired press, these corrupt magazines, these corrupt papers, had we put their editors on trial, had we banned all these corrupt parties and punished their leaders, had we erected scaffolds for hanging in all major squares, and had we chopped off all the corrupters and the corrupted, we would not have had these troubles today. I beg forgiveness from the almighty God and my dear people . . . Had we been revolutionary, we would not have allowed them to express their existence, we would have banned all parties, we would have banned all fronts, we would have formed only one party, the party of the *mustaz'afeen* [the oppressed]. I ask for repentance for my mistake, and I declare to these corrupt layers all over Iran, that if they do not sit in their place, we will deal with them in a revolutionary manner . . . like our master 'Ali, . . . who would pull his sword against the *mustakbereen* [the oppressors] and the conspirators, and who it is said beheaded 700 in one day from the Jews of Bani Qarantia, who were like the Israelis and maybe these Israelis are their descendants . . . These conspirators are in the same category as the *kuffar* [heathen], these conspirators in Kurdistan and elsewhere are in the ranks of the infidels, they should be dealt with harshly . . . The Prosecutor of the Revolution must close down all magazines that are against the popular will, and are conspirators; he must invite all their writers to court and put them on trial. He is obligated to call upon those who engage in conspiracies and call themselves parties, put the leaders of these parties on trial . . . those layers of the army who disobey [in failing to suppress the corrupters and the conspirators] must know that I will deal with them in a revolutionary

manner . . . I demand of all layers of the population, of all intellectuals and of all parties and groups, whose number unfortunately now exceeds 200, that they follow the popular path, the path of Islam . . . otherwise they will become the victims of their own wrongdoing . . . Other nations must learn from our movement, . . . the people of Afghanistan must learn from Iran . . . We hope that the unity of the world of Muslims will solve the problems of Islam, the problems of Palestine, and those of Afghanistan.'

The following day all independent newspapers were banned, headquarters of dissident groups were ransacked and the military campaign against Kurdistan was launched. This latter campaign proved unsuccessful in defeating the Kurds, but the press was silenced and the left marginalised. Today no paper is legal that dares to oppose Khomeini and the Islamic Republic. Those papers that have gained temporary legalisation have paid a heavy political price: capitulation to Khomeini.

The events around the US embassy take-over, the holding of hostages, and the demand for the return of the shah accelerated theocratic consolidation and exacerbated the confusion and capitulation of the left.

Just prior to the siege in November 1979, the Iranian situation was marked by increasing anti-government ferment – among the Kurds; in the universities; where issues of freedom of political debate had again be raised; among women, some of whom were beginning to organise against the new marriage and divorce laws, which repeal the small gains that had been made under the shah; among the workers, where there was a modest rise in economic struggles.

The embassy siege, far from impelling these struggles forward, acted as a brake on them, simultaneously diverting attention from the real issues facing Iran and serving as an occasion for typical obscurantist calls for 'national unity', overlaid with the Islamic cast that renders this time-honoured reactionary appeal even more retrogressive. Khomeini was now in a position to blame all economic shortages on American sabotage; a huge propaganda campaign for the restriction of consumption was launched. All dissidents could now be branded as agents of US imperialism and suffer the wrath of the masses accordingly. Khomeini has used the occasion to implement what he had failed to achieve before; a massive mobilisation of youth into armed militias under the total control of the clergy and their henchmen and a reintroduction of discipline into the army.

The effects of the events on mass consciousness has been hardly less lamentable. The complete diversion of the population's attention from real problems and enemies at home further set back the process of differentiation between Khomeini and his mass base and intensified the obscurantism and mystification that has marked the Iranian upheaval from the outset.

The US embassy occupation and the mobilisations around it provided the regime with a favourable political climate for holding a

referendum on the new constitution. This was followed by the presidential and parliamentary elections in early 1980. Once the elections were over, fresh attacks against the left and the nationalities ensued.

New assaults against the Kurdish people began early in April 1980. Within two weeks these had developed into a full-scale civil war. The Iranian air force joined the army and the Islamic militias in mop-up operations of whole villages and towns.

A new offensive against all dissidents was already under way with the attacks against the Mujahedeen headquarters during March 1980. By early April 'followers of the line of the Imam' were regularly attacking left headquarters on university campuses. Bani-Sadr personally moved in, legitimising these attacks by giving on April 18 a three-day ultimatum to all left groups to evacuate their university headquarters. These were the last public sanctuaries of the left since their other headquarters had been shut down in August 1979. In the ensuing days, Islamic thugs ransacked the left headquarters, causing thousands of casualties. Hundreds were arrested. Several executions followed. Bonfires were made of all leftist literature on the campuses.

II. WHAT PROSPECTS FOR SOCIALISM IN IRAN?

In discussing the future development of the class struggle in Iran, two questions have to be clearly distinguished. First, there is the question of an assessment of the present balance of forces in the country and the likely tendencies of their development. Second, one must begin to develop a revolutionary programme for socialism in Iran.

The relationship of forces in Iran today

Notwithstanding the jubilation of the left in Iran and abroad over the issue of the US embassy takeover, the present political situation in Iran is not at all favourable for the struggle for socialism, as is shown by a cursory look at the state of affairs two years after the overthrow of the monarchy.

The general trend of struggles independent of the clergy and its political programme has been on the decline, except in Kurdistan. The other nationalities and ethnic minorities have been unable to sustain any resistance since the attacks against the Arabs in Khuzistan in early summer 1979 and those against the Baluchis in autumn 1979. New attacks against the Turkomans were launched in spring 1980. Twelve leaders were found beheaded and a new climate against 'losing an inch of our national land' was created in anticipation of fresh attacks against the Turkomans and the Kurds, followed by a full-scale war against them.

The struggle of women for equal rights, which saw a modest revival

in early autumn, was subsequently overshadowed by the embassy events and the presidential and parliamentary elections. But even the autumn 1979 mobilisations were much smaller than those of March 1979 against the compulsory veil. On that occasion nearly 20,000 women demonstrated, on only one day's notice, against Khomeini's edict on the veil. The autumn protests primarily comprised women from the far left and barely numbered in the thousands. The strict imposition of 'Islamic modesty' on women in the summer of 1980 evoked very limited and totally disorganised resistance.

Censorship over the national media is in full force; the judiciary has been delivered from the clutches of SAVAK only to fall under the cloak of the clergy; no independent working-class organisations have emerged; the living conditions of the working class and the urban poor have deteriorated and are likely to continue doing so.

What is most disconcerting of all, however, is the political polarisation that has emerged in the country. The bourgeois nationalist wing of the ruling alliance has been eliminated from the scene for all practical purposes. The majority of those who had supported Bazargan and his government in the first half of 1979 have now become his open enemies. Although this does reflect the impotence of this political current in dealing with the social problems facing the country, the celebration of much of the left in Iran is worse than misplaced. Far from signifying a leftward shift in the mood of the masses away from bourgeois liberalism, this polarisation has further strengthened the hegemony of the clergy and the appeal of its Islamic government as the only possible alternative. The growth of the left, on the other hand, has been minimal in this polarisation.

Moreover, under deteriorating economic conditions coupled with a government repressive apparatus that remains weak, and in the absence of any avenues of progressive political struggles, there has been a rise of workers' economic struggles around unemployment, wages, hours and conditions of work etc. This has made daily life increasingly intolerable for the petty bourgeoisie and the bazaaris. They are clamouring for 'law and order', pressing for a rapid reinforcement of the central government. For the moment, they seem to have given their support, with Khomeini's blessing, to Bani-Sadr. To stay in power (and to save his own neck) he has to succeed in satisfying the demands for order. If he fails, there are other candidates for the job. The Partisans of God (Hezb-o Allahis) have been quietly organising and have grown considerably. The concerted attacks against Mujahedeen headquarters all over the country gave an indication of their forces.

Regardless of the exact short-term balance of forces between different ruling factions, it must be emphasised that the period ahead for revolutionary socialists will be one of prolonged patient political education. Unless there is a victorious upsurge towards socialist democracy in the Soviet Union or a victorious socialist revolution in one of the imperialist countries (thereby giving rise to a new attractive

image of socialism on a world scale), the majority of Iranians, in Persian-speaking areas in particular, have set themselves to experiment with their 'neither western, nor eastern, but Islamic' model. Within this overall context we can project the future of other political tendencies, as well as the tasks and programme of revolutionary socialism.

For reasons already pointed out above, bourgeois nationalist currents of various shades, the National Front and the Freedom Movement, have no real future. The National Front, already in demise, has suffered further losses of its political figure-heads and social base. It has been reduced to commemorating its past, rather than projecting the image of a new future. The only significant initiative it has shown has been to celebrate Mosaddeq's birthday and commemorate the anniversary of his death. Over the summer 1980 period, in the aftermath of the uncovering of a coup plot, there was a systematic campaign to implicate the National Front in the coup plans. Its headquarters have been taken over by the Pasdaran, and it can no longer even publish a paper.

The more radical offshoot of the National Front, the National Democratic Front, gained a certain momentum for a few months by organising opposition to the clergy on a secular and democratic basis, but it has not recovered from the physical attacks against its last demonstration in defence of freedom of the press in August 1979.

The Freedom Movement, originally a breakaway from the National Front in the early 1960s, had set itself the task of governing the state on behalf of the clergy whom they thought should remain in the mosques to provide 'spiritual' leadership. With the clergy now in command of the state, there is very little room left for the Freedom Movement. In any case, it is quite unlikely that the masses, once they begin to break with Khomeini, would look towards political currents whose bankruptcy has been transparent for so many decades and who have no coherent alternative.

The major groups on the secular left have a very small popular base, especially amongst the workers and the urban poor. They are stronger amongst students, white-collar workers and state-employees. All these groups – the Tudeh Party, Fedaeen, Paykar – have also politically capitulated to the clergy in various degrees. The Fedaeen and Paykar in particular are also politically very confused and heterogeneous organisations. It is difficult to see how they could offer an attractive alternative to forces breaking away from clerical rule.

Within the Islamic framework there are many tendencies. Here is where a reshaping of the political map may take place in the coming years. These political currents range from the left reformism of the Mujahedeen, through different shades and factions within the clergy and political personalities related to them, all the way through to extreme right fascistic groupings such as the Hezb-o Allahis. The Mujahedeen have a substantial base in the working class and are influential in many of the workers' councils. They are the current most likely to grow in the coming years as an Islamic workerist tendency. On

many vital issues they have held progressive positions and at times supported the struggles of women, nationalities and workers; nevertheless as long as they remain within an Islamic ideological framework they are bound to end up on the side of reaction when vital questions are posed (e.g., their silence on the attacks against the Kurds, and their acceptance of Khomeini's orders to evacuate their central headquarters). They have made their political trademark the question of the Islamic councils (*shoras*), advocating a governmental system based on them. These councils, however, as long as the Mujahedeen accept Khomeini's doctrine of vesting power and authority in the supreme *faghih*, will remain essentially consultative bodies which lend themselves to becoming vehicles for a populist corporatist base of support for the Islamic regime.

Bani-Sadr, around whom coalesce today a whole layer of intellectuals and state-functionaries, can be broadly characterised as a serious Islamic thinker who is interested in laying the economic foundations for an Islamic republic. His relatively more 'rational' attempts to put the economy in order have come into direct conflict with the programme of the clergy to take control of the state machinery (through their majority bloc in the Majlis) and to base all decisions on precepts derived from the Koran and the shari'a.

The two major factions of the clergy are the Islamic Republican Party, headed by Beheshti, and those around Kho'ini-ha. One could say that the basic difference between the two is that the former tries to come to grips with post-power problems, trying to make the adjustments and alliances that would stabilise the situation. Kho'ini-ha, on the other hand, wants to remain faithful to pre-power visions of a purist and fundamentalist Islamic social order. The 'students following the line of the Imam' who occupied the US embassy are aligned with this faction.

The Hezb-o Allahis (Partisans of God, called thus because of their motto: *Only one party, party of Allah; only one leader, Ruh-o Allah* [Khomeini's first name]) is a fascistic grouping. It is still small but growing rapidly. It enjoys the support of a number of well-known clerics (notably Hojjat-o al Islam Ghaffari) as well as certain bazaaris. It recruits its thugs primarily from the mass of the declassed urban population.

Towards a revolutionary marxist programme for Iran

Much of the Iranian far left's propaganda and activity has focused around workers' economic struggles. However, the economic demands, measured by their actual impact on the course of the class struggle, are of secondary importance today. On the other hand, demands related to the nature of the political structure are central and cannot be reduced, as has often been done by the left, to secondary

points concerning separation of religion and state and the abolition of all privileges for the shi'ite or any other religion.

The specific character of the political system in Iran today, the fact that it is a theocratic Islamic government, shapes all political questions in Iran and must therefore form the central axis of a revolutionary socialist programme.

This question cannot be posed simply in terms of secularisation (separation of religion from the state) because of the specificities of Islam as a social and political system. As any Muslim would readily point out, *Islam cannot be 'separated from the state', precisely because it is above all else a total governmental social programme.* This point cannot be emphasised enough. By turning to Islam, the Iranian masses have not become more *religious*, but more *political* – in a very particular and reactionary way. They have turned to Islam as a vision of a future that they mistakenly identify with a betterment of their lives. Like any other political programme that is objectively in conflict with the interests of the toilers and the oppressed, but for political and historical reasons has succeeded in becoming the expression of their rebellion and the focus of their hope, Islam has to be taken up and challenged at every level. Moreover, this challenge is more immediately posed in the case of Islam than any other political formation. The growth of social democracy, for example, indicates an elementary but essential growth of working class organisation. The very power of social democracy rests on the organisation of workers as a class. The recent growth of sentiments for a labour party in Brazil, for example, is a very positive development. Revolutionary socialists welcome it and along with other working-class militants fight for it (and for their programme) even though, in the given balance of forces between revolutionaries and reformists, it may very well lead to the emergence of a reformist party. Islam, however, is based on the absolute and complete negation of all independent thought or action. It is a deeply anti-democratic view of the world. Its growth, therefore, far from representing any partial step forward for the oppressed, signifies their subordination to the clergy who rest – in theory and not only in practice – beyond the accountability of the masses. Its social and economic policies, moreover, are such that they in turn increase the material dependence of the oppressed on religious institutions, rather than encouraging any form of self-organisation (e.g., the disbursement of charities as a means of 'social equalisation'). This means that one cannot deal with Islam as a social and political system without challenging and fighting it all the way down the line. One is almost tempted to counterpose a full socialist programme to the programme of an Islamic society. This, of course, is necessary at the level of the general presentation of revolutionary socialist propaganda. But it too would be inadequate. To focus simply and solely on general anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist demands in Iran today is pointless. Power is in the hands of the clergy and the fact that there is a bourgeois

government and the mode of production is capitalist is almost irrelevant to the issues of the day and therefore to immediate political tasks.

To elucidate this point we will draw an analogy. Israel is a modern bourgeois social formation based on the capitalist mode of production. The struggle between capital and labour is fundamental and must be integrated into the programme of action of Israeli revolutionaries. In this sense Israel is similar to other capitalist countries. But there is a very important sense in which Israel is *different* from west European countries, for example. Israel is also an exclusively Jewish Zionist state. It is a settler state based on the expropriation and expulsion of its former Palestinian inhabitants. These features of the Israeli state pervade all aspects of life in that country. They affect state institutions, laws, culture; and they enter in one form or another as formative ingredients of the consciousness of every citizen of Israel. To arrive at a revolutionary socialist consciousness in Israel, that is, for the Israeli working class to become convinced of the necessity to overthrow the *bourgeois* state, it is necessary to break with *Zionism*. Left Zionists, for example, who consider themselves socialists and are often very well versed in Marxism, are in fact the purest Zionists of all and they were after all the real pioneers of the modern Israeli state.

Anti-Zionist demands, therefore, must form the central axis of a revolutionary programme in Israel. The problem for Israeli revolutionaries is to win the masses away from Zionism towards socialism; and the chain of demands leading up to that constitutes the specific form that a revolutionary transitional programme takes amongst the Jewish masses in Israel. In other words, anti-Zionist demands are not some nice additional touch added to distinguish revolutionary socialists from other currents in the workers' movement. The most militant and explosive struggles of the Jewish masses in Israel will be contained, derailed, and defeated (with arguments such as the threat to the security of the Jewish state, etc.), unless in the process of struggle the masses begin to break with Zionism.

Similar observations apply in the case of Iran today. Of course, the Islamic state is different from the example of Israel in the sense that clerical rule is not based on specific material economic privileges of the clergy itself. It is above all a distinct *political* system.

An *Islamic* political system is distinguished from all others in that it is *inherently* anti-democratic. In a system based on laws that are not subject to human intervention, questioning and blasphemy, dissent and heresy become identical. No significant Muslim political theorist has ever produced a theory of democracy – *of popular rule* – and no Muslim state has ever yet rested on political democracy. An Islamic regime insists on *forced implementation* of what the clergy considers to be in the interest of the Islamic community, based on the Koran, the shari'a, etc. This is known as the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (command the good and forbid the bad). Moreover this body of 'the good and the bad' comprises a whole range of retrogressive

laws, social norms and reactionary economic policies. One cannot deal with this phenomenon by tinkering with this or that economic policy, and reacting instinctively, empirically, and on a day-to-day basis to this or that attack on women, the nationalities, the left, etc. One cannot sit back and repeat banalities about capitalism and imperialism, and be content with general anti-capitalist anti-imperialist demands. The specific transitional programme for socialist revolution in Iran must start from the specific political character of the state.

The establishment of an Islamic theocratic state is the central fact of what happened in Iran in February 1979. This regime is *historically* more retrogressive than even the shah's regime. Unfortunately and tragically, the overthrow of the shah's dictatorship has not resulted in any gains for the struggle for socialism. Even the partial improvement of conditions for struggle – purely as a result of the collapse of the dictatorial apparatus and completely unrelated to the nature of the current regime itself – has been more than rolled back by the consolidation of the Islamic regime. Furthermore, the new regime has turned back, and will continue to turn back, the most minimal and partial advance made in such matters as family laws, the legal system, the criminal code. The Islamic constitution of Khomeini, promulgated by the Assembly of Experts, is more backward than its 1906 predecessor.

Once the Islamic regime is politically and militarily stabilised, the implementation of its economic policies will also set back the forces of production in Iran for a considerable period of time. Unlike nationalist regimes – Nasser in Egypt, Peron in Argentina, Ben-Bella in Algeria – which arose in the post-second world war period, and which brought about partial and limited economic reforms (land reform, partial industrialisation), the Khomeini regime has had and will continue to have a destructive and retrogressive effect on the forces of production. In fact, from a 'socio-economic' viewpoint, the shah, and not Khomeini, was Iran's equivalent to Egypt's Nasser. It was the so-called 'white revolution' that accelerated the partial, uneven, limited, *and yet real* development of capitalism in Iran.

The standard of living under Khomeini's regime has steadily dropped and it will continue to do so. The dependence on oil revenues will grow as factories and industrial production grind to a halt. At the same time, the production of oil has dropped to less than one fifth of what it was under the shah. The regime is incapable of running the factories without the capitalists who have fled the country. The cumulative effect of all this, in the absence of any alternative, will generate further apathy and demoralisation.

Khomeini's regime is also having a very pernicious effect on the general level of culture in Iran. Islamic monolithism of thought is undermining the development of all individuality of thought, non-conformism, and independence. The traditional oppressive Middle-Eastern family structure is given new strength in forcing children and youth into Islamic patterns of behaviour. Religious intolerance has

already led to attacks against Christians, Jews, Baha'is, and even sunni Muslims. Revolting and inhumane concepts, like the glorification of 'martyrdom', violence and vengeance, are rampant in Iran today. The effect that all this will have on the future of the Iranian masses, on their thinkers, poets, writers, artists and musicians, cannot easily be measured today. Nevertheless it is frighteningly real, and a very bitter price is being exacted by the clergy in this sphere alone.

To conclude: A revolutionary socialist programme for Iran today must include as its central plank hostility to this theocratic Islamic regime and the very idea of an Islamic republic. Every struggle and every demand must be linked up in the press and agitation of revolutionary socialists with the urgency of undermining in every possible way the abomination that has come to power in Iran. Breaking individuals and currents or sections of the masses from the hold of Islam as a social and political system is the only way in which a revolutionary vanguard will emerge that is capable, willing, and effective in struggle against the regime. *The break with Islam, therefore, takes on a transitional character in Iran today, in a similar sense to a break with zionism in Israel.* It is no longer possible to act as a revolutionary militant in Iran without having arrived at a state of total hostility to the very concept of the 'Islamic revolution' and the Islamic republic. Strikes led and organised against the regime or against capitalists, but on a left work-erist Islamic basis, are doomed to failure in the long run, just as purely economic strikes in Israel have always failed to challenge the hold of the ruling class, because they did not challenge zionism, which is the central divide in that country. Are you for or against the rule of the clergy – this is the most central political divide that will arise in Iranian society. Given the nature of the Islamic government, based on the intolerant theological concept of 'command the good and forbid the bad', the struggle for political democracy and individual liberties will become the most central issue of the class struggle.

The demands and slogans that will arise in Iran will cover a whole range of issues from the most general governmental ones (the struggle for a genuinely popular democratic republic; the convening of a *sovereign* constituent assembly; demands related to making all governmental offices elective and recallable; abolition of the *faghih*'s post and the so-called Council of Islamic Guardians; democratisation of all election laws; abolition of all restrictions on governmental jobs based on religion; the sovereignty of the legislative, executive, and judicial organs vis-à-vis the clergy; etc.) down to the most specific policies regarding the judicial system (complete secularisation of the judiciary and the laws, establishment of an elective jury system, rights of defence and appeal, abolition of execution, flogging and all such punishments, reinstating the right of women to hold judiciary posts including the post of a judge, abolition of the special courts for the clergy, etc.). One will have to fight also for a whole range of democratic rights (freedom of

expression, press, association, etc.), artistic and cultural freedoms (lifting the ban on music and dance, ending the censorship of movies and theatres; and lifting state control over the mass media, in particular over the radio and TV; ending the strangulation of the universities, etc.). Socialists must also intransigently demand an end to all infringements of individual liberties and state intervention in matters of personal life.

As argued above, amongst all the social questions, the national question and women's rights have been and will continue to be the most explosive ones. The struggle of oppressed nationalities for self-determination will remain the major obstacle to the consolidation of power by the clergy.

Given the nature of Islamic laws regarding women, we shall also witness a rise in the struggle of women for equal rights over the next period. It remains the responsibility of revolutionary socialists to take an active initiative in this field.

It is within this general political framework and such a prioritisation of tasks and demands, focusing as they do on the centrality of the question of the Islamic state, that all other points will find their proper place as part of a comprehensive programme for revolutionaries in Iran in the wake of the February 1979 'Islamic revolution'.

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Religion, zionism and secularism

Ehud Ein-Gil

When man's life lay for all to see foully grovelling upon the ground, crushed beneath the weight of Religion, which displayed her head in the regions of heaven, threatening mortals from on high with horrible aspect, a man of Greece was the first that dared to uplift mortal eyes against her, the first to make stand against her; for neither fables of the gods could quell him, nor the thunderbolts, nor heaven with menacing roar, nay all the more they goaded the eager courage of his soul, so that he should desire, first of all men, to shatter the confining bars of nature's gates. Therefore the lively power of his mind prevailed, and forth he marched far beyond the flaming walls of the heavens, as he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination; whence victorious he returns bearing his prize, the knowledge what can come into being, what can not, in a word, how each thing has its powers defined and its deep-set boundary mark. Wherefore Religion is now in her turn cast down and trampled underfoot, whilst we by the victory are exalted high as heaven.

One thing I fear in this matter, that in this your apprenticeship to philosophy you may perhaps see impiety, and the entering on a path of crime; whereas on the contrary too often it is that very Religion which has brought forth criminal and impious deeds.

(Lucretius, De Rerum Natura)

India is supposed to be a religious country above everything else, and Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and others take pride in their faiths and testify to their truth by breaking heads. The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organised religion, in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and the preservation of vested interests. And yet I knew well that there was something else in it, something which supplied a deep inner craving of human beings. How else could it have been the tremendous power it has been and brought peace and comfort to innumerable tortured souls? Was that peace merely the shelter of blind belief and absence of questioning, the calm that comes from being safe in harbour, protected from the storms of the open sea, or was it something more? In some cases certainly it was something more...

A Roman Catholic friend sent me in prison many books on

Catholicism and Papal Encyclicals and I read them with interest. Studying them, I realised the hold it had on such large numbers of people. It offered, as Islam and popular Hinduism offer, a safe anchorage from doubt and mental conflict, an assurance of a future life which will make up for the deficiencies of this life.

I am afraid it is impossible for me to seek harbourage in this way. I prefer the open sea, with all its storms and tempests. Nor am I greatly interested in the after life, in what happens after death. I find the problems of this life sufficiently absorbing to fill my mind. The traditional Chinese outlook, fundamentally ethical and yet irreligious or tinged with religious scepticism, has an appeal for me, though in its application to life I may not agree. It is the Tao, the path to be followed and the way of life that interests me: how to understand life, not to reject it but to accept it, to conform to it and to improve it. But the usual religious outlook does not concern itself with this world. It seems to me to be the enemy of clear thought, for it is based not only on the acceptance without demur of certain fixed and unalterable theories and dogmas, but also on sentiment and emotion and passion. It is far removed from what I consider spirituality and things of the spirit, and it deliberately or unconsciously shuts its eyes to reality lest reality may not fit in with preconceived notions. It is narrow and intolerant of other opinions and ideas; it is self-centred and egotistic, and it often allows itself to be exploited by self-seekers and opportunists.

This does not mean that men of religion have not been and are not still often of the highest moral and spiritual type. But it does mean that the religious outlook does not help, and even hinders, the moral and spiritual progress of a people, if morality and spirituality are to be judged by this world's standards, and not by the hereafter. Usually religion becomes an asocial quest for God or the Absolute, and the religious man is concerned far more with his own salvation than with the good of society. The mystic tries to rid himself of self, and in the process usually becomes obsessed with it. Moral standards have no relation to social needs, but are based on a highly metaphysical doctrine of sin. And organised religion invariably becomes a vested interest and thus inevitably a reactionary force opposing change and progress.

(J. Nehru, Autobiography)

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The success of the 'Islamic Revolution' in Iran and its effects on many Muslims in the neighbouring countries have focussed the world's attention on this religious phenomenon, as though it were an exceptional revival, peculiar to Islam, of medieval ideas in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The facts, of course, are quite different. Religious revival has been registered during the last few years in various parts of the world. Outstanding examples of this are the mass welcome of the Pope in the USA (the 'first world'), Poland (the 'second world')

and Mexico (the 'third world'); the growth of various religious and mystical sects, mostly of Asian origin, in the western world, where they have attracted many young people; the strengthened hold of Catholicism in Latin America, following the spread of the 'revolutionary priests' movement; and the 'repentance' of Israeli Jews who 'go back' to orthodox Judaism.

Each one of the multifarious instances of this religious revival has its own social causes, specific to its own place and time. Nevertheless, seeing that capitalism has embraced the world of the twentieth century and has formed it into one entity, this religious revival – with its various specific causes – has one common social background.

This assertion might seem far-fetched, were it not for the fact that the same 'psychological' or 'psycho-social' terms are used everywhere to explain the religious revival. 'Frustration', 'alienation', 'helplessness', 'a dead-end feeling' – do these words describe the emotions of an Iranian peasant towards the penetration of modern capitalism and its cultural values into his country, or the feelings of an American youth in the face of the economic (but also ideological) crisis which has hit modern industrial society, or the sentiments of a Polish worker confronted with a rigid bureaucratic regime and the ever-felt presence of the Soviet Union behind it? These words in fact provide some explanation, however superficial, for the feelings of people under all three regimes, in all three parts of today's world.

At the root of the religious revival is the ideological crisis of our time. For about a hundred years, the feelings of frustration and alienation had an outlet; there was hope for change, there was faith that the world – despite many retreats – was moving forwards, to a better future. There was less reason for feelings of dead-end and helplessness. And in the absence of these there was no impetus for searches for a religious alternative. The way out, the hope, the alternative were seen as bound up with the forward motion of the wheels of history; 'one more thrust forwards' was needed in order to allow the achievements of science and technology to be used for the benefit of the whole of society, in order to overthrow capitalism and establish the longed-for socialist society. It was those whose class interests were threatened by that advance who tried to find refuge in religion, or used it as 'opium for the masses' in order to blunt the latter's desire for change. Even where socialism seemed to be far off, as in the third world, hopes were still pinned on advance, industrialisation, modernisation.

But despite various successes the experience of the last hundred years has generally been a bitter one. The thrust forwards has given birth not to socialism but to a series of oppressive bureaucratic regimes, which are far from providing a credible alternative to capitalism not only in the industrialised countries but now also in the countries of the third world. The same thrust forwards also gave rise, albeit indirectly, to fascist regimes, which were put up by capitalism as one more line of defence against the forces of social revolution. At the same time it has

become clear that under capitalism the countries of the third world cannot make great and significant advance.

As the road of 'progress' appeared to be a blind alley, alternatives began to be sought in the past. Hence the search for 'roots'; hence the opposition to modern technology (e.g. the irrational horror of computers or robots); hence also the fear of catastrophe (atomic war, pollution of the environment, population explosion, star wars, test-tube babies). These fears have penetrated also into circles of the revolutionary left, inducing an atmosphere of disenchantment with progress and encouraging the growth of various reactionary and mystical ideas. (By the way, a similar phenomenon also occurred in Bolshevik circles after the failure of the 1905-6 Russian Revolution, when some members of the left faction of the party started to 'search for God'.)

In these circumstances it is not surprising that the last few years have been a time of religious revival.

Religious revival in Israel

Israel, like South Africa, is an unusual state inasmuch as its social structure includes features of developed industrial capitalism alongside colonisatory features of a settler state. This peculiar structure has led the Jewish religious revival in Israel to take a specific path.

The phenomenon of 'return to religion' in Israel (known in Hebrew as *hazarah bitshuvah* – 'repentance') is in fact not one but two quite distinct phenomena, although religious circles are trying, rather successfully, to blur the differences between the two.

The first kind of 'return to religion' is a reaction to the existential problems generic to all developed capitalist societies, combined with the dead-end feeling engendered by the loss of faith in a meaningful social change. To this is also added, of course, a specific ingredient: the existential problem of the Jews as a minority in the Arab east. But while it is difficult to disentangle the generic factors from the specific ones, I believe that the former predominate, as far as this first kind of 'return to religion' is concerned.

It is perhaps symbolic that the first famous 'repentant' of this kind in the recent wave of conversions came from the circles of Matzpen and landed, of all places, in the camp of Neturei Karta, the most conservative and hence the least modern sect of Judaism. (It is important to point out that, contrary to other Jewish religious sects and groups, Neturei Karta have remained uncompromisingly hostile to zionism.) The dozens who have followed him are no different in motivation from those young Israeli Jews (or, for that matter, young people in the West generally) who have been driven by alienation and dead-end feelings to seek a guru and join various religious or mystic sects. Such conversions constitute a rejection of modern life and society and of their values, and imply – at least in principle – withdrawal from social and political activity.

The second current of 'repentants' in Israel is driven by quite different motives and is composed of people seeking other things altogether. This current consists mainly of ostensibly secular-minded Jews who, due to the ideological malaise of zionism and the shedding of its last democratic veils in recent years, have found themselves unable to justify their presence in Palestine. The only valid justification – based on the democratic right of every person to live where he or she likes – is unacceptable to them because it also implies the right of the Palestinian refugees to be repatriated. The only way open to such people, so long as they remain zionists, is to seek legitimation in the 'ancient sources', that is in the Jewish religious interpretation of history.

This current includes people who begin to practice some – but definitely not all – of the precepts of Judaism, as well as many ostensibly secular-minded people who for reasons of convenience continue to ignore all religious precepts, but are willing to allow the clericalists to run wild as they please, because they are the bearers of the 'legitimation' and 'justification' for the Jewish presence in Palestine.

Since the first-mentioned current is similar in nature to well-known phenomena in the western world, and since it is mainly made up of individuals genuinely searching for a solution to their existential problems, I shall not discuss it any further. The second current, on the contrary, is specific to Israel and is overtly political; I shall therefore deal with it in some detail.

The alliance between 'secular' and 'religious' zionists

From its very beginning, zionism was marked by an alliance between 'secular' and 'religious' elements. Claiming to be a 'national movement', zionism always regarded the preservation of Jewish 'national unity' as a supreme value; and it was always the religious members of the movement who drew the 'red line', beyond which they would prefer to cause a split. Thus the tradition whereby the secular zionists always make concessions to the religious zionists when the latter threaten to cause a split is as old as the movement itself. The religious zionists have always kept the initiative in the movement on matters involving religion.

In addition to the ideological importance of religion as the ultimate source of legitimation for zionism, the religious zionists also rendered the whole movement an invaluable service of a more directly political kind. Up to the second world war, zionism was a minority movement among world Jewry, opposed not only by Jewish democrats, socialists and communists, but also by large sections of Orthodox Judaism. The latter condemned zionism as a heresy against the doctrines of Judaism and particularly against the belief in divine (rather than political) messianic salvation. In the zionist struggle against this type of religious opposition, religious zionists played a key role, which goes a long way

towards explaining the readiness with which 'secular' zionists capitulated to their dictates.

The history of the zionist project in the period immediately following the first world war bears out the importance for zionism of the collaboration of religious Jews. At that time, Orthodox anti-zionists were in the majority among the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. This Orthodox anti-zionist camp had a spokesman of great stature – Jacob de Haan, a well-known Dutch poet who became a religious zionist and immigrated to Palestine, where he underwent another conversion and joined the religious anti-zionist camp. The zionist leaders' fears of this camp were particularly great because it had a real chance of winning a majority in the elected representative body of the Jewish community in Palestine. The zionists rightly feared that such an outcome would irreparably damage their chances of maintaining the massive support of the British authorities in Britain and Palestine. The religious argumentation of anti-zionist Judaism was so effective that the zionists decided to gag it by force. In 1924, a group of assassins (which included Rachel Yana'it, wife of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi who was later to become the second President of Israel) murdered Jacob de Haan. These facts were kept secret for decades, and have only been published recently, when most of the protagonists of the affair were no longer alive.

If the zionists were ready to go so far as to liquidate a spokesman of their religious opponents, they were clearly also ready to go very far in making concessions to their religious allies.

But the main role of religious zionism was the ideological one referred to above. Religious tradition provided the only legitimation for the zionist colonisation of Palestine. Zionism could not afford to alienate its religious adherents, because in their absence it would lose the ideological justification for the zionist project in Palestine.

Religion was thus used as a tool by the 'secular' leaders of zionism. Following the second world war, during which the Nazis (aided by the acquiescence, and in some cases the actual collaboration, of the zionist leaders) exterminated millions of Jews, most of whom were anti-zionist, the majority of Jewish religious leaders harnessed themselves to the zionist cart. This only served to reinforce zionism's religious connection, especially in view of the fact that the organised power of Jewish communities in the United States and elsewhere is for the most part concentrated in the hands of rabbis and religious leaders. Israeli zionist activists and emissaries, including those who regard themselves as atheists, often proudly describe how, on their visit to a Jewish community in Latin America or Eastern Europe, they go to a synagogue to pray. This is invariably described as a 'deeply moving experience'.

At first religion was merely used, in some cases very cynically, by leaders who were non-believers. This is well illustrated by the mission of the 'socialist' zionist activist Yavni'eli, who was sent to Yemen in 1910 in order to recruit Yemenite Jews as a cheap labour force, fit to compete with the cheap labour of the Palestinian Arabs and thus serve

zionism in its struggle for 'Jewish labour'. In order to persuade Yemen's Jews to leave their homeland and go to Palestine, Yavni'eli presented himself to them as a herald of the Messiah and declared that the day of salvation had arrived. (For further details see R. Shapiro, 'Zionism and its Oriental subjects', *Khamsin* 5, p11f.)

But in time the attitude of many zionists to religion became gradually less cynical: they were undergoing a process of self-conversion. A tool which is used for many years begins to arouse genuine feelings of attachment in its user and becomes a sort of fetish. This is what happened to the 'secular' zionist leaders; they developed a liking for religion which had served them as a useful tool for so long. They came to feel that they could not live without it, and even those – still a majority – who are not inclined to practise it personally are nevertheless well disposed towards those who not only preach it but also wish to impose it on others. Hence the great willingness to allocate large public funds to religious bodies and institutions in today's Israel, where pressing social needs are cast aside because of 'lack of funds'.

The shifting status quo

With the creation of Israel as a 'Jewish State', which grants special privileges to 'Jews' according to the Law of Return, there was an immediate need to define who would be entitled to these privileges – in other words, who is a Jew. As the leaders of religious zionism threatened that if their demands were not met 'the nation would be split', the religious definition of 'Jew' was adopted. In order to prevent a split, it was decided not to enact a constitution (in which the status of religion in Israel would have had to be defined explicitly) but to subject the citizens of Israel to the jurisdiction of religious institutions – those religious institutions, that is, which are recognised by the state – in all matters of personal law. Thus civil marriage and divorce are not allowed in Israel. Under the same threat of a 'split', the 'secular' zionists also capitulated to the religious dictate in the matter of burial; Israel allows religious burial only, and the 'unity of the nation' is preserved beyond the grave.

Political realities led 'secular' zionism to an alliance with only one current within the Jewish religion – Orthodox Judaism. This was not because all Orthodox Jews (as opposed to members of the Conservative and Reformed synagogues) were ardent zionists. On the contrary, some of the most determined opponents of zionism, including Neturei Karta, belong to the Orthodox camp. But other currents of Judaism were more inclined to seek the integration of Jews in their respective countries as one tolerant and tolerated religious community among many, in tolerant pluralistic societies. For this reason, Orthodox Judaism was the only Jewish religious current to have any real presence in Palestine. (For the sake of clarity it must be pointed out that this current includes both the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi Rabbinate, the anti-zionist

Neturei Karta, the Agudat Israel party which had opposed zionism at first but later accepted it, the National Religious Party, NRP, which is supported by the majority of religious zionists, as well as the Gush Emunim militants.)

Thus it was the presence in Palestine of Orthodox Judaism, and the absence of other currents, that determined to which religious camp the zionist movement was to capitulate, as well as the terms of this capitulation. For, despite all the differences and mutual hatred between the various Orthodox groups, they are all united in their adamant opposition to the other two main currents of Judaism. The Reformists and Conservatives are virtually barred from gaining a foothold in Israel; in fact, in some ways they suffer worse discrimination than some non-Jewish religious denominations. They receive no government grants, their rabbis are not empowered to officiate in marriages or to grant divorce, and conversions performed by them are generally not recognised. For example, a person converted to Judaism by the Reformist rabbi Alexander Shindler, leader of the Jewish establishment in the USA, may be refused recognition as a 'Jew' (and hence refused Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return) by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior, which is traditionally a domain of the NRP. The Ministry of Religions, as well as the Religious Councils financed jointly by the government and local authorities, who pay the salaries of a huge host of Orthodox rabbis (and indeed of many religious officials of recognised non-Jewish denominations), do not employ Reformist or Conservative rabbis.

This systematic discrimination, which gives the lie to the zionist claim that Israel allows freedom of worship and religious equality to all, is practised and accepted by both main zionist party blocs, the Likkud and the Labour Alignment. Thus, for example, in March 1980 the chairman of the Labour Party, Shim'on Peres, helped the Likkud government to pass a new Chief Rabbinate Law, which confirms the exclusion of Reformed and Conservative Judaism from the list of religious denominations recognised in Israel. And this is the same Shim'on Peres who had promised the leaders of these two communities in the USA that when the Labour Party returns to office it would grant equality to all Jewish religious currents . . .

The Jewish population in Israel is subjected – by virtue of the state's laws – to the grip of the Orthodox clericalists, who impose their code in many spheres of life. Public transport does not operate on Saturdays, cinemas and theatres are closed on Friday nights, during the Passover week bread is not sold, on Yom Kippur the whole country is virtually closed down. Religious studies increasingly encroach on the syllabus of state schools, and religion dominates personal and family law: the laws concerning marriage, divorce and burial.

Their experience in turning the Jewish religion into a tool of zionism led the zionist leaders to try making use of other religions as well. Without

being consulted, the non-Jewish citizens of Israel were submitted to 'their own religious establishments. Thus Israel is one of the few remaining countries in which Catholics cannot obtain a divorce (since civil divorce does not exist), and where a man and a woman who may both be atheists but who were born to parents of different religions cannot marry each other.

The State of Israel does not recognise its Palestinian Arab citizens as a national minority, but merely as members of various religious denominations. (Despite this, most Israeli Jews, who resent the fact that the PLO regards *them* merely as a religious community, have never considered demanding from their own government to recognise the Palestinians in Israel as a national minority . . .) The state has bestowed its recognition of Muslim religious officials (which entails payment of a monthly salary as state employees) in a selective manner. In this way virtually the whole Muslim religious establishment has been turned into an instrument used by the authorities for controlling and containing the Palestinian population.

These officially established religious leaders have been a prime target of attacks by all kinds of religious 'reformers' and fundamentalists, who denounce them for 'falsifying Islam' and 'collaborating with the Jews'. Attacks of this kind have recently acquired momentum because, following the victory of the Iranian 'Islamic revolution', circles close to the Muslim Brethren have gained influence among the Palestinians inside Israel. The struggle of these circles is directed primarily against their rivals within the Palestinian community – the communists and nationalists on the one hand and the officially established religious leaders on the other. Thanks to their struggle against the former, these fundamentalist Islamic circles do not, for the moment, bear the full brunt of the Zionist repressive machine.

The State of Israel 'transformed' its Palestinian citizens from a national minority into a collection of confessional groups; at the same time, the Druse confessional group was 'transformed' into a so-called nationality. In the early 1950s the government made a pact with certain Druse clerics, recognised them as leaders of their community and granted the community itself recognition as a 'nationality'. As part of this deal, young Druse men, unlike other young Arab men, are conscripted into the army. (As a concession to Druse religious sensitivities, young Druse women are exempted.) Is it therefore surprising that among the heads of the Druse Initiative Committee – which struggles against the old Druse leadership, against conscription and for the recognition of the Druse as an inseparable part of the Palestinian Arab people – there is also a religious leader, Shaikh Farhud Farhud?

Since May 1977, when the Likkud came to power and Zebulun Hammer, member of the NRP and supporter of Gush Emunim, became Minister of Education, the penetration of religion into the education system has accelerated. School textbooks have been re-edited:

new chapters on Jewish religious subjects were added, and at the instruction of the new minister every picture or illustration showing men or boys was removed if among the figures there was none wearing a skull-cap (that is, a religious Jew); such pictures and illustrations were replaced by new ones, showing boys or men in skull-caps and girls or women in 'modest' dress (long sleeves, low hem-lines). In addition to this hidden brainwashing, there is also open, but no less subtle, brainwashing. School-children are taken on organised tours of synagogues 'in order to acquaint them with the Jewish heritage'. Religious studies (Bible and Talmud) take up a bigger part of the syllabus. In the history syllabus, the share of Jewish history has been increased at the expense of the history of other peoples. There is a definite policy to appoint religious teachers to teach these and other subjects.

All this has been taking place in the so-called *secular* state schools. In Israel, unlike certain western countries, religious studies are provided by the state. In addition to the network of religious state schools, there is an 'autonomous' school system, also financed by the state but run by the Agudat Israel party, for which the ordinary religious state schools are not strict enough. But the clericalists are not satisfied with these two systems of religious schools and – with the approval of the 'secular' politicians of both the Labour Alignment and the Likud – have made considerable inroads into the so-called secular state schools.

This religious coercion in the educational system meets with hardly any resistance on the part of the non-religious public. Parents put up with the increasing penetration of religious preaching into the schools, just as most Israelis put up with religious coercion in other spheres of life. Many parents even react by saying, 'What is so bad about this? It is good for the kids to be aware of their roots'.

This attitude of acquiescence, or at best indifference, towards religious coercion derives from the same cause as the second current of Israeli 'repentants' mentioned in the beginning of this article.

A political religious revival

The international isolation of Israel following the 1967 war, the diplomatic successes of the Palestinian national movement (which have undermined pro-zionist ideology around the world) and the economic, social and ideological crisis of Israeli society have led many Israelis to feel dissatisfied with the ideological justification of zionism which they had hitherto taken for granted. Even the kibbutzim – strongholds of allegedly secular and socialist zionism, a version of zionism which used to be justified as 'egalitarian' – have lost confidence in those old 'values'.

In any case, it is a fact that the zionist aspiration to 'return to the land of the forefathers' has always had to be legitimised by an appeal to 'the sources' – that is, to the Jewish religion; it is a fact that using the term 'historical rights' as a secular substitute for 'divine promise' has solved

nothing, for the channel through which the modern Jew is supposed to have acquired these 'historical rights' is the continuity of Jewish existence over the centuries, which was a religious existence; it is a fact that zionism from its very beginning was not (as some secular zionists try to argue) a progressive movement of 'rebellion against religion' but, on the contrary, a reaction *against* secular trends towards the integration of Jews in the society in which they were living – individual integration by assimilation, or political integration through participation in democratic or socialist movements. All these facts constantly undermine the repeated attempts of secular zionists to sever the organic connection of zionism with religion. For zionism and the Jewish religion are tied to each other ideologically as well as in practice. If zionism were to lose its last ideological line of defence, which is provided by religion, then its true nature would be exposed even to its own adherents – its nature as a colonisatory, xenophobic and racist movement.

In order to counter Arab arguments, the zionists can no longer be satisfied with their old excuses. In the present world-wide climate of religious revival, the zionists feel secure in putting forward religious arguments. Moreover, without religious gloss the basic concepts of zionist ideology and practice – 'the Chosen People', 'the Divine Promise', 'hatred of the Gentiles', Jewish colonisation and expropriation of non-Jews – are clearly revealed as extreme racism. In putting a religious gloss on these concepts, in presenting them as an integral part of Judaism, the zionists are in effect attempting to purify an abomination by an appeal to the presumed ethical values of religion. In this connection the zionists can use their favourite weapon of emotional blackmail: anyone who rejects the fundamental principles of zionism and attacks its basic concepts, which are justified by means of religion, is represented as attacking the principles of Judaism, and anyone attacking Judaism is branded as an antisemite. Once this trick is seen to work, it is repeated again and again, until it no longer fools anyone, except those who use it.

What is strange is that religious arguments are used not only by the annexationists. Once the latter had put forwards their religious justification, their opponents too – 'moderate' zionists, including such people as the anti-clericalist Member of Knesset, Shulamit Alloni – were not far behind with quotations from the Old Testament and from the writings of various rabbis, in order to prove that there is religious sanction for withdrawal from the occupied territories (or for abortions, or for the marriage of bastards, and so on and so forth). In this way the debate comes full circle: everyone uses religious arguments, the controversy gradually turns into a theological disputation; and religion celebrates.

Is it therefore surprising that it is Gush Emunim which has become the spearhead of annexationism, rather than the Movement for Greater Eretz Israel, which had been established much earlier and which

attempted to justify the annexation with 'secular' arguments? Is it surprising that virtually all the 'secular' annexationists have joined the bandwagon of Gush Emunim and have willingly capitulated to all its religious demands? Is it surprising, too, that the opponents of Gush Emunim within the zionist camp have a feeling of inferiority in their ideological debate with it, in view of the combination of 'pioneering energy' and 'total faith' with which the members of the Gush are possessed?

No, there is nothing surprising in all this, just as it should surprise no one that many kibbutzim have in recent years built synagogues for the use of their members, that they have set up well-attended circles for the study of the Old Testament, Talmud and cabbala, and that this lively religious activity encompasses not only the 'founding fathers' but also their children and descendants. These people are not themselves religious fanatics. In the zionist camp religious fanatics are a numerically insignificant minority, but their activities are supported by a much larger minority of believers, and legitimised by the vast majority of the Jewish public in Israel. The motives for this support and legitimation are for the most part not merely religious but clearly political. And, as we have pointed out earlier, those who have made use of religion as a tool over a long period grow attached to it and fetishise it with what eventually becomes a kind of religious faith.

The secular struggle

From the foregoing it should be clear why, despite the growing clericalisation of many spheres of life in Israel, the secular or anti-clerical struggle has scored no significant success. The small steps which the 'secular' zionist parties were pressurised into taking against the clericalists' opposition, such as the legalisation of abortion for social reasons, were short lived. The League against Religious Coercion, which in its heyday in the 1960s managed to mobilise several thousands to street demonstrations, flickered out and disintegrated following the capitulation of the political parties that had supported it – particularly MAPAM – to their interest in getting a share of political power through an accommodation with the clericalists. But the League was not a secularist movement. It only campaigned against religious coercion, and in doing so was supported by some religious people who were disgusted by the way in which both religious and 'secular' leaders were making use of religion. Even so, the League did not escape being accused by the clericalists of trying to 'divide the people'. (In this connection it is worth pointing out that the clericalists, who so often accuse others of 'divisiveness' are in fact themselves divisive in the worst sense: it is they who press for discrimination between the 'priestly tribe' – which includes every Cohen, Katz, Kaplan etc. – and other Jews, between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, men and women, 'bastards' –

Jews born of 'impure' or incestuous union, who are barred from marrying – and 'proper' Jews.)

The separation of religion from zionism – which is in effect the true meaning of the aim of would-be secular zionists – would seriously undermine the zionist ideological edifice, and for this reason any struggle for this aim, insofar as it remains tied to zionist ideology by an umbilical chord, is doomed to failure. For this reason too it is difficult to find 'secular' zionists who are prepared to wage a determined and consistent struggle for this aim.

One of the biggest mistakes made by most Israeli anti-clericalist campaigners was to assume that the majority of Israeli Jews are secularists, who perceive the clericalists' *diktat* as an oppressive imposition and are ready to rebel against it. Thinking that they represent a 'silent secular majority', those anti-clericalist campaigners made far-reaching statements and demands which had no basis in reality. Their tactics were founded on the illusion that large masses could be easily mobilised for the struggle, and when it became clear that the masses do not respond to the clarion call of their self-appointed 'leadership', the latter soon sank into despair.

The Israeli Secularist Movement, founded in early 1977, still suffers from some of the weaknesses which had led to the defeat of previous anti-clericalist struggles. But in defining itself as *secularist*, and thus emphasising a positive value in contraposition to religion, the Movement has acquired a certain strength to persevere despite its small numbers (after three years in existence, it only had about 300 members), as well as the patience required for making a thorough assessment of the situation. In the 13th issue (July, 1979) of the movement's paper *Mabba' Hofshi* (= Free Expression), there is the text of a lecture, under the title 'Theological Politics', delivered by Gershon Weiler during a night of discussion held by the Movement in Kibbutz Ga'aton. This is how he assesses the position of secularism in Israel:-

'... All these matters we are talking about, it must be clear to us, do not interest about sixty per cent of the people of this country. About forty per cent understand what we are saying, and of these about thirty per cent are firmly against us. We are left with ten per cent who both understand and agree with us, and of these ten, nine do not go with us because they have other considerations, economic interests, interests of peace and war. We remain one per cent. Our struggle, the struggle of the one per cent – let us be clear about what is happening in this country – is over the remaining nine per cent ...'

And later one he says: '... As far as educating the people is concerned, what must be destroyed ... is the consciousness of elitism, of the Chosen People. And I say this deliberately in kubbutzim, in this kibbutz, because I was surprised to discover that one of the processes which seems to be taking place in the kibbutzim is that people are falling for this elitism of the Chosen People in various forms, and I remonstrate against this.

'The normalisation of the Jewish people has two meanings. One meaning is accepted by everybody. Yes, they say, the Jewish people has become normalised; there is now a Jewish postal service, a Jewish army, Jewish roads, and so on. This administrative technical part is acceptable to everyone. But there is also another aspect, the secularisation of life; and this is rejected as I said by ninety per cent, including those who do not understand and those who are against it. They oppose secularisation and normalisation in the sense of giving life a secular meaning.'

Although Gershon Weiler is a professor of philosophy, he has managed to grasp the true relation of forces in the struggle between clericalists and secularists. One can hardly expect more than that from him, because, being a 'teacher of ideas', he likes to be listened to rather than listen. This is why he is capable of blurting out this rubbish about 'Jewish postal services' and 'Jewish roads', things which do not exist. Gershon Weiler does not call himself a zionist, and is not particularly interested in world Jewry. But neither does he grasp the complexity of the connection between zionism and religion. He is therefore obsessed by one issue, on which he bombards the press with letters and on which he speaks whenever he gets the chance: the exemption from military service of Jewish women who declare themselves to be religious.

In his battle for 'freedom' and 'equality', Weiler does not struggle for a uniform criterion for exemption on conscientious grounds which would be applicable to all—men and women, religious and non-religious, Arabs and Jews—but would like religious Jewish women to be *compelled* to do military service. He is not alone in this, and on several occasions the leadership of the Secularist Movement has allowed itself to be carried away into making statements which smack of anti-religious coercion. And on these occasions many of the Movement's zionist members were surprised to discover that it is precisely the anti-zionist socialists of Matzpen who insist within the movement on a consistent support for the principle of religious freedom.

What are members of Matzpen doing in the Secularist Movement? The answer is that the Movement's aims are formulated in sufficiently broad and general terms, so as to allow for a very wide spectrum of views.

Nevertheless, no political party has dared openly to support these aims. The 'secular' zionist parties are afraid of antagonising some of their own members who are religious and the religious parties, who are their potential coalition partners. And the Communist Party (RAKAH) has also preferred to keep well away from the Movement; because RAKAH too is flirting with certain religious circles—in this case Palestinian Arab, whether they are Muslim, Christian or Druse.

Although the Israeli Secularist Movement is by no means anti-zionist, and only a small minority of its members are anti-zionists, it cannot help but run foul of the nexus between zionism and the Jewish religion. The majority of the movement's members try in vain to undo

this Gordian knot with their bare hands, but from time to time they are forced to cast a side-glance in the direction of Alexander's sword.

In April 1980, the Movement held its annual general meeting, attended by some seventy members. The resolutions proposed at that meeting, as well as the amendments finally adopted, illustrate the clash of views within the movement, as well as the occasional side-glance at Alexander's sword. In some cases, the 'compromise' finally adopted is so far-reaching, that some of those who voted for it would most probably have not done so on second thoughts.

One of the resolutions proposed said, 'The Meeting states that the Movement has come into existence in order to wage political-ideological war for a secular state, and is therefore open to all who support this idea . . .'. After several amendments, the following final text won a decisive majority: 'The Meeting states that the Movement has come into existence in order to wage an ideological war for a secularist world-view and for a secular, free and democratic state, and is therefore open to all who support this idea'. One amendment was inserted in order to emphasise the positive secularist content of the Movement's struggle, as distinct from mere anti-clericalism. The second amendment was opposed at first because of its similarity to the PLO formula of 'secular democratic state', and for this reason the word 'free' was added in order to distinguish one formulation from the other.

If the PLO were serious about its slogan of a 'secular' state, it would have been able to embarrass most members of the Secularist Movement by calling for collaboration between the two organisations. But in reality the PLO is proposing not a secular state but a tri-religious (Muslim, Christian and Jewish) state, in which Islam would enjoy a measure of hegemony (witness the message of Arafat to Khomeini, in which the Palestinian revolution was described as part of the Islamic revolution). In the state proposed by the PLO the citizens would be classified as belonging to this or that *religious* community – which is not fundamentally different from the existing situation in Israel.

In contrast to the above radical resolution, which was adopted, another proposed resolution said that 'the Israeli Secularist Movement will call for recognition of humanist secularism as one of the four currents which exist within the Jewish people'. This was an expression of the strange attempt to invent something called 'secular Judaism'. Since the term 'Judaism' denotes a particular religion, namely the Jewish religion, 'secular Judaism' is a piece of Orwellian Newspeak. The source of this confusion is the fact that – because Zionist ideology postulates the unity of world Jewry as a supposedly 'national' entity – most Israeli Jews are utterly mystified regarding the distinction between Judaism as a religion and the Israeli-Jewish people as a real national entity. In the event, the members of the Secular Movement displayed sufficient political maturity by defeating this proposed resolution by an overwhelming majority. But those who are emotionally attached to

'Jewishness' nevertheless succeeded in smuggling it into the Secular Movement through the back door by pushing through a 'compromise' resolution: 'The Movement regards humanistic secularism as part of the spiritual heritage of the Jewish people . . . '.

There was even someone who proposed a resolution saying that 'the Movement condemns the phenomenon of Jewish emigration from Israel, and will combat it to the best of its ability'. Although the majority in the meeting were zionists, they protested strongly against this attempt to drag in 'matters that have nothing to do with the secularist cause'. This was the crudest attempt to harness the Secularist Movement to the interests of zionism; and it was defeated. It does not follow that the Movement's zionist members realise that secularism and zionism are incompatible; but many of them clearly sense that secularism cannot go all the way with zionism.

Another resolution, adopted unanimously, also points to the direction in which the Movement may be going: 'Faced with the waves of Jewish and Muslim fanatic religious revival and "repentance", the Secular Movement calls upon all Israel's inhabitants, regardless of their origin, to join the Movement and to struggle together and in equality against those on either side who incite human beings against each other in the name of a god who supposedly prefers his own believers who "carry out his commands", and for the enactment of a secular constitution in the spirit of the Movement's principles.'

I have no doubt that the political contradiction between zionism and secularism is the basic reason for the power of religion and its influence on the minds of most Israeli Jews; it is also one reason why the Secular Movement cannot become a mass movement. But despite its being confined for the time being to the margin of Israeli society, the quest of the Movement may make a considerable contribution to the ideological struggle against religion and may also help to shatter the widespread myth about the 'secular' nature of the State of Israel.

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Book Review

Nawal Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve; Women in the Arab World*, Zed Press, London, 1980.

The books of Nawal Saadawi, which began to appear in Beirut in 1974, were a revelation to many Arab intellectuals, women and men, who were unacquainted with post-1968 feminist literature. In such works as *Al-Mar'a wal-Jins*, *Al-Untha hiya al-Asl*, and *Al-Mar'a wal-Sira' al-Nafsi*, she courageously broached taboo problems she had come to know intimately through her experience as a physician and psychiatrist practising in the Egyptian countryside and cities. Saadawi portrayed the misery of Arab women frankly and without frills. Not a few Arab women, and men too, were moved by her accounts and analyses of virginity, frigidity and clitorrectomy, of machismo and the pressures it brings to bear on men.

In her Arabic writings, Saadawi tried as far as possible to avoid any confrontation with Islam and religion. When she did mention the subject, it was only to note that men had always interpreted religion in their own interest, or that religion should not be permitted to interfere with the sciences.

For her first work to appear in English, however, Saadawi has written an introduction for the English-speaking public. The effects of her attempt to address this new audience are not only reflected in the positions taken by the author; they actually offer us a new Nawal Saadawi: an Arab feminist who has fallen into the deep trap of nationalist justification and defensive reactions designed to prettify reality for the benefit of critical 'foreigners'.

Saadawi considers herself a socialist, and her class terminology reflects this. But the content of her analysis cedes too readily to nationalist reflexes, the effect of which is to concoct a contradictory mix of modernism and allegiance to Arab-Islamic ideals. Manifestly influenced by the Iranian revolution, Saadawi alleges that Islam has sometimes been used by imperialism and the CIA: 'Any ambiguity in Islamic teachings, any mistake by an Islamic leader, any misinterpretation of Islamic principles, any reactionary measure or policy by Islamic rulers can be grist for the mill of imperialist conspiracy, can be inspired by CIA provocation, can be blown up and emphasised by Western propaganda.' (*Introduction*, pvi)

On the other hand, she argues, Islam can also serve the interests of

the exploited masses: 'The last two decades have seen a vigorous revival in the political and social movements of Islamic inspiration... The movements aiming at cultural emancipation, independence and identity run parallel to and intertwine with the political and economic struggles waged by the people of underdeveloped countries.' (*ibid*, pv) In this Saadawi has failed to go an inch beyond the Arab-Muslim nationalism of the Nasserites, Ba'thists, and their ilk, whose anti-imperialism never transcended the narrow bounds of a struggle against the Muslim Brotherhood on the one hand and the utilisation of Islam as the emblem of national and cultural identity on the other. 'Don't wash dirty linen in public.' 'First let's get rid of imperialism.' Such, unfortunately, is the ultimate consequence of the position of Nawal Saadawi, who holds that all women's struggles must be subordinated to the battle for national liberation.

'The feminist movements in the West', she writes, 'which are devoting great efforts to the cause of women everywhere, are beginning to understand the specific aspects of the situation in underdeveloped countries which have to be taken into account by the women's liberation movements. For although there are certain characteristics common to these movements all over the world, fundamental differences are inevitable when we are dealing with different stages of economic social and political development'.

This may be true enough as far as it goes, but from it Saadawi concludes that in 'underdeveloped countries, liberation from foreign domination often still remains *the* crucial issue and influences the content and forms of struggle in other areas, including that of women's status and role in society. Cultural differences between the Western capitalist societies and Arab Islamic countries are also of importance. If all this is not taken into account and studied with care, enthusiasm and the spirit of solidarity on its own may lead feminist movements to taking a stand that is against the interests of the liberation movements in the East, and therefore also harmful to the struggle for women's emancipation. This perhaps explains the fact that progressive circles among Iranian women adopted a somewhat neutral attitude to some American feminist figures who rushed to Iran in defence of their sisters against the reactionary male chauvinist regime that was threatening to imprison women behind the black folds of the chador.' (*ibid*, p ix).

It is possible that Saadawi fails to realise that her position here differs not one whit from that of any nationalist for whom the question of imperialism has been so mythicised as to be emptied of all content. 'It is necessary', she writes, 'to understand that the most important struggle that faces women in the Arab-Islamic countries is not that of "free thought" versus "belief in religion", nor "feminist rights" (as understood sometimes in the West) in opposition to "male chauvinism", nor does it aim at some of the superficial aspects of modernisation characteristic of the developed world and the affluent society... In its essence, the struggle which is now fought seeks to

ensure that the Arab people . . . rid themselves once and for all of the control and domination exercised by foreign capitalist interest.'

National liberation is thus seen as end in itself of no definite social content – conceived, moreover, from an anti-internationalist point of view. Saadawi effectively rejects the solidarity of western feminists, which amounts to abandoning the women struggling against Islamic obscurantism in Iran to a lonely confrontation with vast forces of fanaticism. This attitude leads Saadawi quite far afield – indeed, it impels her to cross the thin line between militant nationalism and justification, or at the very least minimisation, of the atrocities committed in her own society, whenever these outrages are denounced by 'outsiders'. Although the first chapter of *The Hidden Face of Eve* describes the physical torture and psychological trauma suffered by the author herself when she was excised at the age of six, a torment whose consequences 'will afflict her sexual life', in her English introduction Saadawi declares:

'They [women in America and Europe] raise a hue and cry in defence of the victim, write long articles and deliver speeches at congresses. Of course, it is good that female circumcision be denounced . . . I am against female circumcision and other similar retrograde and cruel practices . . . But I disagree with those women in America and Europe who concentrate on issues such as female circumcision and depict them as proof of the unusual and barbaric oppression to which women are exposed only in African and Arab countries.'

This defensive position entraps Saadawi in paralysing contradictions. She herself remarks that 'to this very day, an Egyptian woman with work and a career, even if she be a minister, is still governed by the law of obedience consecrated in the Egyptian marriage code . . . The Man's absolute right to divorce in Arab-Islamic countries, to marriage with more than one wife, and to a legalised licentiousness all negate any real security and stability for children and destroy the very essences of true family life.' (*ibid*, pxiii) But it is exactly the Islamic law on family life, decreed and applied by the prophet Muhammad himself, that Saadawi cites while not daring to question belief in this prophet and the institutions he created.

Saadawi holds otherwise. She writes: 'For Islam in its essence, in its fundamental teachings, in its birth and development under the leadership of Muhammad, was a call to liberate the slave, a call to social equality and public ownership of wealth in its earliest form . . . But primitive socialism in Islam did not last long. It was soon buried under the growing prosperity of the new classes that arose and thrived after Muhammad's death.' (*ibid*, piii) From her defence of the prophet and his institutions, Saadawi moves to glorification of the Iranian Islamic revolution: 'The Iranian revolution of today, therefore, is a natural heritage of the historical struggle for freedom and social equality among Arab people, who have continued to fight under the banner of Islam and to draw their inspiration from the teachings of the Koran and

the prophet Muhammad.' (*ibid*, *piv*) And: 'The revolution in Iran, therefore, is in its essence political and "economic". It is a popular explosion which seeks to emancipate the people of Iran, men and women, and not to send women back to the prison of the veil, the kitchen and the bedroom.' (*ibid*, *piii*) The least one can say is that the facts unfortunately contradict Saadawi and her interpretation of Islam.

Saadawi criticises western feminists who isolate the problems of women from the political and economic situation. But Saadawi heads for another precipice, one that would cast into the abyss the very Arab women she has taught so much. It is the precipice of a nationalist defensiveness that ultimately minimises the injustices of Arab society and denies all authentic reality to the struggle the author herself strives to serve.

Magida Salman

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Letter

Comments on Tamari's letter (*Khamsin 6*) and Ja'far's reply (*Khamsin 7*)

As I understand Salim Tamari, by his support for a Palestinian state he does not imply automatic support for the various concrete policies of the PLO leadership. His point is that 'a Palestinian state will provide the necessary prerequisite for the transformation of the essentially *national* conflict...into one in which the conditions for class emancipation (on both the Arab and Jewish side) [this phrase is omitted in Ja'far's quotation – J.B.] can be obtained for the first time. This requires...that the Palestinians have the opportunity to live in a stable community in which their national culture and physical security can be protected; ie in a state of their own.' At this stage of my comment I want to summarise my position by saying that the only word in Tamari's analysis I do not agree with is the word 'will' at the beginning of the quotation, which should be substituted by the word 'could'.

Tamari goes on to say that the Palestinians outside the occupied territories cannot struggle 'on class lines'; he does not say however – as Ja'far implies – that their struggle has to be on the 'class programme...of the Palestinian bourgeoisie'. What he does say, and quite rightly I think, is that since a refugee population is the social basis of the movement, the resistance by necessity will have almost only national goals (a state, 'return'). I am not so sure if inside the occupied territories and in Israel 'all forms of class consciousness' are excluded; because – as Tamari himself points out – a 'proper' and 'differentiated class structure' does exist there.

The main difference between Tamari and Ja'far is on the eventual significance of a Palestinian state for further struggles for emancipation. In this respect I think the views of Tamari are much closer to revolutionary realism than those of Ja'far.

Tamari does not say anywhere – as Ja'far often 'quotes' – that a Palestinian state will 'solve' the national question, nor that such a state will provide conditions for the class emancipation of Palestinian workers only.

Although he does not elaborate, I am sure Tamari would agree that a Palestinian state could only be the beginning and not the end of a struggle for further objectives, of which some quite important ones will still be 'national': right of the refugees to choose between return and

compensation, full equality for the Palestinian national minority in Israel – which implies the de-zionisation of this state. I am sure that the Palestinians would be in a better position to press for these demands if they had a state of their own. I also think that afterwards the main form of struggle will be a political one, thus facilitating an impact on Jewish workers, who, one could expect, would be less burdened by the zionist-nationalist elements of their consciousness.

Of course most of these positive effects also depend on the kind of struggle that is waged now, on the political forces that participate in it and on their relative weight: these factors (among other, external ones) will determine the character of an eventual Palestinian state and the conditions for further struggles.

Because this picture does not correspond to the teachings of the 'permanent revolution' and smacks of the 'two-stage theory', it is rejected by Ja'far. If reality does not correspond to theory, the worse for reality. I would reject as dogmatic and sectarian the tendency to approach every problem with a pre-fabricated theory which corresponds to the 'lessons' of a certain experience (and even that may be questioned); but even the theory of permanent revolution does not say that the 'backward' bourgeoisie is incapable of taking any steps in the direction of national independence. And nobody will doubt that countries such as India, Syria or Egypt have achieved a certain degree of independence and sovereignty which the Palestinians are still lacking.

If the theory of permanent revolution is 'true', the Palestinian socialist Tamari must be 'wrong'. In order to fit him into his role as a 'two-stage theorist' he is even reported to justify the 'subservience and . . . dissolution of the organisations of the Palestinian Left' which – as Ja'far himself indicates – do not exist(!?) (p152). Then Ja'far goes on to explain – similarly to zionist spokesmen – that a Palestinian state would give rise to just another backward Arab regime and that such a state would be 'unviable' anyway. Why? Because the PLO is 'intrinsically' incapable of doing better. Therefore even continuing occupation is better than a Palestinian state! Because – here Ja'far provides some arguments that zionist apologetics, lacking imagination, have failed to produce – then, 'even the very limited democratic rights enjoyed[!] by the West Bank population today, under Israeli occupation, will be taken away . . .', the 'material standard of living' would 'decline' and therefore the 'willingness to struggle for a better future' would also 'decline'. (p153) (So what? The standard of living is not the main concern today anyway.) Why is Ja'far not ready to consider the specific experience of the Palestinian people, which is different from all other examples in the Arab world? Why doesn't he give them a chance to learn from their specific history which has put them in opposition to both zionism and the Arab regimes? Any visit to the West Bank (and among Palestinians in Israel) will convince the unprejudiced observer that

- the Palestinian masses' political consciousness is considerable;
- the experience with Israeli capitalism has also had some consciousness-raising aspects (questions of democratic, union and women's rights);
- there is no intention to return to the 'Jordanian' pre-1967 conditions;
- there is universal agreement that any solution is preferable to continuing occupation;
- there is – on the other hand – little intention to cut off contacts with Israeli society (and the Palestinians living in it) entirely;
- the wish to establish an independent Palestinian state is virtually unanimous;
- mass support for the PLO is almost universal.

What does Ja'far propose as an alternative to the struggle for a Palestinian State? 'The programmatic goal of revolutionary socialists should be the creation of a thoroughly new socialist order.' Fine. And how should the Palestinian masses struggle for socialism, when they are still lacking their elementary human and national right? No. The struggle for these rights is 'nationalism' and a 'completely dead-end road' . . .

It is true that Ja'far does not only offer his 'programmatic goal'. He also 'dares' to put forward an immediate demand: 'withdrawal from the occupied territories'. But this demand is full of contradictions in the context of Ja'far's reasoning. On the one hand the realisation of this demand would – under foreseeable conditions at least – inevitably lead to the creation of the (rejected) Palestinian state. On the other hand this demand would contradict Ja'far's wish for 'maintaining the unity of the Palestinian masses in the pre-1967 borders of Israel and those in the West Bank, and increasing – not decreasing – the access of Palestinians as a whole to the Israeli economy.'

I don't see any contradiction between the struggle for the withdrawal from the occupied territories and the struggle for a Palestinian state. I also don't see a contradiction between this struggle and the struggle to build 'bridges to the Jewish proletariat and . . . for the hearts and minds of the Jewish working class and the gradual breakup and erosion of the ideological hegemony exercised by the Zionist leadership' – a struggle which is absolutely necessary and should be supported by all means. The struggle for a Palestinian state – being mainly political – cannot and will not lead to a real separation between the two peoples, but it will be the starting point for a fundamental (and necessary) change of the *relations* between them.

Just as Salim Tamari should not worry about not abiding by the theory of permanent revolution, he should also not care about his alleged 'Borochovisism'. The same faulty reasoning is behind both accusations. The question is not whether a political project corresponds to this or that historical theory but whether it corresponds to the needs

Comments on Tamari's letter and Ja'far's reply

and interests of the oppressed classes and peoples of a given region, at a given time and under given conditions. And in this respect I prefer Salim Tamari to Mohammad Ja'far.

John Bunzl
Vienna, May 1980

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