

# **The Islamic Fundamentalism\***

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The phenomenon of fundamentalism within a group of people is founded on a religion or ideology and serves a political project in order to benefit a certain class. Therefore, we have to ask about the class definition of this project and have to identify it in its historical context.

The Political Islam is a project encompassing the entire society and it has been transferred to modern day from a time 1500 years ago. We have to ask, whether it is applicable to our days as well. In connection with its class identity, we have to look at its socioeconomic shape, its political system and its overall value system.

The model of the project of Political Islam crystallized into shape at a time, when agriculture was the main production type. Craftsmanship was of less importance. Private property, on the other hand, was of utmost importance. It had a status that was nearly sacred, being legitimized as god-given. Land owners were the leading class, from which derived trade, that became more and more important with time, until it dominated the economy. The economic importance of agriculture though declined, due to the many wars and armed conflicts, also due to the brutal exploitation of the peasants.

In the middle ages, the Arab Islamic Empire had seen huge development in agriculture, craftsmanship, science and philosophy. Those declined during the clashes of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and trade gained momentum. This decline in civilizational achievements led to a reform of the leading ideology/religion.

From now on, the leading ideology/religion was derived only from traditional reactionary scientific interpretations of texts instead of rational arguments.

## **Fundamentalism as a Movement**

The countries of the Ottoman Empire had fallen deeply asleep and remained in the Middle Ages at a time, when modern Europe harvested the fruits of the Renaissance and evolved considerably. The reason was the already mentioned reactionary reform of the underlying ideology that served trade at the cost of the production.

The invasion of Egypt by Napoleon marks the clash between these two types of society. After this period, we in the Middle East began our ideological debate to find out, why we had failed. Why were we, the „truly religious“ and underdeveloped as opposed to the well developed “infidels”?

In this debate we find two main streams:

- A relatively secular attitude that tried to adjust Islam to the demands of modern times. This was represented by Rifa'a Et Tahtawi, Ali Mubarak up to Ali Abdel Razeq.
- The other attitude attempted to restore the old and traditional ideology, restoration of the Islamic state by return to the roots. This was proposed in moderate form by Al Imam Mohamed Abdu, and in an extremist manner by Al Imam Rashid Reda, who the Muslim Brothers reverently see as nearly god-alike.

This debate led to the birth/founding of the organization of the Muslim Bothers. They took this debate from ideology to political level. Their main goal was to abhor of (refuse) modern thinking in all its shapes in order to defend “our values” and “our religious roots”. Therefore, the Muslim Brothers were against all modern political theories, Nationalism, Liberalism and Socialism.

With their enmity for all modern thinking they harmonized well with two other political forces in society:

- monarchy and
- the British colonial power that stood against the industrialization of Egypt.

The Muslim Brothers had always been against development and modern civilization. They only served the purpose of trade and therefore also served the hegemonic capitalism if the British colonial power.

Traditional Islam was very helpful in this way. This ideology had reduced economy purely to trade. As a “Hadith”, a saying of the Prophet Mohamed goes: “Nine thenth of profit comes through trade”. In this light one can understand the strong symbiosis or relationship between the British and the Muslim Brothers. This movement goes back to 1929 in Egypt, before it spread to the other Arab countries.

This specific role of Islam became even clearer after the big revolutions after 1952, during which the nationalists took over several regimes in the Arab countries. The new political stream was against feudalism and for Nationalization and industrialization, and it wanted to give modern education to the population. No matter how we see these regimes, all these different experiments and versions of these nationalistic regimes, this is only about the Muslim Brother's attitude towards these modernistic tendencies.

For the Muslim Brothers Nationalism and Socialism are „Bed'a“ (Heresy). This explains the coalition they made with the reactionary monarchies that served the purpose of colonialism and why they maintain this coalition till today. The Muslim Brothers were the ideological instrument of these regimes. They inhibited progress and development with ideological principles, based on formal issues and not content. Thus existing reactionary or warped form of society became justified.

A sort of financial pact was made between the Muslim Brothers and the Petrodollars, the capital derived from oil in the Gulf States. This is the basis of the world wide Islamic capital of our times.

Since the mid-seventies, the Muslim Brothers are a big financial force, especially in Egypt, where the state had withdrawn from all social duties and had started to plunder the foundations of the economy in favor of the „New Mafias“. These New Mafias came through Sadat's „Open Door Policy“, gaining their capital from their close relations with the state power.

The Muslim Brothers as a financial force formed that time. They represented the interest of the big capital, although they had attracted many different groups, from different classes different strata of the Egyptian society.

A conflict formed between two capitalist forces within society:

- the financial capital of the Muslim Brothers and
- the „Mafia“ (opportunists turned businessmen, that had taken the state into their hands).

## **WAHABISM**

A coalition between the British colonial power and the Wahabi movement in the Arab peninsula led to the founding of the Saudi kingdom. Wahabism became the official ideology, the firm basis of the kingdom.

With the rise of the nationalist and socialist movements of the region, i.e. Egypt and Syria, the Muslim Brothers were ousted from these countries. Their leadership found a warm welcome in the Saudi Kingdom. Later, after the nationalistic and socialistic discourse have failed, the spread of Wahabism became an important aim of Saudi politics.

Saudi Arabia acted in absolute harmony with the USA that had infiltrated the region and formed coalitions with the newly rising regimes. The long term objective was to succeed to be the ideological power within the whole region. The aim was to block Arab unity, socialist aims, economic integration, industrialization, Panarabism....etc. The rise - or uprising - of the Arab world was a direct threat to the leaders in the kingdom and to their allied coalition regimes, as they wanted as usual to monopolize the gains from the oil rent exclusively for themselves.

Mohamed Hasanein Heikal says that the Saudi kingdom had maintained best relations to Sadat, the Shah of Iran and the king of Morocco (in the time of the Open Door Policy and the founding of the neoliberal economy). Saudi Arabia had allocated billions for the financing of fundamentalist forces. It has financed the Jihad movement in Afghanistan that was trained by the CIA – in a pact for “EL IMAN DED AL ILH’AD” (i.e. faith against atheism). This led to the “Afghan Arabs”, „Al Quaida“ and the „Taliban“ as the appearing result of this cooperation.

To counteract the nationalistic regimes, the Muslim brothers of Egypt relied on the ideological base of the (originally Saudi) Wahabism. They referred to the Pakistani Abu El A’la Al Mawdudi, the master of Sayed Qotb (the godfather of the Brotherhood) who, in the 60ies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had coined the phrase „Governance to God“. Therefore, our contemporary society lives in „Jahiliya“ – meaning, the „ignorance“ of pre-Islamic society. „Al Jihad“ (holy war) against this society therefore becomes a „holy duty“.

This discourse did attract many who had become impoverished by Sadat’s „Infatih“ policy. Apart from these it also attracted groups of the society that had

always lived in sort of „medieval conditions“, in the country side and in the informal areas of the cities. Though the policies of the Muslim Brothers and the policies of the USA and Saudi Arabia seem contradictory at first sight, they follow the same purpose in general in favor of a minority that profits from the dependence on the center countries, the movement uses the enormous destructive energy of the marginalized in the Arab counties as an instrument against progress.

The Muslim Brotherhood represents a huge obstacle on the long way to democracy and social progress. For them science is reduced to formal statements made by the original (holy) text. They forbid by their interpretation of religion any other form of science, they refuse philosophy and all modern forms of science. The struggle in society therefore is not about class struggle or even political struggle, but a confrontation between „halal“ and „haram“ (accepted or forbidden by religion). As they act in god's will, they have the right to force this by all means including violence in his name.

To figure out the full scope of what lies behind the fundamentalist activities in our society, a broader scientific research would be necessary. Here we can only concentrate on the core statements. The principles „halal“ and „haram“ span all concerns of life, on the basis of textual interpretation. Therefore, all political conscience could only be either „halal“ or „haram“ and the only problem would be the correct religious interpretation of any incident.

This is a total breach with modern thinking. The current day is being analyzed from a perspective that was valid 1.500 years ago. ( *i.e. The awareness and standpoint of that time pass judgment on our time.*) This makes the understanding of contemporary politics absolutely impossible. It is an epistemological breach between the modern understanding of politics as it has been established by the modernity and the way it is understood in the fundamentalist movements.

Their attitude concerning Patriotism, Nationalism, Secularism and The Left are pretty clear, because of the many „Fatwas“, statements based on religious judgment. They have clarified the basic positions and attitudes toward these themes. For other problematic questions there are no „Fatwas“, for instance about the attitude towards the USA or Israel or towards “the other” in general. Here, the basis for decision making is the division into “people of the book” and “infidels”. Therefore, as a framework for any questions concerning the attitude towards Israel,

the only reference are texts, that go back to the relationship between Prophet Mohamed and the Jews on the Arab peninsula in former times.

This understanding of politics rekindles the past and shapes the actual practicalities of life. The veil thus becomes an absolute necessity, the understanding of traditional Islamic moral standard is god-given, here, we have the fight against „Fisq“ (debauchery) and „Fugur“ (moral decline). The individual and the society therefore function on the basis of a simple and primitive value system that dates back 1.500 years.

The Muslim Brothers movement has created a virtual world, in which the sheikh is the only reference for the pious/religious. He decides, what is „halal“ and what „haram“. The individual only accepts, whatever the „text“ prescribes.

To achieve this, is the Muslim Brothers' political real task, no matter what they usually claim in order to mask this fact. In this light, you may just forget all their beautiful slogans.

- In this ideology, the religious ties are much stronger than the national ties. (El Murshid El 'Am, the leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers once had stated, that an Indonesian Muslim would be much closer to his heart than an Egyptian Christian)
- Distinctions are only made between faith and atheism in society, not between classes. „Allah muwazze' al arzaq“, as the saying goes, (god distributes the goods), and „Rafa'a ba'dokum 'ala ba'd darajat“ (he has created you one above the other, in different levels).
- The solution to social problems is „al Zakaa“, alms, which are donations given to the poor as a religious duty.
- The power is based on „el Shura“, the congregation of counselors, together with its head, the Sheikh, the „Khalifa“ or the leader of the religious sect, who has the absolute power in all religious and contemporary questions, as „al islam din wa dawla“ – „Islam is religion and state “.

This explains the form of the organization, based on obedience and submission. Herewith, the totalitarianism is complete and the individual as defined by modernity has vanished.

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