Islamism and Identity Crisis

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Abstract
Historically, Islam has always served as a vehicle for the expression of socio-political and economic dissent, particularly in times of crisis. Muslims have been exposed to a variety of ideologies over the past century. The colonial period introduced certain Western values but did not truly provide Muslims with experience in genuine capitalist or liberal democratic governance. More important, these ideologies never represented the independent and conscious choice of the population, nor were they widely internalized. This paper draws on aspects from the role of political Islam in countering both the post-colonial and globalization discourses. Besides, it sheds light on how Islam has become a central point of reference for a wide range of political activities, arguments and opposition movements. Finally, this paper provides an in-depth scrutiny and the deconstruction of what political Islam is because power and politics in political Islam are so aberrant and drastically evolving that a research can barely delimit political Islam or Islamism. In the last few decades, the role of religion in international affairs has become more prominent, and has attracted the academy's and the public's attention. Religion never went away, and it was never privatized. Only the historically exceptional French model of privatization led us think religion is excluded from the public square. I believe the claims that God is back is merely to refer to the coming back of religion as a social problem.
Key words: Political Islam, Resurrection, Revival, Islamization, Reform, Renewal.

Nowadays, Islam continues to demonstrate its dynamism and diversity of expression. The dominant theme of contemporary Islam has been its resurgence. Since 1970s, the impact of Islam on Muslim life has been evident in much of the Muslim world. Besides, Islam has reasserted itself more forcefully in both the personal and public lives of Muslim societies in a "striking and sometimes dramatic manner" (Esposito, 2010. p. 58). This fact is often referred to as the Islamic resurgence, Islamic revivalism, Islamic fundamentalism, or Political Islam. However, the debate and struggle over issues of identity, faith, culture and practice occur today not merely in the Muslim world but also in the West.

The contemporary revival has brought a remarkable escalation in emphasis on religious identity and practice in individual and corporate life. Islamic revivalism is reflected in an increased emphasis on religious observances (mosque attendance, fasting, abstention from alcohol and gambling), a new vitality in Sufism, the proliferation of religious literature, the growth of new Islamic movements committed to socio-religious reform, and the reassertion of Islam in Muslim politics.

Islam is thought to be essential and integral to politics, law, education, social life and economics. These realms of life are not deemed as secular but religious (Islamic) because of

the creed that Islam is a way of life and/or the whole way of life, if we may borrow Raymond William's definition of culture, and therefore, religion and society are interrelated. For pious Muslims, there is no sharp dichotomy between the sacred and the profane.

Islamic symbols, slogans, ideology, and actors have become notorious fixtures in Muslim politics. Islam has been utilized by governments and by opposition movements alike (Burgat, 2003; Bouyahya, 2015). Subsequently, the following questions have sprung up to interrogate the role of Islam in the Muslim contemporary life. First, why and how has Islam reemerged so significantly in Muslim life? Second, why did religion again become such a visible driving force? The motives of the resurgence are multifaceted and need to be appreciated within the specific contexts of individual and nation/states and regions. Nevertheless, an array of phenomena might be singled out as frequent to the contemporary Muslim experience.

1- an identity crisis precipitated by a sense of failure, loss of identity, and lack of self-esteem.

2- a disillusionment with the West, the failure of many Muslim rulers and their Westerninspired governments to respond adequately to the political and socio-economic needs of their societies.

3- the new found sense of pride and power that resulted from military (Arab-Israeli war) and economic (oil embargo) success in 1973 and the Iranian revolution 1978-79.

4- a quest for a more authentic identity rooted in an Islamic past.

Adopting the discourse of religious revivalism, some religious leaders called for a return to Islam. This call was fueled by the doctrine that Islam had united the tribes under the prophet Mohamed (PBUH), inspired the early expansions and conquests, informed the glories of Islamic empires and civilizations, and served as a motivating force in revivalist reforms. Since Muslims still venerate the golden age of Islam, now popular, intellectual, and religious literature had common themes, such as 1/ a growing criticism of the West, 2/ a quest for identity and authenticity, manifested in a nostalgia for the past golden age of Islam, 3/ efforts to recover and incorporate an awareness of native (Islamic) cultural and historical identity, and 4/ emphasis on traditional moral values. The prevailing mood was translated in the language of authenticity, religious and cultural revival (tajdid), reform (Islah), and renaissance. It is of paramount importance to pinpoint that there were differences of belief and perspectives between those who believe that Islam is the cornerstone for community identity and life. The essence of contemporary revivalism is the ideologization of Islam. Islam is perceived as a total ideology that caters for the basic framework of meaning and direction for political, social and cultural life. This creed is reflected in the inclination to speak of Islam as a religion and state, as a system of belief and law that governs both the spiritual and temporal affairs (Esposito, 2010).

Although there are several differences of interpretation, the dominating or common ideological framework of Islamic revivalism encompasses the following beliefs.

1.   Islam is a whole and contemporary way of life. Religion is integral to politics, law and society.

2.   The failure of Muslim societies is due to their departure from the straight path of Islam and their following a Western secular path (Esposito, 2010), with its secular, materialistic ideologies and values.

3.   The renewal of society requires a return to Islam, an Islamic religio-political and social reformation or revolution, which draws its inspiration from the Quran and from the first great Islamic movement led by the prophet Mohammed (PBUH). Therefore, there is a return to the past in order to interpellate memory in the name of a fertilizing utopia through the imaginary[1].

4.   To restore God's rule and inaugurate a true Islamic social order, Western-inspired civil code must be substituted by Islamic law, which is the only acceptable blue print for Muslim society.

5.   The process of Islamization, or more accurately re-Islamization, requires organizations or associations of dedicated and trained Muslims.

However, radical activists go beyond these concepts and maneuver on the following precepts and assumptions, believing that theological doctrine and political realism necessitate violent revolutions.

1. A crusader mentality, fighting the Western neocolonialism.

2. Establishment of an Islamic system of government is not only an alternative but also an Islamic imperative, based on God's command and will.

3. Since the legitimacy of Muslim system of governments is based on the Sharia, governments that do not follow it are illegitimate and guilty of unbelief, and thus atheists whose unbelief demand holy war.

4. Opposition to illegitimate governments extends to the official "Ulama", the religious establishment, and state-supported mosques and preachers.

5. Jihad against unbelief and unbelievers is a religious duty.

Islamic movements have displayed on equally pluralism rather than monolithic Islam, ranging from moderates who work within existing political systems to violent revolutionaries who seek to defeat governments and/or regimes, from open membership to secret cells, from so-called democratic to the totalitarian. While pre-modern revivalist movements were mainly internally motivated, Islamic modernism was a response both to continued internal weaknesses and to the external political and religio-cultural threat of colonialism. Thus, modern Islamic movements' reaction to the westernizing of Islam and Muslim society led to the formation of modern Islamic societies or organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which combined religious ideology and activism.

Islamic modernism (19ᵗʰ century) sought to delineate an alternative to Western, secular adaptationism, but a religiously motivated rejectionism. Islamic modernists did not simply seek to purify their religion by a return to an Islam that solely reappropriate past solutions. Instead, they wished to chart its future directions through a reinterpretation of Islam in the light of modern realities. Thus, they were pioneers to plant the seeds for acceptance of change. For this reason, the term political Islam has been adopted by several scholars to depict this seemingly irruption of Islamic religion into the secular domains of politics. Thus, Islam has become a focal point of reference for a wide range of political activities, arguments and opposition movements (Hirschkind, 2011). Not only do religious movements and/or parties

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[1] Karl Max, in the Eighteenth Baumaire of Louis Bonaparte, wondered on the reasons that urged the French rebellions to express their experience through names, slogans and metaphors borrowed from the Antic Republic of Rome.

base their appeal to their Islamic credentials appear to exemplify this instrumental relation to religion, but also regimes and monarchies employ religion to conceal, establish and maintain their power (Belal, 2012; Darif, 1999).

In political Islam, power and politics are so aberrant and drastically evolving that we can barely delimit political Islam or Islamism. Subsequently, the main vindication that sets off this paper on political Islam is that different scholarly and policy offer specific insights into Islamism without ever fully encapsulating it. The ultimate target of this paper is to construct such an assemblage of insights as to uncover the key dynamics and mechanics of political Islam in deciphering identity politics. Political Islam as a construct refers to what individuals in a particular socio-historical context think about the political and the religious (Volpi, 2011). Accordingly, Islamism appertains to the political dynamics generated by the activities of those people who believe that Islam, as a body of faith, defines something crucial about how society should be organized, and who seek to implement this idea as a matter of priority. According to Fuller (2003), political Islam is growing, expanding, evolving and diversifying. From another perspective, Belal (2012) delineates political Islam as an apolitical ideology that targets harnessing power. Hence, Islam-oriented movements are believed to mesh both the religious and the political.

On the other hand, Fuller (2003) depicts Islamism or political Islam[2] as a political wave that makes Islam the counter piece of its own political culture and then proceeds to improvise on what this means in the local political context. In addition, he depicts an Islamist as "… one who believes that Islam as body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and seeks to implement this idea in some fashion" (p. xi). In this definition, Fuller aims at making political Islam broad enough to capture the full spectrum of Islamist expression that runs from radical to moderate, violent to peaceful, democratic to authoritarian and traditional to modernist. Islamist leaders and ideologues seek to revitalize Modern Muslim society (Burgat, 2003).

Thus, today Islamist thinkers and activists are actively developing selected elements of the Islamic tradition, combined with ideas, techniques, institutions and commodities of the present and recent past to cope with specifically modern predicaments, such as political, social, economic and cultural issues (Kramer, 1993; Zoubida, 2001).

In the literature, Islamism encompasses both Islamic politics and the process of reIslamization (Burgat, 2003; Fuller, 2003). On the other hand, Islamist politics refers to the activities of organizations and movements that agitate in the public sphere while deploying sins and symbols from Islamic traditions. It entails a political ideology articulating the idea of the necessity of establishing an Islamic government, understood as a government that implements the Shari'a (Islamic law). On the other hand, Islamism signifies a drive to Islamize the social sphere, in other words, it involves a process whereby various domains of social life

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[2] The term "Political Islam" or "Islamism" are use synonymously and interchangeably in the literature (Fuller, 2003; Volpi, 2011)

are invested with signs and symbols associated with Islamic cultural tradition (Bouyahya, 2015).

Burgat (2003) indicates that there are three crucial articulations of Islamism that contributed to shape the contemporary practices and discourses of political Islam. First, it is a construction of a response to colonial powers. Second, it is a re-articulation of these choices to interact with the post colonial state. Third, there is an engagement with the multiple aspects of globalization, especially in the post-cold war context. This assumption shows the diversity of Islamist itineraries. This entry into Islamism is on multiple levels, tailored to individual histories and national contexts. These contexts are threefold. The first sequence is the emergence of Islamist mobilization ad a foil to direct colonial presence. Here it is necessary recall the Salafists and the reformist preambles of the 19th century, such as Jamal Eddine al-Afghani, Mohamed Abdou and Allal al-Fassi in the 20th century in Morocco. The second immediately subsequent to independence concerns the assertion of cultural options and increasingly authoritarian political formulas of the first generation of national elites. The third starts in the 1990s right after the collapse of the USSR with the birth of a so-called new world order orchestrated solely around American interests.

In this paper, there are important reasons for examining political Islam. To the casual observer, it may seem to be an exotic and remote world, locked in a time warp linked to the seventh century values and struggles. The reality is rather different. Islamist politics could not be more central to modern political and social development. Islamists, with all their trends, are struggling with the genuine dilemmas of modernization, rampant change in daily life and urbanization at all levels. In other words, Islamists are also struggling with social dislocation and location and crisis, the destruction of traditional values and the need for representative and competent governance. Finally, they need to build just societies and cope with suitable political, economic and cultural challenges from the West.

Not only is Islamism always repositioning itself tactically, strategically and substantively, visà-vis other ideas and practices in the social, political and religious field, but it also continuously re-examining what it means to follow the fundamentals of Islam (Volpi, 2011). Therefore, political Islam is not a fixed and well-defined field of religious practice, but instead an open and ongoing debate about the meaning of Islamic religiosity and its implications for individuals and communities (Bouyahya, 2015).

Conclusion

The vehicle of political Islam might be one of the very best ways to understand the politics of the Muslim world in general- far more revealing than to allow Marxist, socialist, nationalist, or even democratic politics of Muslim societies. Islam plays a pertinent role in the politics of Muslim world. In fact, Islam pervades the daily life of Islamic society and political culture more profoundly than any other single ideological or conceptual force. Besides, Islamism acts as a vehicle for a great many issues not directly linked with the goal of establishing an Islamic state per-se, or even with the propagation of Islam. For a long period of time, many of the ideologies endorsed Arab nationalism as a strong vehicle of opposition. Others signed on to communism as a similar catalyst. Both of these secular ideologies failed because they could not address the many problems besetting the Arab world. In fact, many nationalists, disillusioned with the

impotence and failure of Arab nationalism, came to embrace the new ideological refuge of Islamism. In Islamism as an ideology, political activists are driven by the quest for social justice, reform, change, anger at corruption among ruling classes, anger at impotence and foreign dominance.

In a nutshell, Islamist ideology, as any other ideology, can be used widely as an instrument to attack, delegitimize, legitimize, or create unity of purpose. As with all other ideologies and principles, it is often applied selectively in accordance with the immediate interests of the state or the movement. Hence, political Islam as an Islamist ideology remains the only realistic major alternative movement to most of today's authoritarian regimes. Political Islam still claims an ability to meet the key grievances of the Muslim world against other rivals. In the absence of any alternative ideology seen as both offering solutions and remaining true to the values of the Muslim world, political Islam or Islamism dominates the current field by default.

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Biography

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