

PREFACE

When a book is written in response to an historical event, precisely the history in it quickly recedes. The September 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon, which were the impetus for these essays, have led to a measure of global violence that could not then have been imagined. The attacks themselves are now several wars away. A preface to the paperback edition needs to ask: When history recedes, what is left standing? What is the value of the book for readers today?

The book's central proposal is that Islamism as a political discourse can be considered together with Critical Theory as critiques of modernity in its Western-developed form. It asks readers to suspend existing political identities and reconfigure the parameters of their discourse to recognize overlapping concerns. It does this performatively, analyzing the present through the work of contemporary Islamic rather than western theorists. Its touchstones are not Agamben, Zizek, Derrida, or Habermas but, rather, Taha, Gannouchi, Shariati, and Qutb. Three years later, these names of Muslim political theorists are scarcely more familiar to western intellectuals than before. Despite post-colonial sensibilities to the errors of orientalist discourse, despite all the sensitivity to constructions of the Other, with few exceptions (already existing and acknowledged in the book), western critical theorists act as if all that is necessary is to draw on their own, existing models and traditions to define any new state of the world.

If religion has been allowed back on the theoretical agenda, it is St. Paul who monopolizes the discussion. For a number of important

PREFACE

western theorists, Pauline Christianity has suddenly become fashionable. But it is an idealized and sanitized Paul, stripped of the anti-Semitism that was a consequence of Christianity's separation from its Jewish origins, with the first Jewish anti-imperialist revolt of 66-70 C.E., and forgetful of Christianity's own imperial legacy, inherited from the Emperor Constantine, that culminated with the papal-led, medieval crusades against the Muslim world. Western philosophical traditions of the European enlightenment, American democracy, and post-Nietzschean skepticism become conservative in a global context malgré lui-même, insofar as they bolster and protect the presumption that Euro-American thinking is in advance of the rest of the world, hence adequate for its present understanding. It is one thing to champion multiculturalism in the spirit of Christian love, or Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, or democratic inclusion, or post-modern anti-essentialism; it is quite another to accept, when judged in global terms, the minority position of one's own intellectual culture, the present dominance of which cannot be explained solely on the basis of its intrinsic worth. My book is not a call for western theorists to convert or be still. Rather, it implies the need to argue for our beliefs on truly foreign, and in many ways unpalatable, discursive terrains – just as colonized people are routinely required to do vis-à-vis the invading culture, just as Muslim intellectuals have done since the Napoleonic invasions several centuries ago.

The sub-title of the book, *Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, was meant as a challenge, and a question: to rediscover one's own commitments in a foreign political language, and to ask not only what is lost in translation but also what might be gained. How does Islam, that defines progress in terms of social cohesion rather than individual competition, and evaluates society in civil rather than personal terms, provide a corrective for the morally indifferent world of global markets, where social responsibility is an optional appendage to political life? How does the transnational strength of Islam as a highly contemporary phenomenon expose the fact that Western norms are not natural, not inevitable, but contingent and subject to change? In the reception of the book, it is not the descriptive term *Left* that has

PREFACE

proved problematic. Muslim critical theorists have been grateful for the acknowledgement that the progressive policies they espouse are fully compatible with this positioning on the political spectrum, whereas the sort of Islamic politics that appeals to transnational Muslim elites is fully compatible with the self-enriching goals of economic globalization, not to speak of the right-wing agendas of extremists on issues of military violence and sexual control (which they share with right-wing supporters of G.W. Bush). Being on the Left is an orientation, not a dogma. The word makes sense wherever progressive politics requires independent judgment (ijtihad) rather than unquestioned obedience in thought and deed. Muslim feminists are a critical part of this Left, refusing on theological, social and legal grounds to equate Islam with the patriarchal society in which it has too long been embedded. Far more controversial has been my use of the word Islamism. It was at a meeting of l'Académie de la Latinité in Alexandria that Dr. Ahmad Jalali of Iran rightly questioned this choice, as it implies ideological conformity rather than a discursive terrain that encourages dissent and is open for creativity and change.

The fact that the first translation of this book was in Israel (by Risling Press), followed by Greece and Japan, is rewarding. I am grateful to be included among a growing list of authors who in various ways are pushing the boundary of intellectual responsibility beyond the provincialism of the west, notably, Judith Butler, Zillah Eisenstein, Roxanne Euben, Amy Goodman, Naomi Klein, Saba Mahmoud, Arundhati Roy, and Ann Stoller. Not all of the book's essays deal directly with political Islam, but all reflect the challenge of this engagement. Acknowledging the unavoidably global resonances of any theoretical claim today, they call for an epistemological rather than ontological approach to theory, because existentially we are not in the same position, whereas critical judgments can be shared. Implied is a questioning of the presumption that culture is the determining factor in the construction of political subjectivities. Physical torture, bodily mutilation, civilian terror, public humiliation, arbitrary imprisonment, and the control of populations through fear – these are the physical realities of war as a human initiative, the terrors

PREFACE

of which do not depend on cultural mediation for their meaning. The task of an artistic avant-garde in this context is defined less by achieving global recognition within the proliferating artworlds, than positioning f below the radar as a subaltern, globally connected underground that serves, not the warring factions, but those civilian multitudes who are caught in the crossfire. It is a mark of our time that the most radical, most difficult political position to sustain is independence from both violent sides.

A certain strand of Muslim thought has indeed become more accessible to western readers. Liberal Islam is promoted as the responsible core of contemporary Islamic thought. Muslim reasonableness, tolerance and fairness are reassuringly presented to European and US audiences as the non-dangerous, de-politicized center. But the alternative to both terrorisms, non-state and state, is not some safe, middle position of political quietism. Progressive does not mean: "like the west." In a too-eager attempt at reconciliation we lose the space for radical, critical distance from both sides in this war. For the past several years, I have taught the political theory of contemporary Islam. What happens in my seminar is not quite what the title advertises. A sustained engagement with Islamic political thinkers inevitably ends up destabilizing the students' own political identity. In discussing whether politicized Islam is compatible with democracy, their presumption of democracy in America begins to unravel. Confronting the prejudice of western discourses of orientalism is only the beginning of this process. It is by reading the debates among Muslims that the students' world-orientation is most unsettled. Muslim political debates today engage divergent Islamic approaches to issues of sovereignty, national identity, legal traditions, and social justice that leave the tired category of the West out of the discussion altogether. That is far harder for US university students to bear.

What three years ago seemed implausible is now commonplace: the US population has demonstrated its support in free elections for preemptive war, government misinformation, media control, dictatorial executive powers, suspension of human rights, and

PREFACE

violation of international and domestic laws. In the US government's identification of its own national interest with maintaining global hegemony, democracy is not the uncontroversial bedrock of political life, but merely one, expendable option in the policy toolbox. We are witnessing a test case of how far American democracy will go in agreeing to its own destruction – not the first time this has happened in the history of democratic states. The situation calls for a very different theoretical discussion than the one that has dominated in western critical circles until now. As Muslims struggle with the issue of the legitimacy of sovereign power and its relation to religion, ethnicity and the nation-state, western publics are doing the same. Debates about *vilayat-i-faqi* (sovereignty of the jurists) parallel those over the “state of exception” in western democracies - if not in the substance of the arguments or the specific populations targeted by state repression, then surely in the dangers of unchecked executive power over governing and justice alike. Interpretation of *shari'a*, like constitutional judicial review, negotiates change through continuity. Both are challenged by the moral claims of global majorities who, while outside of their proper jurisdiction, are no less worthy of moral recognition. Revolutionary violence may be expressed in terms of the Mahdi, or the Messiah, or Marx, but all such legitimations of force are limited by human fallibility and historical unpredictability, and all are subject to moral scrutiny by non-adherents within the newly global, public sphere.

It seems light-years since the euphoria experienced by millions who participated in the spontaneously organized, global manifestation of February 15, 2003, against Bush's planned invasion of Iraq. That was the dream-form of a global Left. Against it, the historical realities of public responses are stubbornly intrusive: the second-term election of George W. Bush; riots in the Muslim suburbs of France; the London metro bombing; anti-immigrant xenophobia in many countries, violent demonstrations from Pakistan to Nigeria against the Danish cartoons. These incidents, encoded within local political rhetoric, easily reinforce existing power while diverting it to the right, and that is precisely the problem. When the standoff between

PREFACE

competing political powers becomes increasingly hostile and yet still claims to represent the mainstream, then the global center appears in these partial and polarized contexts as a radical, leftist fringe.

Nonetheless, one by one, but cumulatively in massive numbers, people are refusing to accept the traditional ways of framing global politics. Ideologies come later, if at all. Discursive articulations are secondary, as people are motivated above all by material realities. Global media have been progressive in transmitting these realities. Jean Baudrillard, in criticizing the society of the spectacle, opposes to the virtual world of media “the event,” implying that only the latter can motivate a progressive, political response. For Alain Badiou, prototypical of an event were the street demonstrations of 1968. But it needs to be remembered that these were image-events, effective because of their entry into media-flows that, although far from unobstructed, repeatedly escape control. Surely the images of US torture at Abu Ghraib produced such an event, as have citizen demonstrations for democracy in many countries. Global publics continue to be engaged in the production, circulation and reception of image-events as significant political actions.

Can it be that we are at last growing up to our global responsibilities? There is a developing conviction that the proper judge for the legitimacy of sovereign foreign policy cannot be sovereign power itself, but rather, an impartial jury that also hears the case of those affected by it. To speak of a global public sphere today means to acknowledge the fact that domestic and global politics bleed into each other. Governments can no longer make a convincing moral case for limiting justice or humane treatment to the minority of humanity whom they happen to recognize as their own. Democracies are obliged to act democratically on the global stage. Islamic movements cannot limit their understanding of *ijtihad* in a way that criminalizes dissent or condemns non-believers. To cite Abdul-Karim Soroush, “Religion is divine, but its interpretation is thoroughly human and this-worldly.” To mimic or perpetuate western-modern political forms is indeed backward, if these forms are revolutionary violence, state terror, or constructions of sovereign power that rely on

PREFACE

naming an enemy for their legitimation. The revolutionary goal is a new moral template for earthly rule.

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