

## POSITIVISM AND TRADITION IN AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

### KEMALISM

- Y.K. Karaosmanoglu: “General, this party has no doctrine...”.
- Mustafa Kemal: “Of course it hasn’t, my son; if we had a doctrine, we would paralyze the movement”.<sup>1</sup>

The many studies, articles, essays, conferences and seminars dedicated to the personality and the work of Mustafa Kemal are still far from having exhausted an area of knowledge with many facets, a historical reality with unending extensions. By studying the apologetic literature about the civilizing hero and a historiography which is limited to the relatively neutral description of the rich career of an individual, it can be noted that there are very few writings inspired by the desire not only to analyze, to explain and

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by S.S. Aydemir, *Tek Adam: Mustafa Kemal*, Vol. 3, Istanbul, Remzi Kitabevi, 1966, 502.

to understand but also to *think through* the Kemalist revolution.<sup>2</sup>

The most poorly studied aspect of this great historic adventure is no doubt the effective place of Islam in Turkish society compared to the perception which Atatürk and his partisans had of it. Most authors—Turkish or Western—have allowed themselves to be enclosed in tenacious ideological oppositions such as religion and secularism, tradition and modernity, the Ottoman decadence and the power of the Western model, Islamic conservatism and the progress of civilization, etc. These dichotomies are often dealt with using conceptual categories inherited from the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and historiographic writing thus perpetuates every attitude of thought or, rather, the positivist imagination which inspired the actions of Atatürk and of his generation.

This lack of scientific knowledge is not limited only to Kemalism, which offers so much matter for reflection to the historian of Islam. It can be verified, alas, in the majority of works dealing with the Islamic realm. The recurrence of revolutionary situations in several contemporary Muslim societies has always been accompanied by an outburst in both apologetic literature and repetitive dissertations about the ideological dichotomies already mentioned.

From this can be understood the newness and great pertinence of every effort of thinking of Kemalism in an Islamic perspective. The perspective intended is here twofold: on the one hand it requires thinking of the historical, sociological and doctrinal situation of Islam in Turkish society from 1880 to the end of the 1930's. On the other hand, we shall attempt to open a new field of analysis and of reflection for Islamic thinking by analyzing the lessons of the Kemalist revolution and the Khomeini revolution. Before doing this, however, it will be necessary to situate historically and philosophically the recurring postulates of the philosophy of the Enlightenment which continue to weigh down the interpretation of Islamic realities.

#### THE ORGANIZATIONAL POSTULATES OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Historians situate between 1670 and 1800 the period of the formation, expansion and realization of the philosophy of the Enlighten-

<sup>2</sup> In the sense that F. Furet, for example, thought through the French Revolution.

ment. All Europe took part in this great movement of history which gave birth to what is today called the West. An uninterrupted series of intellectual, scientific, technical, political and economic conquests culminated in the great French Revolution, in the development of capitalism and of material civilization, and in a strategy of the domination of nature and of all the inhabited earth.<sup>3</sup>

Muslim societies included in the Ottoman area—although geographically close to the West—were hardly involved in the intellectual adventure which was underway; they were, however, to be subject to the increasing pressure of conquering capitalism. After 1800 they began to discover, with varying degrees of lucidity, the distance which separated them from their powerful neighbors. To remedy this, they turned to the path of education and reform. Mehmet Ali sent Egyptian scientific missions to France; Ottoman Turkey inaugurated the era of *Tanzimât* with the Rescript of Gülhane in 1839. The process continued with the Young Ottomans in 1860 and 1870 and the Young Turks of 1908 whose movement, amplified by Mustafa Kemal, culminated in the revolution of the Twenties.

The facts and episodes of this revolution which gave birth to so-called modern Turkey have been described frequently. But what has not been analyzed is the type of modernity introduced by the historical action of Muslim elites up to approximately 1950. The analysis proposed here will be developed in two stages. First of all the ideological portion and the philosophical extent of the organizational postulates of the spirit of the Enlightenment will be evaluated; then it will be shown how these great figures of history, Atatürk and his disciples, used abstract principles in an imitative and empirical fashion and without the necessary critical distance; and, detached from the historical context which had ensured them a certain effectiveness in the West, these principles proved to be inadequate once they were transposed into a new and badly known social-cultural area.

The Enlightenment developed and expanded gradually in three major directions:

- The conquest of the autonomy of reason relative to the dogma-

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *La philosophie des Lumières dans sa dimension européenne*, writings introduced by A. Bildermann, Larousse, 1969.

tic excesses of religion; socially, in Europe, this meant the rise of a liberal bourgeoisie which tended to secularize institutions and to struggle with the clergy and the nobility for power over them. It can be noted that in the West, the ascent of this bourgeoisie has gone on in an unbroken manner down to our own times. The same was not true for the merchant bourgeoisie which emerged in Iraq-Iran in two stages, once in the third and fourth centuries and again in the ninth and tenth centuries. In both cases, from the fifth century on in the first event and from the eleventh century on in the other, the movement which tended to stress the priority of reason and of its power to unify all men had to give way to religious orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup>

– Definition of a rational and universal policy based on progress in scientific and technical knowledge. The conditions of civil government were defined (J. Locke), the origins of inequality and a new social contract (J.-J. Rousseau), the separation of Church and State (Spinoza, Pufendorf), human rights and citizens' rights, in particular the right to insurrection.

– Morality became an autonomous science separated from canon law and religion: Ch. Wolff said, for example, that natural law would apply even if God did not exist; Bayle declared the existence of moral codes without religious foundations; Holbach said that conscience is born of experience; Pope noted that happiness is the motive and the end of our actions; Wieland and Voltaire held that luxury contributed to progress in the arts and to public happiness; etc.<sup>5</sup>

These ideas, launched in the euphoria created by the major scientific discoveries, the material progress and the political conquests of the 18th and 19th centuries, contain a share of Utopia which still in our own times awakens a collective longing, inflames the social imagination and motivates all forms of militancy. This is why they have easily crossed the borders of Europe. Upon discovering them, the restrained elites of colonized societies did not escape the enchantment of liberating revolutions. Such elites yielded to this enchantment with an enthusiasm which was all the

<sup>4</sup> For this concept, cf. M. Arkoun, "Le concept de Raison islamique", *Pour une critique de la Raison islamique*, ed. Maisonneuve-Larose, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Philosophie des Lumières*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13 ff.

greater since the colonial situation had created in their countries the “ideal” conditions for applying all the principles which the liberal bourgeoisie had used to ensure its own political rise. It took a long time to discover—and this is still denied, even in the West—that, although the discourse of the Enlightenment played a positive role during the nascent phase of an emerging secular power opposed to the religious and noble power, it did not supply adequate intellectual equipment for unmasking the real play of all social forces present and the ultimate stakes of their competition within these differentiated social-political areas. On the contrary, it contributed to covering over the determining factors and the profound mechanisms of this historic evolution.

Along with these weaknesses inherent in the liberal bourgeois discourse, there were two causes for cultural alienation among Muslim intellectuals. First of all, by 1800, there was the impossibility for the leaders of what is incorrectly called the Renaissance (*Nahdha*) to revive the most significant experiences of classic Islam; the epistemic break with this was emphasized to the degree that these societies were opening themselves to material civilization. And then there was the ignorance of what classic Islam represented, the decline of the Ottoman state, the scholastic rigidity of the *'ulemâ*, the degeneration of popular religion which combined to make of the Western model a necessary and effective recourse. Such was the attitude certainly of a man like Atatürk who, with the positivist faith, the military courage and the spirit of initiative which characterized him, manifested all the conditions needed to make pragmatic action prevail over critical control. This is what other Muslim political leaders—with less iconoclastic radicalism, however—have done or still continue to do, figures such as Nasser, Bourguiba, the leaders of *Ba'th* or those of the Algerian N.L.F. And so the impact of postulates of the philosophy of the Enlightenment continues to have an effect in Islamic countries, even on those which favor a return to the original teachings of the Koran and of the Prophet. No longer able to proclaim their adhesion to a Western model in crisis, they project its ideology over the founding Age of Islam.

When we consider the revolutionary experiences associated, in varying degrees, with the ideology of the Enlightenment, both in the West as, more recently, in Islamic countries, we note that four

major questions are either evaded, forgotten or completely ignored:

– What psychological, cultural, historical or anthropological ties attach the ideology of the Enlightenment to the message of the three monotheistic revelations? Western thinkers, such as Malraux, do recognize an affiliation with the Bible and the New Testament, but are silent with regard to the Koran.<sup>6</sup>

– Is there an internal necessity in Western civilization alone which would explain the particular direction taken by secularization? And, conversely, is it possible to speak of an internal necessity in Islamic civilization which could explain the continuous confusion between secular and religious authorities?

– Depending on the answer given to the previous question, how can the severance experienced in the West between the secular world and religious authority be interpreted historically, sociologically, anthropologically and philosophically? Is secularism but a temporary episode in the historical trajectory of the West or is it a pole of meaning or an anthropological category in the maturation process and in the process of the emancipation of man in society?

– If it is an anthropological category, does it imply an elimination ultimately of the religious dimension or a redefinition of nature, of functions, of historiogenesis, of relations between two equally unyielding authorities?

Completely taken up with its combat against the still dominant power of the Church and its search for a new way, the ideology of the Enlightenment could not burden itself with such difficult questions. Positivist thinking of the 19th century raised the definitions of a militant discourse to the rank of “scientific” solutions. As for Islamic thinking, which had remained insulated from the Western adventure since the 16th century, it considered any question about secularization unthinkable (which does not prevent, as it has been said, the real progress of this secularization in relation with the ideology of development). An entire intellectual field thus remains to be cultivated with new means.<sup>7</sup> A closer examination

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran*, ed. Maisonneuve-Larose, 1982, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, both Kemalism and Khomeinism pose problems. Ataturk did indeed replace an exhausted regime with a viable State, open to a certain modernity, and Khomeini put an end to the dissoluteness of a megalomaniac cut off from the people. But in both cases, the upheavals reached the symbolic foundations of the society without respecting either the critical and conquering spirit of the Enlighten-

of Kemalism in an Islamic perspective will allow us to establish this evaluation better.

#### KEMALISM AND TURKISH ISLAM

The term *Islam* is often used as if it were a univocal concept whose content is constant and common to all societies. There are, however, as many varieties of Islam as there are societies. Moreover, within the same society Islam changes contents and functions depending on the situation, groups, classes and class situations. This is why it is important to specify the type of Islam which Mustafa Kemal would have been able to know between 1880 and 1930, that is at the time of his training and of the development of his action.

A complete typology of religious expression in a Muslim society must be established from three complementary viewpoints:

– From the traditional doctrinal point of view (which corresponds to the standard divisions in works of heresiography), in Turkey there can be encountered a majority of Hanafite Sunnites or Shâfi'ites (there are very few Mâlikites and Hanbalites); a strong minority of Shî'ites (*ahle Haqq*), *Nusayrî* and *yazîdî*.

– From the sociological point of view there can be distinguished an urban Islam (*'ulemâ*, merchants, bureaucrats, officers) and a rural Islam (peasants and mountain dwellers). In the cities, small craftsmen, domestics, the needy and the unemployed are classified in the ranks of popular Islam; conversely, clerics (marabouts, saints, heads of brotherhoods), as well as large land-owners are affiliated with urban Islam, if only because they are literate.

– From the anthropological point of view, there exists a large separation between groups, classes or individuals who are literate and those who live in the oral tradition. The pertinence of this division is valid for the entire Muslim area. On the one side is a learned Islam based on the classical writings proper to each school.

ment in one case, nor the sense of the absolute and the tolerance which give a value to prophetic experience in the other. And in both cases also the deepest essence of Turkish and Iranian society was ignored rather than directed by a way of thinking which is equal to the historical event.

On the other side is a popular Islam based on the memorization of prayers, formulas, accounts and the accomplishment of rituals proper to each brotherhood. The groups which belong to learned Islam are distinguished by the special role which they assign to religion. Thus the official *'ulemâ* (*sheyhülislâm*, mufti, cadis, auxiliaries of justice, exegetes, theologians, etc.) are more concerned with the power of the state than interested in a personal theological quest, that is in an "understanding of faith in act in the course of time".<sup>8</sup> There exists, then, an official orthodoxy which is opposed to the concurrent orthodoxies of other types of Islam. The leaders of brotherhoods are in a position of power with regard to their disciples, but of protest and even opposition with regard to official Islam.

Intellectually and culturally, the official Islam of the *'ulemâ* in the era which concerns us was marked by an extreme doctrinal poverty. For a long time Islamic thinking had allowed itself to fall into the dogmatic repetition of several handbooks of law, grammar, exegesis and history. For Turks the situation was aggravated by the difficulty of access to Arab texts. Cut off both from classical sources as well as from the spiritual influence of the great *sûfi* masters, popular Islam was in its turn victim of the debasement of the social imagination and of the collective sensitivity. Well known are the unbearable excesses to which several brotherhoods today still surrender themselves in the name of "spiritual exercises".

Faced with this negative social-religious landscape, two quite different reactions manifested themselves in Muslim countries beginning in the 19th century. On the one hand Arab societies produced the reformist movement called *salafî* because it called for a return to the pure norms of the pious Ancients (the Inaugural Age of Islam), which movement touched Ottoman Turkey as is shown, for example, by the writings of Mehmed Saïd Pacha who explained that the Ottoman decline was due to the abandonment of "true" Islam. At the other extreme, the Turkey of the Young Ottomans, and then of the Young Turks, arrived at a brutal rupture both with the State and with Islam, together judged responsible for the decline of the nation in 1918, and which ultimately brought

<sup>8</sup> Definition given by the Reverend Father D. Chenu.



on the abolition of the caliphate—to which the sultanate claimed, wrongly, to be the heir—and the proclamation of the Republic. For the positivist outlook of Atatürk, it was the very principle of the alliance between the State and religion which had been vitiated. Only the solution of secularization could put an end to it. Atatürk would not have been able to succeed in such a change of structure if the influence of the *'ulemâ* and of the bureaucracy of the Ottoman state had not begun to give way to the influence of secular cadres trained for the application of the *Tanzimât*. However, the new “intellectuals” coming out of the School of Administration (*Mülkiye*), of the School of Medicine and the Military Academy did not form a social stratum sufficiently large and sufficiently vigilant to prepare the country for entirely new secular forms of thinking, of action and of existence. Like the *'ulemâ*, they served the existing power without playing a decisive role in the formulation of major decisions. The so-called modern educational system did not provide them with the basic knowledge and the intellectual openness necessary to address the problems of a heavily Islamized society, any more than had the scholastic education of the *'ulemâ*. “Each school was a separate universe where students were cut off from every-day Ottoman life... It was as if the generation of 1890 thought that life as it was described in books was more real than life itself”.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever might have been the real modalities of the presence of Islam as religion and life style in Turkish society at the beginning of this century, Atatürk could not have brought a negative judgment against them given his total and enthusiastic conversion to the positivist principle that only Western civilization is capable of promoting a modern society, of guiding a historical progress which conforms to the common objectives of all men. In his eyes, “non-civilized peoples are condemned to remain under the feet of those who are civilized”,<sup>10</sup> but “the Turkish nation has perceived with great joy that the obstacles have been removed which for centuries

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the chapter by Serif Mardin, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey”, in *Atatürk, Founder of a Modern State*, Ali Kazancigil and E. Özbudun, eds. London, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by B. Lewis, in *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1968, p. 268.

have continuously kept Turkey from joining civilized nations, moving forward on the road to progress".<sup>11</sup>

Abdullah Cevet, director of the periodical *İctihâd*, had already taught along the same lines that, "there is no second civilization; civilization means European civilization and it must be imported with its roses and with its thorns".<sup>12</sup> But Atatürk went further than the ideological militants. He attacked head on the most ancient and most deeply rooted symbolic foundations of Islamic identity as social and cultural reality. Not content to abolish the institution of the caliphate-sultanate which was in the end but an abstract idea for most Muslims, he intervened at the level of individual consciousness by replacing the fez with the hat, the traditional costume with European dress, the Hegiran calendar with the Gregorian calendar, Arab letters with Latin letters, the *charî'a* with the Swiss code. The fundamental elements of representation—time, space, semiological systems such as writing, dress, literature—which condition the perception of the real and of significations, were eliminated by virtue of a value judgment held to be philosophical, whereas in fact it was subjective and ideological. "We must liberate ourselves from these incomprehensible signs (the Arab alphabet) which for centuries have held our minds in an iron vice... The old literature is condemned to disappear".<sup>13</sup>

Consider the following two texts:

"Gentlemen, it was necessary to abolish the fez which rested on the head of our nation like an emblem of ignorance, of negligence, of fanaticism, of hatred of progress and of civilization, to accept in its place the hat, the headdress worn by the civilized world, thereby demonstrating that the Turkish nation, in its mentality and in other respects, does not diverge in any way from civilized social life".

"Gentlemen, the Turkish people which founded the Turkish Republic, is civilized. It is civilized according to history and according to reality. But I tell you as your very brother, as your friend, as your father, that the people of the Turkish Republic, which claims to be civilized, must demonstrate and prove that it is so by its ideas and its mentality, by its familial life and its way

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267-268.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

of living. In a word the truly civilized people of Turkey... must prove that it is civilized also in its external appearance... I agree with you. This grotesque mixture of styles is neither national nor international... My friends, there is no need to seek to revive Turanian dress..."<sup>14</sup>

In these statements there is clearly perceptible a desire for desymbolization and for resymbolization of collective existence. It is not Arab letters in themselves which are challenged, but an ancient cultural practice which has ossified minds; it is not the hat as such which is preferred to the fez, but the symbol of a civilization "according to history and according to reality" in contrast to a civilization of ignorance and of negligence... By attacking the external appearance of every Turk, the revolutionary hoped to modify the collective mentality lastingly. The founders of the major religions did not act any differently when they imposed new rituals and distinctive conduct on their emerging communities.<sup>15</sup> But Atatürk's method was more iconoclastic than creative of a symbolism, with a strong power of integration. It imposed external signs borrowed from abroad and consequently unassimilable by native semiological systems, where Muhammad in Medina, for example, used Arab signs and symbols to open new fields of signification.<sup>16</sup>

The reaction of the *'ulemâ* of Al-Azhar to the decisions of Atatürk provides an interesting example of the competition which can arise within a given society for obtaining control of the symbolic heritage.

"It is clear", wrote the masters of Al-Azhar, "that a Muslim who seeks to resemble a non-Muslim by adopting the latter's distinctive form of dress will also finish by adopting the same path as the non-Muslim for his belief and his actions... Is it not foolish to abandon one's national mode of dress to adopt that of another people when this desire for imitation can lead to the disappearance

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268-269.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the explanation given by Tabarî in his commentary on verse II, 113 in reference to the institution of Friday as a day equivalent to Saturday for Jews and Sunday for Christians, *Tafsîr*, ed. Chakîr, t. IV, p. 283.

<sup>16</sup> This is the real meaning of his struggle to enter Mecca and to perform the pilgrimage in an Islamized Ka'ba.

of our nationality, the annihilation of our own identity in theirs, which is the fate of the weak...?"<sup>17</sup>

We must be careful not to be influenced by the present ideological atmosphere in the Islamic world which confirms with vehemence the protests of Al-Azhar and condemns Ataturk's Westernizing choices. We will insist instead on the basic identity of the type of thinking which is exercised in the two distinct frames of reference: scientific positivism, on the one hand, and conformist and dogmatic theology on the other. In both cases the restorative and creative power of the *symbol* is unknown and its functions are reduced to those of a *signal* referring immediately to intangible boundaries and social definitions. This is what we call the manipulation of the symbolic heritage by social performers dominated by a false consciousness of their real historical and cultural situation. For Ataturk, as for the masters of Al-Azhar, the costume as well as the letters of the alphabet were external forms which involved irreconcilable forms of thinking and of civilization. Nevertheless, the "argument" of a "true" civilization or that of the "unanimous opinion of Muslims" which were invoked in support of shared theses were not subjected to any critical examination which could have established their authority. They refer in both cases to the constraining power of the social and political order which is established or which is seeking to establish itself.

From this can be understood the intellectual and historical dimensions of the differences between Ataturk and Al-Azhar, or better between a positivist and secular philosophy of history and a dogmatic and scholastic theology which confuses religious goals and nationalist imperatives.<sup>18</sup> Both attitudes reveal the radical inadequacy of the mental equipment applied to analysing Muslim societies and to the definition of a historic action appropriate to their situation. Although opposed to the secular Kemalist revolution by its content and its goals, the Islamic revolution in Iran also manifests certain features such as the radicalizing of refusals and of choices, the use of social and ideological constraints to impose

<sup>17</sup> Quoted by B. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

<sup>18</sup> Thus all Muslims recognize the transcendence of God, the absolute and insurmountable value of the revealed Word, the transhistorical sweep of prophetic action and the eschatological perspective of existence.

an order determined *a priori* as ideal, the indifference to data culled from sociology, from psychology, from political life and even from objective religious tradition. The two revolutions were addressed to their respective peoples with the conviction of engaging them in a decisive and salvific affair at last in keeping with the genius of the Nation and with Truth. The fact that this revolution is secular or religious is secondary relative to the “messianic project” which stirs up an activist fraction and to the political voluntarism whose recurrence is one of the characteristics of contemporary Muslim societies.<sup>19</sup>

All these evolutions refer to a durable and far-reaching phenomenon: the historic confrontation between Islam and the West. Less has been written about the military, political and economic events marking the continuous competition between these two worlds. Much attention has been devoted to the struggles between classical Islam and Byzantium, the Seldjukides, the Ayyubides and the Crusades, Catholic Spain and Andalus, the Christian West and the Ottoman Empire, the capitalist West and colonized societies, the industrial West and the present Third World. But the descriptive writings of historians, Christian or Muslim imagery of mobilizing ideologies, the exhortations of the Westernizers (the generation of Ataturk, Ferhat Abbas and several intellectuals representing a range of nuanced positions), the vehement sermons of militant imams accumulated misunderstandings and reinforced the mental images<sup>20</sup> which still nourish polemics, legitimate wars, lead to reciprocal exclusions (cf. the situation of immigrants in Europe). The need is felt to have a constructive reflection making it possible to open the paths to an Islamic way of thinking better adapted to the historical responsibilities imposed by the confrontation with a West which is always motivated by a desire for power.

<sup>19</sup> There is no intention here of mixing up Ataturk and Khomeini in the same critique, but of reflecting, in an anthropological objective, on what we call a “messianic project”, which is an important category of historic action in general.

<sup>20</sup> P. Bourdieu distinguishes “*mental images*... acts of perception and appreciation, of knowing and recognition, in which agents invest their interests and their presumptions; *objectal images*, in things (emblems, flags, insignia, etc.) or acts, strategies interested in symbolic manipulation which aim at a determination of the (mental) image which others can have of these properties and their bearers”, in *Ce que parler veut dire*, Fayard, 1982, p. 135-136.

## TOWARD AN OPEN ISLAMIC THINKING

Between the contradictory solutions proposed by Atatürk and by Khomeini, there are situated several attitudes of thinking and historical practices which lean toward one or the other. The pragmatism of a Bourguiba, relatively favorable to secularization, contrasts with the rigorism of the Saudi state which insists on the application of Hanbalite Islam. The socialism of *Ba'ith* or of the Algerian N.L.F. does not exclude a recourse to traditionalization through Islam.<sup>21</sup> Many examples could be cited from various Muslim societies; all are living through, with greater or lesser degrees of intensity, the dilemma typified by the Turkish experience of the twenties and thirties and the present experience in Iran.

– To what point can and should a people be cut off from its symbolic heritage, from its system of belief and non-belief, from its daily life, to direct it toward a totally foreign history and culture?

– Can and should a people be preserved from every foreign influence to the point of closing it in on a single phase of its own history (present-day Iran rejects its pre-Islamic past as much as the Shah gloried in it; Egypt is barely interested in its Pharaonic past; Northern Africa turns away from its Berber past and present...)?

These two questions refer back to the same difficulty: contemporary Islamic thinking disposes of neither the intellectual equipment nor the social-cultural cadres essential for thinking through not only the relations of Muslims to their own history, but also their relation to the outer world and to its history. Let us try to explain the significance and the extent of these two major tasks which should mobilize scientific research in every Muslim country.

Today a way of thinking which aspires to the qualification *Islamic* must be first of all and with all necessary rigor a historian's way of thinking. It has been so since the death of the Prophet, since every succeeding generation has always returned to the Inaugural Age (610-632) to explain its religious and profane practices. Thus the quest for and the conservation of information (*akhbâr*), vestiges (*âthâr*), accounts (*riwâyat*) and traditions (*hadîth, sunan*)

<sup>21</sup> The concept of traditionalism has been analyzed well by A. Laroui for Morocco in *La crise des intellectuels arabes*, Maspero, 1974, p. 45 ff.

have given birth to a rich literature which is essentially historical. There are two manners today to make use of this information which represents our only connection with the Inaugural Age and the formative period (632-900 approximately) of Islamic thinking. There is the reformist manner (*islâh*) which perpetuates a mythical view of the past, and the critical historical manner which discerns the historical from the mythical while incorporating the latter in an anthropological view of the past.

The reformist manner does not date from the *salafi* movement (return to the *salaf*, the pious Ancients, witnesses to the Inaugural Age), illustrated particularly by Al-Afghâni and Muhammad 'Abdu; it is inherent in every mythical way of thinking which situates the revelation—in the sense of unveiling—of the Supremely Significant, the categories of all right thinking and action, in an Inaugural Age—in *illo tempore*—of the destiny of a group. History is then treated as the foundation account—which provides the ontological and existential bases (*Usûl*)—of the group's collective soul. And so the peoples of the Book (*ahl al-kitâb*) which produced the societies of the book, return unflinchingly to the Bible, to the Gospels, to the Koran and to their first preachers in order to verify the conformity of new ways of thinking and new conduct to the revealed Significant. The historiography developed in such a mental realm has itself remained linear, always beginning at an *origin* and continuing down a line of facts detached from living systems, each juxtaposed one alongside another in an *account-history* which maintains the illusion of continuity in the group's memory.

Contemporary Islamic discourse, from its Khomeini version to the most secularizing versions, remains epistemically faithful to the reformist manner; it always points toward the return to the initial and pure form of what is globally called *Islam*. Any distinction between the specifically religious objective (*dîn*) of the Koran (problems of ontology, of transcendence, of the vocation of the human person, of the status of truth, of paths of access to knowledge, of life and death, etc.) and the social-historical dimension (*dawla* and *dunyâ*) already strongly present in Muhammad's action at Medina is unthinkable. By imposing, on the contrary, the dogma, never theologically analyzed, of the indissoluble relation of *Dîn-Dawla-Dunyâ*, the transformation of an open religious symbolism which stimulates thinking, into ideological slogans

which mobilize to political action, is facilitated.<sup>22</sup> This is the meaning of all the projections of currently popular political vocabulary (democracy, socialism, social justice, rights of man, liberty and liberation, progress, etc.) onto primitive “Islam” and the idealized figures of several Companions (*sahâba*). Such an Islam refers more to products of the social imagination proper to each society than to the intended meaning or to the appeals of the Koranic discourse addressed to those who hear, see, think.

This analysis is impossible as long we remain within the system of thinking of the militant fundamentalists or in the positivism which Atatürk espoused. In the first case, the social imagination is unleashed by nourishing it with ideological representations qualified as Islamic, emphasizing mental barriers and compromising social communications (cf. the clashes between “Muslim” and “Secular” or “Marxist” students in Tunis, Algiers, Rabat, etc.). In the second case, Atatürk’s radical undertaking introduced a certain mobility into political, institutional and cultural life, but at the cost of a serious break with Islamic heritage. In addition, the leap of the revolutionary outside the framework of reformist thinking in no way guaranteed the passage to what he considered to be modernity. Turkish society in the twenties had neither the economic resources, the universities, nor the research scientists and scholars who could have given substance to the contents of modernity as in the West. Moreover, the positivist version of this modernity only transposed into scientific language the postulates of ancient theology, of classical metaphysics, aggravated by the ideological prejudices of the triumphant bourgeoisie. Western societies themselves have not finished struggling with the difficulties inherited from positivism, scientism, abstract rationalism. But they have had the advantage of being able to pursue a free, constant and rigorous critique of knowledge. Since the fifties, scientific research, driven by social dynamics, has imposed modes of understanding which prefigure a new age of knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

Islamic thinking still participates only too feebly in this powerful research movement. It especially refuses to employ what I have

<sup>22</sup> Cf. M. Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran, op. cit.*, p. 145 ff, and E. Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*, London, 1982.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. M. Arkoun, *L'Islam, hier, demain*, 2nd ed., Buchet-Chastel, 1982, p. 120 ff.



termed the historical critical manner to enrich the account-history through the practice of a *problems-history*. To justify this refusal it is frequently repeated that Muslim societies can spare themselves the spiritual and moral crises and thus the sterile discussions which were generated in the West by the Industrial Revolution. It is postulated that Islam will resist better than Christianity because it has tended from the beginning toward modernity in all areas. Therefore it is useless and false to turn to “Western” science in order to discover the specificity of Islamic realities. These can be correctly interpreted only by using procedures and the conceptual structures provided by Muslim scholars.

In these few phrases we have summarized the articles of the ideological credo presently recited in seminars and international conferences on Islam, in essays at all levels, in ordinary conversations and official statements. The self-complacency and the negation of liberating tasks which these “arguments” carry are reinforced by an apologetic literature now being produced by Westerners themselves who, ill at ease in their own societies, are placing their hopes in an Islamic-Christian dialogue which earns them easy fame in the Islamic world.<sup>24</sup> This is to say how much the confrontation between Islam and the West, more than fifty years after Ataturk’s intervention, continues to nourish misunderstandings, to develop harmful images on both sides, to cause withdrawal from areas of mutual discovery and acts of historical solidarity.

The problems-history could in fact provide an excellent practice field for an interdependent form of thinking appropriate to the current phase of history. Such a form of thinking would consist in rendering problematic, in an anthropological and philosophical perspective, categories, themes, definitions, practices and beliefs which are commonly accepted in ordinary or even scientific language as being truths which are established, undeniable and binding. All the vocabulary taken from the human and social sciences (religion, sacred, profane, revelation, religious rights, positive rights, society, class, reason, rational, imagination, imaginary, marvelous, metaphorical meaning, real meaning, symbol, myth, subject, conscience, account, etc.) used to describe the past must

<sup>24</sup> The ideological current meant here is so powerful that we will refrain from citing an institution, a proper name or a title.

be reworked, redefined, reappropriated not only to take into account phenomena limited to a tradition and to a social-cultural context, but to reconstruct semantic spaces broken up by symbolic rivalries, desires for power, repeated wars. The example of Islam in this respect is highly instructive. By creating a new religious space with its own symbolic and ritual expressions, Muhammad opened an era of competition and struggle with Christians and Jews who used the same references as the Koran in the history of Revelation. This historically far-reaching episode continues to be reduced by historians to an Arab and Islamic particularism. Nevertheless, there resulted from it a cultural configuration which matches that of the West and it is possible to speak of a Greco-Semitic mental space. The semantic reconstruction of this space can only be accomplished if there is a liberation from the theological boundaries and ideological divisions inherited respectively from the doctrinal masters of the Middle Ages and the false universalism of bourgeois humanism.<sup>25</sup>

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Throughout this discussion we have sought to demonstrate that it is not possible to situate Kemalism in an Islamic perspective without gradually shattering the traditions of thinking and historical practices which have predominated until now, both in the West and in the Islamic world. When a recurrence of social and cultural tensions and a resurgence of debates over the signs of ideological recognition (shapes of the beard and mustache) are observed in present-day Turkey, it is possible to determine to what degree the emancipation of minds is being trampled underfoot. It is no longer as easy as at the time of Ataturk to relegate religion to the reactionary and conservative column and to favor Western modernity as the only credible historical alternative; but it is no less true that religion when manipulated is a fearsome political force. It has everywhere contributed to the formation of mentalities, it has marked collective sensitivities and imaginations, it has determined

<sup>25</sup> Important work has been done in the West, but it remains too circumscribed to move beyond the narrow circle of specialists (particularly when these are Orientalists) and thus to have an influence on research in general, university instruction and, *a fortiori*, general culture.

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the good sense and common sense which resist critical revisions. It is no less true that if the West has ceased believing in its own model, it continues to impose it indirectly by the hegemonic power of its economy and its technology. Faced with these multiple challenges, these weighty but exhilarating responsibilities, neither political thinking nor scientific thinking nor so-called Islamic thinking have been able, up until now, to go beyond empirical attitudes and temporary solutions. The increase in population of these peoples everywhere exceeds the resources of the human spirit, it appears. And when we compare the immense demographic pressures in all Muslim societies and their capacities for assimilating political-religious ideologies, we can ask ourselves with some anxiety about the historical outcome of an increasingly harsh confrontation with the dominant powers.

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