



MIDDLE EAST REFLECTIONS

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THE SECOND WAVE OF MODERN ISLAM

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I would like to start by raising the question of the title of the lecture: The Second Wave of Modern Islam. Not only does this presuppose that there was a wave in the first place, but that in fact such a wave can be placed firmly in time and space. And that the wave has definable contours and moves in a particular direction, creating a grouping of events and facts that can be treated consistently by the historian. A wave, almost by definition, precludes the idea of randomness and incoherence; but a wave can nevertheless disguise the turbulence and even the chaos beneath it. Those of us immersed inside the turmoil of a wave may not be able to discern the outlines of order that overlies the unfolding of apparently random events, but that does not negate that an order of sorts exists outside our frame of reference. The trick of course is to situate oneself outside the wave and then examine its features to discern the implicit order that is contained by and within it. The second aspect of the title refers to the idea of “Modern Islam”—something that is distinct from Traditional Islam and one that has features and outlines that are unique to it. And that the birth of this Modern Islam can be traced to a set of events and personalities somewhere in the mid-19th century, which collectively mark a decisive break from pre-modern Islam. This modern Islam in time has generated ideas and precepts that have entered the common culture and have informed the perspectives and consciousness of large numbers of people.

Does history move in such cycles with a clear beginning and an equally distinct end? I suppose if you are reflecting over long periods of time—several centuries—the distinctness of historical epochs is easier to identify. The closer you get to contemporary events the lesser is the ability to detect patterns and order that draw both unrelated and related events into definable structures. You can talk about the rise and fall of ancient civilisations with a sureness that might be lacking say if you are talking about the rise and decline of the American imperium. The identification of the beginnings of ongoing epochs in history—whether of entire civilisations, empires, nations

and ideas—is easier to establish than their end. We can mark the rise of the West, but can we with any assurance mark the decline of the West? Beginnings and ends are matters of profound discontinuities in the historical process. They are radical ruptures to established and confirmed ways of living, acting and even thinking. And it is in this category that I place the rise of modern Islam—that is an Islam that is preoccupied with the troubling issues that emerged with modernity—a consciousness that was in juxtaposition to its prior established and authoritative practices, in short its orthodoxy.

Defining Modern Islam

Much has been written and spoken on the rise of modern Islam, which encompasses the notions of both modernist and radical Islam. Few would contest that its origins lay in the encounter of the world of Islam with the West—not in the sometimes benign, but mainly adversarial forms before the 19th century—but rather in the actual conquest of Muslim lands and the overwhelming of Muslim sovereignty nearly everywhere where Muslims had once prevailed. This was a rupture of the first order—marking both an end and a beginning. Modern Islam can thus be framed as an ongoing response to this discontinuity, an attempt to understand it, contain it, come to terms with it, accept or reject it. The form in which modern Islam has expressed itself has therefore been mainly reactive to the shock of the original rupture. The challenge has been continuous and protean—and so has the response; but the response has always been reactive, never creative. Vestiges of the past certainties creep up and sometimes appear overpoweringly evident—but they are within the system of reactive responses, drawing often from the models of the western experience even when they appear most authentic and autonomous. Are not the most relevant prototypes of today’s jihadi violence found in the 19th century revolutionary movements of Tsarist Russia, or the terrorism that was integral to the 20th century secular national liberation movements, rather than the Assassins of the medieval Islamic world or the *Khawarij* at the onset of Islamic history?

Modern Islam has certainly favoured the political, to the exclusion of practically all else, in its attempts to forge a meaningful and sustainable response to the challenges of the modern world. Even the conscious archaism of some apparently apolitical mass Islamic movements—the Tablighis for example—are reflections of the political, a commitment to withdraw from serious interaction with an unacceptable outer order.

And the political has been expressed inside three broad categories: at the level of the state, society; and individual and collective consciousness. In its earliest manifestation, the process came together in the Pan Islam of the Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid, a process which came to a crashing end with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. The adjustments induced by Pan Islam were not that anxiety-inducing. Their range was limited and a functioning Muslim state, even a power, was still intact. Both the forms of society and collective consciousness were still framed in an overwhelmingly traditional mode. Could the Ottoman Empire have preserved the idea and reality of an Islamic state that had nevertheless found a way into the contemporary world? Perhaps, but it would have certainly treated the ‘nationality’ problem differently, privileging religious identity above ethno-sectarian considerations—the stuff of the modern nation state. But in the end, the encroachments of western political modes—in the form of constitutions, western-influenced legal systems, political parties and the very idea of the nation state—proved decisive to the final forms of government that emerged after the dissolution of the Muslim Empires.

Modern Islam was thus born in a world where the ancient verities were collapsing. There were many holdouts it was true—but not enough to change the tenor of affairs. And modern Islam is in fact a reflection of the confusion that gripped the Muslim mind, faced with the crumbling of the old order. In fact, I believe, that modern Islam was born with both denial and affirmation. It denied that partly adopting the new forms would prove anything but a utilitarian adjustment to the needs of power. It affirmed that Islam, nevertheless, still held the ultimate truth.

But what Islam were they envisaging?

These two currents, the first of denial took the form of a rationalist-materialist Islam; and the second, of affirmation, led to literalism. A far weaker trend, which never took much hold politically, was the accommodating idea of Islam, first proffered by Syed Ahmad Khan, which led to Islam being an extension of the scientific-humanist civilisation of the West.

There was thus an inherent conundrum inside modern Islam, which really doomed the project from the onset. It required considerable mental effort to reconcile a rationalist, materialist and literalist idea of Islam with one that shied from interacting with the elemental notion of the sacred. By the sacred I mean the subtler realities that are felt and experienced at the supra-rational level, a level which can be called the ‘imaginal’. The reality of all religious faith is based on experiencing the ineffable, and it is this experience and its acknowledgement that marked the identity of the Muslim world, more so I believe than the commonality of its institutions, laws and rituals and culture. Modern Islam in fact ignores, and sometimes denies, the reality of the ineffable in the formation of Muslim consciousness. ‘*Aql* (reason) and *Naql* (transmission of religious knowledge) are the foundations of modern Islamic thought; the first is by now heavily overlaid by western paradigms displacing the traditional understanding of reason as the mind that can discern the divine; the second by a stultifying literalism raised to the level of foundational belief. The latter is based on a fundamental and unprecedented privileging of the Law of Islam, the Sharia, above all other considerations in the understanding of the divine purpose. A Muslim’s sole way of understanding the divine purpose is by living out the law in its most meticulous form. In the process, both ethics and imagination have been marginalised. But the building blocks of ethical action are found in the universe of ideals and virtues; while the vitality of creative thought is anchored on openness and a willingness to engage with subtler realities. When both are banished from systematic political thought, the end result is barren and self-defeating. The vitality of any civilisation must be directly related to its ability to renew itself in creative action and thought. Modern Islam has signally failed to do that, in spite of many false starts that fizzled out precisely because they were based on a formulaic, derivative and quantitative understanding of what constitutes creativity. In this way, the arc of modern Islam has broken decisively with the creative élan of Islam’s past, even as it loudly proclaimed that its primary mission was to renew the wellsprings of its civilisation.

Where has this led over the decades?

Islamic State

Let us start by examining the fate of the Islamic state.

The ideal of the Islamic state has proved elusive, and when established as such has proved to be the handiwork of power-oriented elites and parties, or an eccentric and highly individualistic construct. The short-lived experiment of the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt collapsed with the

Brotherhood denying that they wanted an Islamic state and in fact appropriating the language of democratic political and human rights to demand their reinstatement in power. The *Nahdha* in Tunisia is barely hanging on to power, diluting to insipidity any notion of what an Islamic state actually meant and why it would be any different from the welfare states of 1950's Europe. The mighty behemoth of the Islamic state in Iran has inevitably surrendered to a pragmatism that might well end in a development-oriented authoritarianism led by the Revolutionary Guards. Sudan, which joined the ranks of Islamic states by a coup d'état has foundered in corruption, dictatorship and misgovernment, managing to lose a third of its territory to the newly founded state of South Sudan. The emirate of the Taliban in Afghanistan, another self-described Islamic state, became a byword for obscurantism and extreme violence against minorities, and the cloistering of women. I shudder to even try to explain the dysfunctional, violence-prone kleptocracy in Iraq that is led by the remnants of the Shia Iraqi Islamic movements.

So much for the Islamic state, as far away as one could imagine from the ruminations of its modern theorists such as Rashid Ridha, Mawdudi, Qutb and Baqir al-Sadr. What joined these diverse thinkers is the assertion that an Islamic state is essential to the preservation of Islam as a religion and that such a state must be based on the Sharia—no matter how one is to define it. And that through the Sharia, a revitalised Islam will unfold driving states and societies to ever higher levels of achievement and justice. But reactionary dynasties and princely states have also appropriated for themselves the label of being governed by the Sharia. By now, the confusion as to what constitutes the Sharia is greater than ever, hardly an auspicious environment for constructing an Islamic state based on its principles, when these principles themselves are far from being agreed upon.

Let us now look at the effects of modern Islam on societies.

Islamic Society

The main issue here is of periodisation. Certainly societies across the Muslim world appear to be more pious and observant when compared to the heyday of the secular states in which most Muslims lived—say from the end of World War II to the 1970's. So in this respect one of the principal drives of modern Islam—that is to expand the practice of Islam and observance of Islamic norms—appears to have succeeded. But stretch the framework to reach to the turn of the last century, and then the matter looks entirely different. There, society—whether the overwhelmingly rural based population, or the urban dwelling elites—were instinctively respectful of religious authority and observant, and had no need to be reminded of their religious obligations. Their customs, habits and thoughts were organically connected to the long and rich past of Islamic life and culture. It was the disjuncture that brought modern Islam into being that reframed the issue to a population—or at least its ruling elites—that appeared to abandon the strictures of religion in droves. So, the re-islamisation of society—what makes liberals and secularists in the Muslim world bewail the loss of their cherished modernity—was in fact an invented form of religious observance, moulded to fit the needs of the Islamisation project.

I therefore seriously question whether the outer spread of religious norms, shorn of religious experience, is in any way related to the deepening of religious consciousness as such, which is why it will not be sustained over the long run. I am not questioning the sincerity of belief of the hundreds of millions who have found succour and comfort within the practice of Islam. This is an individual and collective decision, which I enormously respect. But I am afraid that this has nothing to do with the scheme of re-ordering the outer world to fit with the demands of modern

Islam. In fact, this dichotomy will prove, in my opinion, one of the critical stress points that will contribute to ending the cycle of the First Wave of modern Islam. The mass piety movements in the Muslim world, with one or two important exceptions, appear to me structurally different from their equivalent in Victorian Britain or the US. They lack the social mobilisation component around which entire segments of the early modern economy had been built—from the co-op movements to the friendly building societies of the Quakers; from the model worker dwellings of Cadbury to the New Town movement. In fact, I sense, admittedly with no serious research to back what I am saying, that the more overt are the signs of Islamisation (say in the number of mosques being constructed, the percentage of covered women or the number of Islamic bank branches) the less are the signs of mutual solidarity and support reflected in institutions and social programmes. And the less there is of charitable giving. There are exceptions of course as I had noted earlier. The Gulen movement of Turkey is one; but these are very early prototypes of the Second Wave, which I will be coming to.

Which brings me to the third aspect of the modern Islam project—that of affecting the consciousness of Muslims.

Islamic Consciousness

The issue of raising the *wa'iy* or consciousness of Muslims is a cardinal element in all the action programmes of proselytising Islamic groups and parties. But this consciousness is almost entirely understood in political, doctrinal and behavioural terms, taking for granted that there is little to be done about the forms in which the modern world has evolved. As a consequence the consciousness of modern day Muslims—and Islamists in particular—is overwhelmingly utilitarian, rationalistic, reductive and quantitative—in fact diametrically opposed to the consciousness of the past. It is a completely de-sacralised mind, a mind moreover that lives in what Weber called a “disenchanted” world. The divine cannot be experienced directly. A person’s only duty is to live his or her life according to the Law. This of course heightens the inherent contradiction of living in a manner which effectively banished the sacred from one’s life; while at the same time proclaiming your fealty to a world view whose essential precepts you no longer experience—or aspire to experience. The Sharia becomes then a crutch which a person uses to proclaim his or her separateness; while at the same time contriving to use it to justify all manner of desires. Revelation in the service of Mammon. This cannot continue for much longer without something giving way. Some of us of a certain age might recall the impact of a series of essays by ex-communists—Koestler, Crossman and the like—entitled “The God that Failed” about their disillusion with communism. I notice a deluge of articles and essays in the same vein by former Islamists all around the theme of “The Islamism that Failed.”

So if modern Islam is no longer about state, society or consciousness, what is left of this grand scheme? What is left I am afraid is simply power and dominion—an ideology for some, a route to power, and a validation of continuity in power for others. Wherever this has happened, it will bring within it the seeds of the downfall of the First Wave of Modern Islam.

This is mainly now defined by three dominant currents.

Three Currents — Salafism and Wahhabism

The first is the world of the Salafi and Wahhabi Muslim, based on a materialist utilitarianism wedded with a rigid literalism. This creates the juxtaposition of archaic norms of life and

conduct, supposedly demanded by an invariant faith, twinned with the most relentless expressions of materialist excess. Calvin and Gotham! But not quite! There are only superficial similarities between the Salafis and Wahhabis and their equivalent in other great religious traditions, say Christianity. The esteem given to those who make money, and the obligation of sharing it by tithing or *zakat*, are points of similarity. The tensions between a puritanical literalism and the imperatives of ethical action were not successfully resolved by seeking the source of ethics only in the interpretation of scriptural texts. Ethics emerging from the law rather than preceding and relating to the Law. At some point, the paths demanded by each parted ways—with a group, such as the Dutch Reformed Church providing the religious scaffolding for the system of apartheid, while another, say the puritan tradition of New England, giving rise to its complete opposite, the Abolitionists of William Lloyd Garrison.

At present, of course, there seems to be little evidence that Salafism/Wahhabism will bifurcate in this manner; but in time it must. The great issue will not be race, but the treatment of women. There is simply no getting around the fact that Salafism, but especially Wahhabism, is deeply misogynist and cannot accommodate the idea of equality, or even equivalence, of women to men in its theology. Once enough head of steam is built up—by greater education, by resistance to stereotyping, by the demands of natural justice—then the pressures on the regnant theology and its guardians will be enormous for it will come from everyday life and not from some grand liberation theory. We are not there yet, but I doubt that this great trauma will be too far away. Salafism/Wahhabism is now on a roll, fuelled not only by the proverbial Saudi money and the horrible euphemism of “...charitable giving by wealthy Gulf merchants”; but also because this peculiar form of religious puritanism appeals to the recently urbanised, consumerist, new middle classes of the Muslim World, seeking certainty and affirmation.

Here again, it is a matter of time before the unremitting materialism to which these people are prone, gives way to a loss of religious enthusiasm. Two generations raised on computer games and social media, fast food and mall shopping, designer labels and SUV’s, credit cards and mortgages, and their future offshoots, will surely push many to put an end to this form of religious zealotry. For the moment, it seems to have the opposite effect, where the worst excesses of triumphant capitalist gigantism seem to coexist happily with the most rigid forms of religious practice. The transformation of Mecca into a giant shopping mall with the sacred precincts ringed by outsize luxury hotels and shopping arcades—supposedly to accommodate the ever-rising number of pilgrims—is ample testimony to this. The irony (and tragedy) of turning the sacred into the tawdry is a by-product of the literalist utilitarian mind set of the Wahhabis and Salafis. If there are no Sharia injunctions against building skyscrapers next to the Ka’aba, then it is acceptable to do so. The same logic applies to the destruction of historic monuments and other sacred sites. We worship God and not things; therefore turn the house of Khadija, the wife of the Prophet, into a parking lot. This may continue well into the future, but only at the expense of the religious sensibility and commitment of the people.

Shia Islam

A second current into which modern Islam has flowed is the abrupt sideway turn of Shia Islam, represented by the strange system of governance that has emerged in Iran. I do not want to go into the merits or demerits of the Islamic Revolution, but only to conjecture on whether it will be long lasting and thus vindicate this particular turn in modern Islam. Iran is not a theocracy but an Imamocracy, drawing on a neologism. It is a country run by a privileged substratum of the clerical classes in alliance with the elite security forces, basing their rule on an unconventional

interpretation of the role of the jurists in the absence of the Hidden Imam of the Twelver Shias. The enabling theology behind this amazing conclusion is too complex to go into now, but it has a finite shelf-life as it were. Perhaps because I will very likely not be around to see its results, I will make the prediction that the Iranian system of government will not exist, in its present form, by the end of the next quarter century. The internal conflicts within this system are not to do with the issue of the treatment of half the population. No matter the constraints on women in present day Iran, their lot is significantly better than their counterparts in the Salafi/Wahhabi world, and will very likely improve within the limits of the current system. What will force the fundamental changes in Iran are two matters: the first is to do with the issue of succession to an all-powerful leader; the other issue is the drive to regional power and even supremacy by a development-oriented and authoritarian security force.

I do not believe that the ruling clerical groups can or even desire to hand over unlimited power to one of their own, after the demise of the current Supreme Leader, without significantly curtailing and circumscribing his power. In other words, the appropriation of authority from the Hidden Imam will become collegial and thus open to debate, pressure and change. The tensions here will be between a rationalist and pragmatic politics framed within a supra-rationalist doctrine of the actions of the Perfect Man of Shia dogma. Already, there is a clear dichotomy between the two, and this is likely to grow.

The second matter is that Iran is one of the few countries in the Islamic world that has the potential to break out as an economic power house, with its autonomy and independence intact. Partly because of its international isolation, Iran has not been dependent on either foreign investments or on foreign powers to maintain its standing. There is a powerful, latent force within Iran that wants to actualise this potential and may now have the opportunity to do so. The security elites of Iran—in particular the Revolutionary Guards Corps – already control large swathes of the economy, but unlike the military in Egypt or Pakistan, they are not primarily designed to keep the top brass in clover and above scrutiny. If you add to this the economic bodies under the control of the Supreme Leader, the so-called *bonyads* or religious foundations, you have a huge concentration of capital that if managed efficiently and productively could form the bases of Iran's economic resurgence. Under normalised conditions, Iran will try to modernise its economy at breakneck speed in a path that will combine the Chinese experience and that of Korea under Park Chung Hee. No wonder the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia are in no end of panic.

I am not concerned here with geopolitical rivalries, only with what these trends imply for the course of modern Islam. The quarantining of the Iranian revolution by war and sanctions contained its revolutionary consequences; it was then conflated with Shia Islam, thus narrowing its appeal even more where the Shia do not constitute more than 15% of the Islamic world; we are now in the third cycle of containment, where it is now linked nearly exclusively to the power drive of the nation state of Iran, and its budding empire in the so-called Shia crescent. The turn towards a development-oriented authoritarianism will further reduce its specifically Islamic content. You can deal with Iran as a power and a state, but still hound and imprison your Shia population at will, as Malaysia seems to be doing. This development is not that unusual. The Soviet Union had earlier discovered that its allies abroad could easily imprison and decimate their local communists with no effect on their relationship with the Soviet Union.

Jihadi Islam

The third direction into which modern Islam has stumbled—quite unexpectedly I might add from a historical point of view—is the nihilism and cult of extreme violence that has gripped all manner of people acting under the rubric of jihadis. It is obviously a product of modern times—even contemporary times. One is hard put to find any equivalent either in the past or in recent history (before 1980, say) with which one can find an element of continuity. Perhaps the temporary Wahhabi conquest of the Arabian Peninsula in the late 18th and early 19th century which was accompanied with huge killings, is the nearest such case. The paradox of this jihadi Islam is that it is rejected by most Muslims at all levels, but accepted by a significant number at some levels. I will not mince words here. Most Salafi/Wahhabis approve, are ambivalent about or are silent about jihadi violence against non-Muslims but especially against Shia Muslims and other heterodox factions of Islam. Only a minority reject it out of hand. In the former case, the ferocious response of the US after the attacks of 9/11 has made jihadis and their supporters pause to think of the consequences of their actions against a mighty foe. But as for non-Muslims in Muslim lands and Shias, other heterodox sects of Islam and Sufis, it has been fair game. The terrorists and nihilists of 19th century Europe were mainly self-contained revolutionary cells with little or no connection to state power. (The Serbian Black Hand being an exception. They gave us the pretext for World War I). This is emphatically not the case with the jihadis of modern Islam. They are autonomous entities with their own programme of revolutionary action, but they are often connected to states and when this occurs their actions are made to coincide with achieving state objectives. There is no need to elaborate on the relationship between the mujahidin of Afghanistan and the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan; or the connections of al-Qaeda and its various manifestations and franchises with Saudi intelligence or the limitless generosity of Gulf well-wishers—as if these people can act independently of state power in places like Kuwait, the UAE or Qatar.

Suicide bombings, decapitations, slaughter of innocents, rapine, desecration of holy sites, segregation of communities, shunning of minorities—these are now inextricably linked with the fate of modern Islam. I have witnessed all of this at first hand, so I am not theorising. Alliances of this kind, between states and terrorists and criminals, are not uncommon in history to achieve singular objectives. But this goes way beyond such tactical understandings. I will say bluntly that selective appeal to jihadis and jihadi violence is an integral aspect of Wahhabi thinking on power and an entire theology has evolved to warrant and celebrate such atrocities. Ancient notions of what is legitimate in sanctified warfare are now commonplace justifications for barbarities of all kind, including sexual enslavement in the Islamists version of the comfort women that serviced the Japanese army of WWII. This perverse development has crept into the discourse of modern Islam, with people who are far away from the world of the jihadis, eagerly debating the finer points of the theology of basically, how to treat the Other. The demeaning of the spirit of Islam from this turn of events is devastating.

Islamic Parties and Movements

I do not want to minimise the significance of the seemingly most obvious expressions of modern Islam—namely Islamic political parties and movements, and those that are euphemistically called “Islamically-rooted”. The Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots; the Jam’at Islami in Pakistan; the newly formed Salafi parties in Egypt (Nour) and in Indonesia (PKS); the AK Party in Turkey; the mass movements of Nahdat al-Ulema and the Muhamadiya in Indonesia; the Gulen movement and the Nursis in Turkey; the Tablighis, and so on. These are perhaps the most

important heirs of the early founders of modern Islam, and in this respect should be considered the living embodiment of modern Islam.

But are they that in truth? I doubt it.

To me they represent the end of the cycle that began with the reformers of the 19th century and continued in the bewilderment after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. The mass piety movements were all in one way or another concerned with the loss of faith and authenticity; the Islamic political parties were organised for achieving power; the social and educational movements grew as the modern nation state in most Muslim countries proved inadequate to the task of providing a decent standard of public services. The tools that they used to achieve their objectives are all either hopelessly dated, or they have been cornered into accepting the rulebook of democratic processes. It is ironic that the Muslim Brotherhood, stripped of its power in the Egyptian counter-revolution of June/July 2012, does not base its resistance to the army-led government with calls for Islamist solidarity but on democratic legitimacy. There is no Islamist political, social or economic project beyond being ensconced in power.

So what does Islam mean in the context of parties who carry that label but offer nothing in particular except that they pretend to being able to manage the state in a more effective manner than their competitors, and seem to have a fixation on the state of public and private morality.

My own explanation as to why there was an abrupt and massive collapse in the support base of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is not that they bungled the management of the state, or were intent on Islamising it—no matter what that meant. There is really very little evidence of that beyond the meanderings and incoherence of the Morsi presidency, which in and of itself is insufficient to warrant a military intervention followed by massive and unprecedented killings. Rather, it is to do with the recognition of the mass of the electorate that the Islamist project is really nothing more than the assumption of the mantle of power, for no other end than because it is what political parties do. The Islamist project of the Islamic political parties is a hollow construct precisely because there is nothing Islamic in it apart from the numbing repetition of the words Islamic and Sharia. In reality, those in the electorate who believed in the rhetoric and were prepared to give the Brotherhood the benefit of the doubt saw the reality when the Brotherhood was in power and uncovered the fraud for what it was. Lincoln Steffens, the American reporter, who visited the Soviet Union after the October Revolution, came back with the quote “I have seen the future; and it works.” The electorate in Egypt who dramatically shifted their support from the Brotherhood to the coup makers could very well have said: “We have seen the future: and it doesn’t work.”

But what about the AK Party? Isn’t it after all the best example of the co-existence of Islam and democracy?

The AK Party did remove petty restrictions on the wearing of the hijab and affirmed the rights of the petty-minded to have religious education, but otherwise one can hardly point to an Islamisation project, unless it is in fact finding a solution to that old canard, the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The AK tamed the military and the judiciary but it has always upheld the ultimately secular nature of the Turkish state. It has pursued a neo-Ottoman foreign policy twinned with social conservatism and a very dynamic and successful policy of economic management. From the perspective of modern Islam, its most significant achievement could well be the reformulation of the Sharia, through a revisionist programme that is focussing on

reforming the understanding of the Prophetic hadith. But we have to await the results of this effort before one can pass judgement on its efficacy and ultimate appropriateness.

The End of the First Wave of Modern Islam

The evidence that the First Wave of modern Islam is coming to an end is thus quite compelling. But the end is coming with a bang and not a whimper.

The reason is twofold.

Salafisation

First is the increasing pace of Salafisation of mainstream Sunni Islam. How and why this has come about is beyond this lecture, but it has certainly affected all the traditional centres of Sunni Islam. The discourse of Salafism and Wahhabism has moved from the periphery to the centre of the world of Sunni Islam and with it has gone the nuanced and mystically-inflected forms of traditional Sunnism. The preoccupations of Wahhabism in particular with literalism and easy declamations of heresy are now quite common. Ordinary folk are now more than likely to worship in Saudi or Kuwaiti financed mosques, preached to by ulema who have attended gratis the Wahhabi academies of Saudi Arabia, and look there for their guidance and direction. This development makes it all the easier to accept Wahhabism's a-historicity, its indifference to heritage and tradition, and to act upon the main preoccupations of Wahhabism, mainly the quarantine and elimination of what it sees are unacceptable accretions to the religion. The barrenness of the resulting culture is too sad to contemplate, for it eliminates all the creative vitality of the religion. I challenge anyone to mention one noteworthy work of literature, art, architecture or craft that has emerged from the world of the Salafis and Wahhabis over the decades, even centuries. The counterpart to that is the immersion of the common folk in material accumulation to the exclusion of almost everything else of true value.

Which brings me to the catastrophe-in-the-making to modern Islam by the accelerating schism between the Shia and Sunni Muslims.

Shia-Sunni Conflict

Some might say that this is overdramatizing what has been in effect a permanent divide in Islamic history, but this entirely misses the mark. Until very recently there had been a consensus amongst Muslims regarding traumatic episodes in early Islamic history, namely the rightness of the cause of Ali versus Mua'wiyya, and the events leading to the martyrdom of Hussein, the son of Ali. These are of course key elements in Shia Islam, but one could declare oneself on the side of Ali and Hussein without necessarily accepting Shia doctrine. Nearly all the Sufi *tariqas*, staunchly Sunni in legal matters, trace their lineage to Ali. In fact many of the figures of early modern Islam were born Shia, such as the pan Islamic agitator Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Asadabadi al-Afghani, but nearly all his key followers, stalwarts of modern Islam such as Abduh and Ridha, were Sunni.

However, a combination of factors has moved what is in essence a doctrinal conflict within the folds of Islam into a lethal animosity. Wahhabism's hostility to Shia Islam has never abated but it was kept in check by the realpolitik policies of the Wahhabi's strategic allies, the House of Saud; and the confinement of Wahhabism to the area of central Arabia. Following the Iranian revolution, the Saudis felt exposed to Iran's revolutionary fervour and sought to contain it by

first encouraging Iraq's war effort and subsequently by relying on the US's military presence in the Gulf. This policy was seriously jeopardised by the invasion of Iraq which seemed to empower Iran even further by installing a Shia led government in Baghdad. Surreptitious support to al-Qaeda in Iraq did not end with the fall of the new order in Iraq pushing the Saudis into adopting a more indirect strategy of demonising Iran and Shiism in the broader Islamic world. The ramping up of anti-Shia sectarian discourse can be traced to the mid 2000's with the congruence of Saudi fears of Iranian hegemony with the traditional Wahhabi rejection of Shia Islam. This has now seeped into a number of Islamic countries, some with insignificant Shia populations. It has also neatly coincided with the indiscriminate violence of jihadis against Shia populations in Iraq and Pakistan, and has proved a powerful rallying cry for the tens of thousands of jihadis currently fighting in the Syrian civil war. Wahhabi and jihadi hatred of Shia Islam now easily trumps any antipathy to the west. I believe the Wahhabi project is nothing less than the expulsion of Shia Muslims from the fold of Islam, in fact treating Shiism as a different and hostile religion to be confronted and vanquished. What the Shia are supposed to do when faced with such an onslaught beggars the imagination.

These are the elements that I think could augur the start of the second wave of modern Islam in a universe of division, hostility, strife and recrimination; and the apparent ascendancy of Salafism/Wahhabism in the Sunni lands of Islam. Sunni Islam might not totally surrender the understanding of the religion to the fringe interpretations of Wahhabism, but there is little doubt that the centre of gravity of Sunni Islam has shifted dramatically towards acceptance of key Salafi/Wahhabi doctrines and tenets. The consequences of this to the welfare and vitality of Islam are enormous.

But still, is this new turn a true disjuncture which decades from now a future historian can look back and say that the events of this period marked a fundamental break in the story of modern Islam? Are we witnessing the beginnings of Islam's version of the Thirty Years War whose outcome though uncertain will nevertheless be decisive in defining the forms of the next wave?

Almost by definition events overlie deeper structures, and dramatic twists and turns might appear less so from the safe perspective and distance of a longer time framework. However, I cannot believe that this is merely froth on top of the wave, for it is affecting both the mentalities and perspectives of people, and at some level also the way that they organise their daily lives. If communities segregate and avoid or even demonise each other; if intimate matters such as marriage, family and friendships become hostage to deep sectarianism, then they will create their own realities which in turn become structural.

Reformation, Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement in Islam

The transition of modern Islam from one world to another has been difficult and fraught with problems. The cycle is ending in failure—at least in terms of the three aspects which it sought to change: State, society and consciousness. Naive calls have been made from time to time for an Islamic Reformation or an Islamic Enlightenment, to somehow track Islam along the trajectory of Christianity and the modern world. In fact both of these have been experienced but not necessarily with the expected results. If one means by “Reformation” the breakdown of traditional forms of authority and hierarchy, then Wahhabism is a distorted form of such a reformation of Islam. If by “Enlightenment” we mean the enthronement of reason at the heart of human endeavour, then we have also had that ever since Syed Ahmad Khan and the quest for a rationalist and rationalising Islam. Both Reformation and Enlightenment have ended with

completely unexpected results as I have tried to outline.

History does not deal with roads that were not taken but I will nevertheless try to envisage the enlivenment of a crucial potential within Islam as the route towards the revival of an altogether different expression of the religion. Neither reformation nor Enlightenment; But what I say Islam needs is its own version of the “Romantic Movement”, which privileges the individual, honours the drive for human perfectibility, an ethic of toleration, a theology of freedom and justice, a cultivation of the sense of the ineffable and its attributes of beauty and creativity. All this within a structure that is built on the notion of the ethical and the acknowledgement and experience of the sacred.

The “Romantic Movement“ of Islam will re-imagine the faith and challenge the new dogmas and the authority behind them. It will elevate ethics to a central position in Islam, and see its source in the universe of ideals and archetypes, rooted in the attributes of God; and not exclusively in the meticulous observation of rules and strictures. It will seek inclusiveness and acknowledge diversity and multiplicity. It will celebrate nature and protect the natural order. It will accept the validity of other expressions of religious belief. It will seek to expand the realm of individual freedoms and liberties. It will seek new forms of communal solidarity, transactions and ownership. It will redefine the nature of legitimate authority and subject it to constraints. It will seek to redress the chasms of inequality and disadvantage. It will rebalance gender relations.

The Renaissance in Europe was based on the rediscovery of the classics of antiquity; the Renaissance of Islam might very well emerge from the recovery of the ‘imaginal’, a form of thinking and experiencing which has produced its own edifice of spiritual knowledge, but which has been deliberately belittled or ignored by its castigators. Its greatest exponent is the medieval mystic, Muhy al-Din ibn ‘Arabi but his legacy has been misappropriated and misdirected. Ibn ‘Arabi is of course hated by the Salafis and Wahhabis, precisely because his rendering of Islam is completely at odds with their literalism, and points a course for Islam that is utterly alien, even unthinkable for them. The ulema of the Shia are ambivalent and often hostile to Ibn ‘Arabi and to mystical thinking generally because it challenges them at the level of doctrinal authority. I am not saying that we should all start reading the 200-odd works of Ibn ‘Arabi or immerse ourselves in the works of Rumi, Ibn al-Faridh and Attar, and expect to stop the march to self-destruction. It is a fundamental start that may halt the galloping desertification of modern Islamic thought and practice implicit by the emergence of a Salafi/Wahhabi ascendancy. It is also a powerful antidote to the consumerist materialism that has seized the minds of the Muslim middle classes. And has submerged us in a world devoid of colour, beauty and originality, producing crass urban landscapes and degraded natural environments; and mind-sets and outlooks that demean the human spirit.

Conclusion

The next wave of modern Islam could well be defined by the heirs of Ibn Taymiyyah, the medieval theologian who is the inspiration to the Salafis and Wahhabis; confronting the as-yet undefined heirs of Ibn ‘Arabi; and the battleground will be the course of modern Islam in the next several generations. If the potential of the inner dimensions of Islam are not realised and there is no such grand stand-off, then the world of Islam could well bifurcate into Salafi/Wahhabi domination of the majority Sunni world; and a rump and alienated Shia Islam huddling around a resurgent Iran. The Second Wave of modern Islam will therefore not be the occasion of its revival but it could well set it on the path to its ruination as a vital civilising force.

I will conclude with lines from William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming". Its relevance to the Second Wave of Modern Islam is clear:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,

Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born

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