

# The roots of Islamist popularity

ROBBERT A F L WOLTERING

**ABSTRACT** *In this article I will answer the question why, in the Islamic world, Islamist activism finds the support that it apparently does among segments of the general public of the various countries. In particular, the initial elements and circumstances that induce a person to support or even join an Islamist group are the subject of this study. After defining the notion of Islamism in the first section, I shall give an assessment of the popularity of Islamism. Following upon this, the third section will show that the conditionalities which drive a person towards an Islamist inclination or conviction cannot in the main have anything to do with the Islamic religion per se. Lastly it will be argued that these conditionalities are rather to be found in a wide array of interacting political, social, historical and economic factors.*

In order to know what it is that draws people to an Islamist ideology it is of course first necessary to get an idea of what this ideology entails. Here I will give a short outline of what the literature on ‘political Islam’ or ‘Islamism’ in general has to say about the goals of this ideology.<sup>1</sup> Later it will be made clear that the discourse of Islamism cannot account for all the support which it enjoys, nor for the type of support. First of all, I would like to define Islamism by looking at what it desires, and by investigating what these desires imply.

## What is Islamism?

For all their diversity, what all Islamist groups have in common is the desire to ‘Islamise’ society: their desire is to change the very basics of the social fabric. It is the belief of Islamists that today there is no society in the world that lives according to the principles of Islam, and that this is a bad thing. So they state their goal in religious terms: there should be more Islam in society. As to the political aspect of their desire, all Islamists have in common the conviction that sooner or later the realm of politics will have to be altered fundamentally. Islamisation may start at the bottom, or it may be implemented from above, but it is clear that any Islamisation of society cannot be complete until the existing political system of the country in question is replaced with a—usually undefined—Islamic one. Ideally, such a replacement would result in an ‘Islamic state’. Although this desired result is rarely satisfactorily defined, and the proposed road towards it varies with each separate Islamist group, the implementation of *shari’a* is an almost constant factor in the advocated goal of Islamisation. However, *shari’a*, in turn, is more of a collective noun than a term

*Robbert Woltering can be reached at Recht Boomssloot 6-1, Amsterdam 1011 EA, The Netherlands.*

denoting one specific body or system of law. Given the Islamists' desire to replace the political system, Islamist groups are not comparable to Christian–Democratic parties in Western Europe, Hindu parties in East Africa or the Jewish Shass party in Israel, since these do not seek to overthrow the system but rather to participate in it and, by doing so, to obtain maximum advantage from it. In short, Islamist groups state a religious goal of Islamisation, and have the political conviction that only an overthrow of the existing political system in favour of 'something Islamic' will be able to bring this Islamisation to completion.

Very few of these groups are capable of rebelling against the prevailing authority in any way other than through often secretly held meetings and through the spreading of leaflets. Those that use violence are widely publicised.

The discussion about whether there are 'moderate Islamists' is difficult because, in order to find the answer, one would have to look inside the head of the supposed 'moderate'. If he (or she) engages in parliamentary elections, can he be termed a 'moderate Islamist', and has he thus been 'tamed'?<sup>2</sup> My contention is that those 'Islamists' who have genuinely accepted the rules of the system they participate in should not be called Islamists, because they no longer have the desire to overthrow this system. By and large, they resemble Christian–Democratic parties in the West. Given the authoritarian nature of most regimes targeted by Islamist activity, it is no great surprise that so far there have been almost no examples of a convincing turnover from an Islamist group into a 'tamed' political party. Also, the less than constructive posture of, for instance, Egypt's Muslim Brother parliamentarians (as independents) may well serve as an example of the resilience of the Islamists' political desire for a complete victory over the prevailing system.<sup>3</sup> However, in the field of religion there have been notable occasions where an Islamist group has adapted its initial religious views when the political situation has required it.<sup>4</sup> The practice of Islamist politics—if closely observed—leads one to conclude that religious fervour inevitably becomes subordinate to *realpolitik*. Possibly the most telling example of this comes from an edict by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988: 'the requirements of government supersede every tenet [of Islam], including even those of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca.'<sup>5</sup> It appears that in the field of religion Islamists tend to compromise more than in the political field. Thus it should be concluded that Islamism is inherently a political phenomenon, conceived mainly out of political motives.

The approaches taken towards achieving the Islamist goal almost always involve the quest for popular support. This support is often pursued by providing basic goods and services to the public. An Islamist organisation may offer housing, food, work and education, all of which are a tremendous improvement to people who have none or too little of them, a situation which serves as an obstacle to a normal life and, in particular, impedes a normal family life. Apart from material provisions, Islamist organisations bestow a high level of dignity and value on the moral standards of society, which are equated with the Islamic heritage. They claim 'authenticity' of conduct on all accounts: social, economic, religious and political. This authenticity is juxtaposed with elements which have entered society from abroad and retain a 'foreign' identity. Most of these elements are, as a product of past colonisation and current world domination,

originally Western elements. The elements protested against by means of the claim on ‘authenticity’ can range from secularism and democracy, to playing with Barbie dolls and the wearing of a tie.

Generally, Islamism is defined more or less as an ideology of protest. Its discourse is usually rigid and simplistic, and rarely worked out beyond the level of slogan chanting.

### **When, where and amongst whom is (or was) Islamism popular?**

Throughout the 14 centuries of Islamic history there have not been sufficient instances of Islamism to justify setting Islam apart as inherently any more or less ‘political’ than, say, Christianity. Islamist discourse itself draws its examples of an ‘Islamist state’ from the period which started with Muhammad’s Medinan society (the first *ummah*), which was founded in 622 AD and lasted until the end of the subsequent period of the Rightly Guided Caliphs in 665. Since then, there have been ‘Islamist’ uprisings, which succeeded only in very few cases. None of these successes is counted as such by the current Islamists, mainly because of their sectarian nature (eg the Mahdist state in Sudan 1881–98 is disqualified for its Sufist nature). Certainly therefore, Islamism should be regarded as a modern phenomenon. Indeed, pioneers of Islamist ideologies are not to be found until the end of the 19th century, eg Gamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97) and Muhammad Abdu (1849–1905). This leads us to believe that the roots of its support should also be searched for in concurrent modern phenomena.

As regards the period in which Islamism gained support, most literature cites the 1970s to 1980s as the starting point. Gilles Kepel is more exact and places the start of modern Islamist discourse in the 1960s, and the beginning of an upsurge in its popularity in the late 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

The most well known of all Islamist groups is to be found in Egypt: the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, today it has a significant following among segments of the Egyptian populace, especially students, but also educated professionals such as medical personnel and engineers. Foreign branches were established, *inter alia*, in Jordan and Syria. None of these branches and offshoots, however, has ever acquired the same popularity as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, practically all other Islamist groups are far smaller than the Muslim Brothers. There is, however, a significant number of them. While most are to be found in the Arabic-speaking world, there are notable exceptions to this in Turkey, Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Iran. These countries all have in common the fact that they have all at one time been (and in several ways still are) under Western influence, if not (colonial) domination, and at that time adopted a European system of rule. Furthermore, almost none of these countries has experienced the kind and degree of improvement that their populations were promised shortly after they had acquired independence. Together with most other countries which acquired their independence in the latter half of the twentieth century, with the exception of Turkey, they constitute the bulk of the ‘Third World’. It may be useful to look upon these countries in this vein; some of the sets of problems evident in, for instance, sub-Saharan African countries are, as we will see, often

also applicable to other Third World countries.<sup>7</sup> The root causes of Islamist support may lay partly in this area.

Looking at the wide variety of studies on Islamism, one is struck by the fact that the great majority of supporters of Islamist ideology are young people, and often most of them are well educated.<sup>8</sup> In Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and Indonesia among others, students have always been the main protagonists in the Islamist struggle (although there would normally be men in their 40s or older at the head of the organisation). It should therefore be clear that these supporters cannot be regarded as lacking the intellect to dismiss all too simple ideologies. It should be assumed that they have a compelling reason to support or join an Islamist group.

### **Why the reason behind Islamist popularity cannot be Islamic**

In the previous section it was made clear that the popularity of Islamism is to be found in a number of Third World Muslim countries—predominantly among well educated young people in Arab countries—and that the ideology of Islamism was first formulated at the end of the 19th century, and only gained significant support in the latter decades of the twentieth century. What is important is that this observation leaves out a great number of countries that are Muslim, but do not have a significant number of Islamist supporters. In fact, there could well be more than a billion people who are considered to be, and consider themselves as, Muslim, but who cannot be regarded as supporters of Islamism. Finally, it leaves out 13 centuries of Islamic history in which Islamism failed to make a noteworthy appearance.

Therefore it is impossible to sustain the idea that Islamism is a political ideology which is in any way inherent to Islam. Indeed, to say this is to say that for 13 centuries there have been no true Muslims, and that also today the majority of the world's Muslims are not true to their faith. In other words, one would be siding with the Islamists' worldview. Usually the so-called 'strictness' of Islamists' religious beliefs is considered to be a prerequisite for any person to be associated with Islamism.<sup>9</sup> This rests upon the idea that Islam must play a part in the attractiveness of Islamism. However, it has been noted that in fact Islamists are *not* the most pious of Muslims, and they certainly do not belong to those most versed in what is generally considered the canon of Islamic knowledge. The students who appear to be such prominent activists are in fact students of the exact sciences, rarely students of theology.<sup>10</sup> Therefore it cannot be sustained that the popularity of Islamism is linked to the 'Muslimness' of its supporters, or that it is derived from the presumption that Islamism is Islamic.

But how can one say that something called 'Islamism' is not Islamic? How can one say that there is nothing Islamic about an ideology that clearly states that it is imperative for all *Muslims* to adhere to its standpoint that the society needs to be re-Islamicised and governed according to its authentic *Islamic* principles? Those who attribute most influence to Islam must surely be the best adherents of it? This reasoning confuses the power of the word with its actual meaning. To a certain extent this can be compared to utterly authoritarian regimes which call themselves democratic, or to George W Bush waging a war 'for freedom', or to

Zionist ideology claiming to work for all the world's Jews.<sup>11</sup> All Muslims obviously feel that Islam is wonderful, the best that God could have given to mankind. It is politically expedient to use this common belief when trying to mobilise popular or financial support.

To 'blame' Islam for Islamist support is to blame French patriotism for the popularity of Jean-Marie Le Pen; of course the man mentions 'la patrie' in every second sentence, but this does not mean that the voters for his Front National (FN) are any more or less patriotic than others. In most cases a measure of patriotism will be a *prerequisite* for an FN vote, but it is not at all *sufficient*. The same is true for Islamist popularity and Islam; it is a prerequisite to consider oneself Muslim in order possibly to become an Islamist, but it is not enough.

If Islamist popularity is not derived from Islam, but rather from as yet undefined elements in certain Third World countries and their student constituencies, then why do we not hear of comparable 'Christianist', 'Hinduisticist' or 'Animisticist' groups in the student bodies of comparable Third World countries?

In many ways it could indeed be said that Islamism as an ideology is unique. But this does not mean that an uncompromising and sometimes violent ideology which claims a religion is only to be found in the form of Islamism. What makes Islamism unique is that it claims to base itself on Islam, the only great religion to have both its place of origin and the countries in which it is dominant, situated in the Third World, spread out over a vast region extending from Morocco to Indonesia. It is because of this immense geographical spread that Islamism has an international, even global dimension, which caters for the media attention it receives and facilitates names such as 'World Wide Islamic Front of so and so', more than does the theological notion of the *ummah*, or 'Muslim community'. In order to show that Islamism is not unique in the sense that it claims a religion for politics, one could point to the political history of the Christian churches. However, these arguments are usually put aside with the statement that, ever since the Enlightenment and other liberal developments, the West has managed to do away with the destructive powers of religion through the separation of church and state.<sup>12</sup> Indeed examples should be drawn from modern times. And they are easily found in various forms of animism that have been and still are being used or abused in political activities of both peaceful and violent character.<sup>13</sup>

The 'problem' is that these forms of animism are small and isolated from one another and can never achieve anything of an international dimension. To find mention of them, one would have to read the African press. As for contemporary political Christianity, it is worth noting that the region that spread this religion is the affluent West: an Anglican or Catholic in, say, Zambia who desires politically to instrumentalise his (or her) religion, would soon find himself overruled by the higher echelons of clerical authority<sup>14</sup> if this instrumentalisation ran counter to Western interests. And a protest group which doesn't protest against the West will not receive as much publicity as those that do. It may not be a coincidence that so-called traditionalist religions and 'independent churches' are on the increase all over sub-Saharan Africa, and it is to be expected that these religions will increasingly take on a political discourse.<sup>15</sup> As for Hinduism, indeed we *do* find it used for political ends. In its core area of the Indian subcontinent Hinduism is used in politics, in all its forms, both peacefully and violently. The fact that in

Hindu history and religion there is nothing which justifies a political connotation to Hinduism, apparently does not hinder some Hindus from forming Hindu nationalist groups, who may decide to kill Gandhi, to chase away Christian missionaries or to burn down mosques.

Most people would not readily assume that the problem with the murder of Gandhi, the hostility towards Christian missions and the burning of mosques is caused by 'Hinduism'. It would be hard to find people who would conclude that therefore 'Hinduism has a problem'. A Hindu nationalist could invite all Hindus to join his struggle in the name of Hinduism, and some Hindus might agree to his request, using all sorts of religious utterances when doing so; but they would be making that choice on the basis of something else. It is the comparable basis on which Islamists make their choice which will be made clear below, using the knowledge of the demographic, social, economic, political and historic factors which surround the people who decide to join the Islamist struggle.

### **A constellation of forces driving Islamist support**

Most of the Islamic countries are part of the Third World. Almost all of the Third World is made up of countries which used to be part of the European domain, from the capitals of which was decided how these 'future Third World countries' were to be exploited. After gaining independence, virtually all these countries adopted the existing political, economic and social structures which had been put in place by the colonial powers. These often included arbitrary borders, European-style governing bodies, authoritarian power structures, an economy aimed at international trade with the West, and a subordinate position in the international community. The colonial powers had left just before the yoke of a continuing demographic explosion would become unbearable. The problems ahead were articulated by the British Colonial Secretary Creech Jones in 1948:

We [will] be faced with a population problem of appalling dimensions ... We must expect a troublesome time ahead ... We cannot get all of them a place on the land and many of them would not wish it. They cannot on their present economies enjoy all the services which they begin to demand. They clamour for the benefits of civilization without the economic basis to sustain them ... We cannot for a long time hope to satisfy all the new appetites of the colonial peoples and consequently there must be discomfort and agitation.<sup>16</sup>

The problems predicted above have clearly actualised, and are still developing. All over Africa Third World countries are increasingly troubled by the pressures of a young population, who were born into independence and have started to rebel against the regimes which fail to deliver.<sup>17</sup> In these circumstances Islamism is only one of many revolutionary currents which tap into the feelings of discontent and deprivation among the young. At present, however, Islamism is the only current which, in the eyes of many, is relatively 'new' and 'untried', while at the same time purporting to carry a religio-historical justification, and claiming a vast geographical validity because of the spread of Muslims throughout the Third World and beyond.

People who decide to join an Islamist movement usually have in common the

fact that they are young, well educated, but in a weak socioeconomic position and excluded from the political process. In most cases they live in Third World societies. In all cases their societies have experienced a critical turning point in the colonial period, which eventually left them in a wholly different political and (socio)economic structure (even if their country was never an actual colony). Ever since, these societies have become increasingly aware of the material and immaterial niceties of Western civilisation, which continued to be present in one way or another after the de-colonisation. Especially in and around the oil-rich countries, people are well aware of the discrepancies between the wealth of the Western countries and the poverty of their own, because it is in these countries that Western interests are most apparent. In order to rally political support both regimes and opposition groups have found it useful to use populist rhetoric in the propagation of revolutionary ideologies. All over the Third World there have been strong socialist currents of a populist character and in many cases a 'socialist' regime has been installed, at least for a time. In other cases populism has been used to further a nationalist, pan-Arabist or pan-Africanist ideology.<sup>18</sup> All these ideologies have been tried for decades but in the eyes of most people they have failed to deliver sufficiently. After a varying number of decades since independence the Third World countries are still in the predicament foreseen by the aforementioned Colonial Secretary. It is not surprising therefore that many people are still being tempted by radical solutions, and Islamism is only the latest ideological embodiment of this desire in the Islamic parts of the Third World.

Apart from socioeconomic factors there is also a connection between Islamist support and generational conflict, along the lines of an educational divide. Philippe Fargues studied this phenomenon for the Arab world. Following the acquisition of independence one of the main objectives of the universally adopted goal of 'development', was education for the masses, both male and female. The vast spread of literacy created a division between generations since it only reached the young, and not those who had already passed the 'age of instruction'. Realising that they are more 'knowledgeable' than their elders, the literate young no longer feel comfortable within the patriarchal system, where they have to listen to sermons and rules designed for the illiterate. Refuting the ideologies of their fathers—Arabism and socialism—they turn to something of their own. Thanks to the demographic explosion this generational—educational divide is, numerically speaking, enormously in favour of the young, and the divide lies exactly around the age that also divides those statistically likely to have an Islamist inclination and those not likely, ie the years between 40 and 50.<sup>19</sup> The generational—educational factor can also explain why Islamism has significant female support. 'Inequality between the sexes created by educational institutions today affects the generation between 40 and 60 years old—the generation of power.'<sup>20</sup> Considering the traditionally subservient role of women in most Islamic societies, it is logical that the educated woman would want to start changing her status, and to take the management of her life into her own hands. What female Islamists are taking on is the generation of their illiterate parents, where the women listen to the men, in the way the men listen to the *imam*, and the *imam* to the political authorities. If there is going to be a revolution, this time the women want to be part of it.

The way Islamism is pictured depends to a great extent on the identity of the one painting the picture. In the West most people associate Islamism first with anti-Western slogans, aggressiveness and intolerance. This would probably draw little support from any population. But what would someone in Egypt, the Palestinian territories or Tunisia associate Islamism with? All over the Middle East people know that, even though they are repressed, the Islamists are repressed far more. Also they know about the socioeconomic programmes of the different Islamist groups. They know too that their corrupt regimes, with which they are often (at least) discontented, fear the Islamists. They hear the Islamists chant anti-corruption slogans more than the West hears them chant anti-Western slogans, they see Islamic hospitals opening their doors to those who cannot afford the regular hospitals. Imagine such a person, and then realise that this person has only read about, heard and seen these Islamists. What about the people who actually *enter* these Islamic hospitals, are *being fed* and *housed* by them? This is the socioeconomic propellor which drives people towards an understandable conviction that the Muslim Brothers, Hamas<sup>21</sup> or EnNahda<sup>22</sup> are to be highly respected for their work, and possibly, to be joined.

Obviously therefore, the socioeconomic factors can account for a lot of the support enjoyed, for instance, by the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. As for the ideological factor, I believe that this is less important. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Islamist ideologists have written extensively about one particular concept: 'authenticity'.<sup>23</sup> Consisting of a 'destructive' part and a 'constructive' part, it condemns various forms of foreign, usually Western, imports as 'un-Islamic' and presents an Islamic alternative. Here I will only focus on the 'destructive' part of the ideology of 'Islamic authenticity', which rejects 'Western influences'. The fact that many people cannot afford imported goods would again be a plausible economic explanation for the acceptance of this part of the ideology. But a more truly ideological explanation can also be given.

In the condemnation of part or all of the West by Islamists, the USA is often designated as their nemesis. It has been—and still is—argued that the Islamists' revulsion towards the West stems from Muslim feelings of humiliation occasioned by the fact that Islamic countries have found themselves subordinate to the West since the late 18th century. In this explanation, mainly given vent to by Bernard Lewis, it is argued that there are vestiges of an originally Manichaeic belief in 'a cosmic power struggle between Good and Evil' in all three great monotheistic religions, but 'Islam's problem' is that it never got rid of the dangerous implications this has, because it did not experience anything similar to the Enlightenment and subsequent separation of church and state. Now that the Muslim world has been subjugated on a global scale, it is presented as inevitable that Muslims continue their 14 centuries-old struggle between East and West, Islam and (post-)Christianity, 'Good and Evil'. Regardless of what the West does, this struggle will have to rage until 'more tolerant Islamic traditions' prevail. Such is the argument of Bernard Lewis in his 'Roots of Muslim rage' and elsewhere.<sup>24</sup>

The reasoning of Lewis and like-minded writers completely ignores the socioeconomic factors which drive people against their current regimes. Neither does it pay attention to political factors like the fact that these regimes are known to be



corrupt. Most importantly for this discussion, Lewis downgrades the importance of concrete Western economic, political and military activities in Islamic countries to zero. Instead, Lewis reproduces the worst aspects of classical Orientalism (as criticised by Edward Said<sup>25</sup>), namely the mystifications of 'the Oriental man', and commits himself to an essentialist approach to Islam. Furthermore, by basing himself on an unsubstantiated premise, namely the assumption that hatred of the West is a normal—though unfortunate—expression of 'Islam', he generalises to an unacceptable extent by implying that he is describing all of the Muslim world. Finally, Lewis defies common sense by absolving Western powers from all responsibility in generating any Muslim opposition. Literally, Lewis states 'we of the West can do little or nothing'.<sup>26</sup> The USA, in particular, is cleared of the 'familiar accusations' which are hurled at it, since it is presented as a victim of its success as the leading Western nation: it has sadly but inevitably inherited the pent-up Muslim hatred that resulted from Western domination. Rarely does one find academics producing such politically and socially craven 'explanations' of vastly complex global issues.

Lewis provides no evidence for his theory that it is religio-historically inevitable for Muslims to detest the West. Instead, he reverses academic praxis by attempting to invigorate his views through an attack on rival explanations of Islamist–Western animosity. Although they need not to be exaggerated, the lasting effects of the colonialist period are undeniably present, as illustrated above. Lewis dismisses the colonialist factor on the grounds that the USA was never a colonial power, and never ruled a Muslim nation (as opposed to the USSR). Of course, no one ever said otherwise, so it is a mystery how Lewis can think this assertion can function as an argument. According to Lewis, the fact that the USA supports Israel also cannot really be the reason behind anti-American feeling in the Muslim world. Here, his argument is that the Muslim world did not protest against the USSR when it initially supported Israel via Czechoslovakia. One of the things Lewis chooses to ignore in this counter-'argument' is that, in the roughly five years of Soviet illicit backing of Israel, there did not exist a significant Islamist force which could noticeably criticise the USSR for it. Also, he seems to see no difference between five and 50 years of support. In yet another statement serving to point once again at the harsher treatment that Muslims' rage reserves for Western powers, Lewis ignores the Afghan war when he says that the USSR was never criticised or attacked over its domination of Muslim subjects. The closed fortress that was the USSR had only one chink in its armour, and that was Afghanistan. This opening was enthusiastically used. Indeed, up until the very end of this ideology, communism itself was the main opponent of Islamists all over the Muslim world.

Lewis' insistence on dismissing any concrete Western responsibility and historical facts in the shaping of anti-Western trends in Islamist and Muslim circles serves to perpetuate the old notion of the irrational and mysterious (especially Arab) Muslim.<sup>27</sup> This notion has the advantage for Lewis that it implies that the grievances and desires of this irrational, mysterious being can best be explained in ephemeral, rather than concrete terms. For obvious reasons it has been one of the aims of this article to avoid the ephemeral, insisting instead on the concrete.

The continuing importance of the colonial legacy is made visible by the Algerian Islamists' condemnation not of the USA, but of France and the French language. In fact, so free of difficulties was the relationship between the Algerian Islamist party FIS and the USA that the latter initially supported the FIS against the secular junta.<sup>28</sup> Liaisons such as these lead one to conclude that the general anti-Westernism of Islamist ideology is in fact dependent on contemporary and local particularities: the Algerian regime is economically tied to France, hence France is considered 'guilty by association'. In Egypt the regime is dependent on American aid, and its security forces are trained by the CIA, hence in Egypt Islamists turn against the USA. The reason behind the USA's dubious image in the Arab-Islamic world in general should not be searched for in a 'Manichean legacy' in the Islamic religion, but rather in the fact that, more than any other country, the USA is the superpower which has interests in this part of the world, where it consistently assists repressive regimes.

### Conclusion

It is hard to look beyond the substantial layer of superficial slogans and stereotypes which are maintained by both Islamists and influential media and even some scholars. In this article I have tried to explain the reasons that lie behind a person's decision to support morally or actively one of the many varieties of Islamism. The dominant reason will vary from faction to faction, from country to country, and eventually even from person to person. So many people have so much to complain about, and so often they have only one option which can direct their complaints to their authorities. Initially I thought that Islamists were simply misguided souls who misunderstood both their adversary (the West) as well as the meaning of their 'solution' (Islam). Indeed, there are distorted views of the West in many parts of the Muslim world, and the Islamists' knowledge of Islamic heritage and religion is often appalling. But that Islamism is not simply an uprising of dangerously mistaken zealots with an incurable hatred of the West, I first realised when a young Sudanese spoke to me of his views on the desperate state of his country:

You see, this country is not truly Islamic, not Islamic at all. They (the NIF-dominated junta) say they form an Islamic government but they are not. We need a truly Islamic state ... You know, there is not a single Islamic state in the world? ... Or perhaps, you know, the only countries that come close to Islamic government are in Europe. They are really Islamic because they have governments that are there because of the people, and they care for the people, and if they don't, they go away. That is what is an Islamic state.<sup>29</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Among others N Ayubi, *Political Islam—Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London: Routledge, 1991; D F Eickelman & J Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996; J L Esposito, *The Islam Threat—Myth or Reality?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; and G Kepel, *Jihad, Expansion et déclin de l'Islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, folio actuel 90, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> D Pipes, 'There are no moderates: dealing with fundamentalist Islam', *National Interest*, Fall 1995.

- <sup>3</sup> Eg the Muslim Brothers' call for the legislature to forcibly divorce people critical of settled Islamic values from their wives, or husband, over charges of apostasy.
- <sup>4</sup> Eg the National Islamic Front, Sudan. See A S Sidahmed, *Politics and Islam in Contemporary Sudan*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997; N Ayubi, *Political Islam*, pp 108–109; and 'The policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran', Lecture by P Aarts, University of Amsterdam, 1 March 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> As quoted (from *Keyhan*, 8 January 1988) in D Pipes, 'The Western mind of radical Islam', in: N Kramer, *The Islamic Debate*, Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Centre, 1997, pp 51–67, 63.
- <sup>6</sup> Kepel, *Jihad*, p 17.
- <sup>7</sup> F Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation. Religion and Politics in the Middle East*, London: IB Taurus, 1995.
- <sup>8</sup> Ayubi, *Political Islam*; Eickelman & Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*; P Fargues, 'Demography and politics in the Arab world', *Population: an English Selection*, 5, 1993, pp 1–20; Sidahmed, *Politics and Islam in Contemporary Sudan*. For (sub-)Saharan Africa, see N Levtzion & R L Pouwels, *History of Islam in Africa*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000.
- <sup>9</sup> To the point where the British 'shoe-bomb terrorist' Reed tried to avoid detection as an Islamist by leaving empty liquor bottles in his hotel room.
- <sup>10</sup> Ayubi, *Political Islam*, ch 6; lecture by J J G Jansen, Amsterdam, 19 November 2001.
- <sup>11</sup> This example (which compares only partly to Islamism) is particularly interesting when one realises that, within orthodox Jewry, there was initially hardly any support for the Zionist cause: on the contrary, orthodox Jewry rejected Zionism as 'un-religious'. Only after Israel had become a fact did orthodox Jews become involved.
- <sup>12</sup> One could dwell on the forces which successfully took over the role of religion in the West as 'forces of destruction', which had been and still are creating unimaginable carnage via nationalism, ethnicity and racism. In his article, Lewis fails to mention this. See B Lewis, 'The roots of Muslim rage', *Atlantic Monthly*, 266, 1990, pp 47–54, 56, 59–60.
- <sup>13</sup> The Anya Nya rebellion (Sudan) and the Maji Maji rebellion (Kenya) both occurred in the 1950s; the Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda, still active) draws on a hybrid of Christian/Animist spirituality.
- <sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that clerical authority in the sense of a hierarchical church structure as such is—except for Shi'ism—absent in Islamic religion.
- <sup>15</sup> P Chabal & J-P Daloz, *Africa Works—Disorder as Political Instrument*, London: International African Institute, 1999, ch 5.
- <sup>16</sup> As quoted in J Iliffe, *Africans—The History of a Continent*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p 241.
- <sup>17</sup> Most recently in Zimbabwe. J Jeter, 'Misery drives a desire for change in Zimbabwe', *Washington Post*, 5 March 2002; and Jeter, 'Young voters pose threat to Mugabe', *International Herald Tribune*, 1 March 2002. See also P Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-first Century*, London: Fontana Press, 1993.
- <sup>18</sup> N Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State—Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London: I B Tauris, 1995.
- <sup>19</sup> Fargues, 'Demography and politics in the Arab world'.
- <sup>20</sup> P Fargues, 'From demographic explosion to social rupture', *Middle East Report*, 190, pp 6–10, 1994, p 10.
- <sup>21</sup> A Palestinian case such as Hamas of course has additional (more important) elements concerning their 'tougher stand' on Israeli occupation.
- <sup>22</sup> For EnNahda, the case has been different ever since the Tunisian government cracked down on Islamist groups with such force that it can no longer provide public facilities.
- <sup>23</sup> Eg Tariq al-Bishri, Sayyid Qutb.
- <sup>24</sup> Lewis, 'The roots of Muslim rage'.
- <sup>25</sup> E Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- <sup>26</sup> Lewis, 'The roots of Muslim rage'.
- <sup>27</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of the anachronistic nature of Lewis's latest work, *What Went Wrong*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. See E Said, 'Impossible histories', *Harper's Magazine*, July 2002.
- <sup>28</sup> Lecture by S Zemni, 8 March 2002, University of Amsterdam/International School of Social Sciences and Humanities.
- <sup>29</sup> From an anonymous conversation in Khartoum, June 2001.