

New Directions in Islamic Thought

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About the Speaker

Hassan Hanafi is Professor of Philosophy at Cairo University. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy in 1966 from la Sorbonne in Paris. Hanafi has acted as Secretary General of the Egyptian Philosophical Society since 1976 and Vice President of the Arab Philosophical Society since 1983.

Hanafi is the author of thirty books in the French, English, and Arabic languages. He is also the author of a project entitled Tradition and Modernism which is based on three sections consisting of the reconstruction of Islamic classical sciences: theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, mysticism and scriptural sciences, the foundation of the Science of Occidentalism to study the West and the theory of reality as hermeneutics.

Abstract

Much of Western media and publicly formulated discourses have concentrated on Islamic fundamentalism and violent Islam as the only version of the religion, thereby reducing the whole to one of its parts. This paper will focus on three clusters of new directions in contemporary Islam. Firstly, it will examine the notion of a 'liberal Islam', which includes rational as well as enlightened Islam initiated by Mohammed Abdou, Kassim Amin, M. H. Heikal and Kh. M. Khaled, among other thinkers. Secondly, it will analyze the notion of a 'socialist Islam', which includes the idea of a progressivist and leftist Islam defended by M. al-Siba'i, S. Qutb, Abdelrahman al-Sharkawy and Hassan Hanafi who founded 'Islamic left' or 'liberation theology' in Islam. This categorization also includes revolutionary Islam as described by Ali. Lastly, this paper will discuss the idea of a 'nationalist Islam', which includes communitarian Islam, open Islam, and pluralistic Islam, such as those experienced in Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and Morocco, where Islam is identified as part of a national identity. This is also called socio-political, economic, wholistic or 'totalitarian' Islam, and can be peaceful or a violent left-over of Islamic fundamentalism. It is wrong to label all these Islamic innovations as Western. Notions such as liberalism, socialism, and nationalism are not the monopoly of the west but are innovations in every human culture which require parallel comparative cultural studies.

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From Fundamentalism to Post-Fundamentalism

Over the last several decades, and especially since the events of September 11, 2001, Western media, and indeed scholarship, has concentrated largely on Islamic fundamentalism and violent Islam as the only version of Islam. Quite sadly, these particular Western discourses are reducing the whole to one of its parts and reading the present into the past, as if Granada, Cordoba, Seville, Toledo, Kirawan, Karawiyyin, Zeitouna, Basra, Baghdad, Cairo, and Istanbul never existed. The long history of Arab philosophy, science, and art are not the product of fundamentalism, but, rather, its opposite. This pre-judgment is not only an academic pre-supposition but also a general behavioral attitude vis à vis Islam and the Muslim world that exhibits an endless double bias. The truth of the matter is that the progress of history is rarely slowed except by other people's prejudices.

History moves on while the mindset of some comes to a halt. Contrary to the prevailing sentiment in the West, Islam has proven capable of surpassing this historical stagnation and has continued to create new avenues and theological approaches in modern times. Much of Western scholarship is oriented towards yielding to this prejudice.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, which triggered the common use of the phrase "Islamic fundamentalism" in the West, was a purely socio-political modern-day event, albeit related in name to Islam. It was the expression of frustrations, anger, incapacity, and historical rancor towards the West in general, and United States of America in particular. Ironically, Islamic fundamentalism was supported and encouraged by the United States during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in order to fight communist infiltration to Islam. After the defeat of the Soviet Union, the Taliban, the most spectacular representative of Islamic fundamentalism, took over Afghanistan and hosted Al-Qaeda to continue the

project of defending Islam against the West. The incapacity of political regimes as well as their stagnation and lethargy all over the Muslim world has led to violent reactions and underground protest movements in recent history, which are natural reactions to mainstream hegemonies. The phenomenon is a pure socio-political one. Islam serves only as an ideological justification, as a cultural carrier, and as a tool. Conservatism has accentuated such use of Islam since it is the sole popular ideology after all other opposition ideologies, including Liberalism, Nationalism, and Marxism are being actively marginalized.

New directions in Islamic thought, or new moderate voices in Islam, are reactions to both Western hegemony and Islamic fundamentalism. The Justice and Development Party in power in Turkey, the opposition party in Morocco, and the illegal Renaissance party in Tunisia Al-Nahda all represent a “third way” between Islamic conservatism and Western secularism. They represent the silent majority because they simultaneously combine authenticity and currency, tradition and modernity, and the old and the new. Ideologically, they reject violence and try to realize their goals through such peaceful means as dialogue, mutual convictions, and intermediary solutions. There is a whole spectrum of these new moderate voices.

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Quantitatively, this non-fundamentalist discourse is much more expansive and contemporary than the fundamentalist one. Rarely is the West interested in it, because non-fundamentalist discourses do not permit the West to use Islam as a weapon of mass-destruction or to legitimize invasions, aggressions, and threats to the Muslim world. Many in the Muslim world are also not interested in moderate Islam because it does not play as large a role in power politics as fundamentalism and secularism do. In particular countries, moderate Islam is an elitist phenomenon that is not backed by the masses. It is different from the Islam of the new preachers *al-Du'at al-Judud* taking place in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. It is a certain kind of commercial, mass-mediated, emotional, and reactionary conservative Islam which evaporates Islamic energy in eschatology, and which is supported by political regimes because of its depoliticized nature.

Liberal Islam

Liberal Islam has its source in modern Islamic reformism encouraged by Al-Afghani, Mohamed Abdou, Kasim Amin, Mohammed Hussein Heikal, Taha Hussein, Al-Aqqad, Mansour Fahmy, Allouba, the early work of Khaled M. Khaled, Sanhoury, and some intellectuals belonging to the new Wafd party. Liberal Islam originated as a reaction to Western hegemony, especially British Imperialism. It has been in existence since the occupation of Egypt in 1882 and flourished as an outcome of the 1919 revolution. It has its roots in the Islamic principles of defending the freedom of the individual and belief in democracy as a political system that is based on mutual consultation, or *shura*. Testament to this are Qur'anic verses such as “no coercion in religion” and “consult with them,” as well as the famous saying of Omar: “Why do you enslave human beings when they are born to their mothers as free people?”

The first pillar of Islam is to give witness, or *shabada*, which also means that the believer should have the moral courage to speak out against injustice. The *shabada* begins with a negation: There are to be “no divinities” (*La Ilaha*) except God, thus freeing human consciousness from all passions as motives for human vices such as power, fame, wealth, lust, etc. Once human consciousness is freed from negativity, it can affirm its affiliation with the one principle in front of which all mankind is equal and from which all are deduced. This is the unity of the self, the unity of society without social classes, and the unity of mankind irrespective of color, sect, tribe, or race.

Liberal Islam is also called “enlightened Islam” (*mustanir*) and is based not only on scripture, but also on reason. Enlightenment became a common dominator in many new voices among traditionalists and modernists as well as ruling governments and their opposition movements. Reason is the basis of scripture as it was the case in the old *Mu'tazila* theology and the classical philosophy of Averroes. M. Abdou switched from *Ash'arism* to *Mu'tazilism* in his theory of justice and theodicy, but not in his theory of Essence, Attributes, Acts, and Names of God, like al-Maturidi tried to do in the fourth century. He defended the autonomy of reason and freedom of will; otherwise, the two components in Divine Justice, responsibility and accountability, would have been impossible.

Liberal Islam is also called “rational Islam” since reason is the point of departure and the commonality shared between all rational human beings. It is open for dialogue, seeks proof, and depends, not on dialectics or rhetoric, but on demonstration. Liberal Islam is also called “cultural Islam” in countries like

Malaysia, which concentrate on the role of Islam in building world cultures, and influencing science, art, and philosophy. From a cultural Islam perspective, cultural power, not political and ephemeral power, is real and more durable. Also from this perspective, the Unity of God is inseparable from his justice, from the freedom of the people, and from development of the country's natural resources. Indonesia's modern *Pancasila*, namely the five principles, also stemmed from this Islamic principle.

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Yet another name for liberal Islam is “pluralistic Islam,” because it permits different versions, interpretations, views, and perspectives in Islam. From a pluralistic perspective, no one has the right to monopolize ideas of truth. Since Islam is anchored in history by its different phases, in society by its different classes, and in education by its various levels, there is no single Islam, but many forms of Islam, from classical Islam to modern Islam. In theology, there are different sects: Ash'arism, Mu'tazilism, Shi'ism, Kharijism, Zahirism, etc. Each main sect has a variety of subsidiary ones. A tradition counts them as seventy three sects, but only one, Sunnism, namely the established political authority, was considered the correct one and was kept, while the rest were considered wrong and abandoned. In philosophy, there are also different schools: the rationalist (Averroes), the theosophist (Ibn Sina), the naturalist (Al-Razi), and the humanist (al-Tawhidi). In Jurisprudence, there are at least five systems of laws: Malikism, Ja'farism, Hanafism, Shafi'ism, and Hanbalism. In interpretation, there are traditional, national, esoteric, and socio-political methods. Respect and appreciation for pluralism in Islam has largely diminished over the course of Islamic history since Ibn Khaldun, but it can be reborn, given the absolute variety of Islamic practices in the Muslim world, in China, in Europe, and in the Americas.

Socialist Islam

Socialist Islam has its roots in the social predicaments of the Muslim world, namely the discrepancy between rich and poor, and the necessity of wealth redistribution. The richest man on earth is a Muslim, and the poorest, dying from

drought, hunger, disease, and displacement, is also a Muslim. Socialist Islam began with Abu Dhar al-Goffari during the rule of the fourth caliph (*khalifa*) and continued through Mostafa al-Siba's *The Socialism of Islam*, Sayyid Qutb's *Social Justice in Islam*, Abdel Rahman al-Sharkawy's *Mohammed: The Messenger of Freedom*, and in his literary work *Al-Hussein, a Revolutionary and Martyr*. It also continues through Ali Shari'ati and his *On the Sociology of Islam*. Some have also called Hassan Hanafi the founder of the “Islamic Left” and “Liberation Theology” in contemporary Islam.

Methodologically, socialist Islam begins with an absolute priority of text over reality and of public welfare over textual arguments. It has its sources in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Malikism, and the methodology of Jurisprudence (*Usul al-Fiqh*) by al-Shatibi and al-Tufi, and in modern reformism by al-Afghani. It depends on theories of ownership, the public sector, industrialization, agricultural development, labor as a source of income, banks without interests, and redistribution of wealth – not only through alms (*zakat*), but also through nationalization, and even confiscation of exploiting capital. Sometimes it is called radical Islam and is accused of being a disguised form of Marxism by reigning political authorities as well as by traditionalists.

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Socialist Islam is also called “communitarian Islam,” because it stresses the importance of communitarianism and social solidarity. It is based essentially on national consensus in democracy and in collective ownership of major sources of production and public services to prevent exploitation and monopoly. Fasting, giving alms, and pilgrimage are means to found the communitarian society. Some principles of Socialist Islam include: sharing of resources rather than the usurping of resources; the common is preferred to the individual; and the public has absolute priority over the private. Socialist Islam criticizes the classical notion of free trade and commerce as a main source of income. It rejects consumption as the primary goal; living a decent life is the ultimate happiness. Socialist Islam is group solidarity, spiritual brotherhood, and a universal link between all Muslims

all over the world. Some of the prophet's famous sayings describe this solidarity: "The Muslim for the Muslim is like a construction of pillars supporting each other" and "Muslims are like a body; if a member gets sick, other members also get sick and catch the fever." The unity of the community is a reflection of Divine unity on all levels: the personal, familial, societal, and humanitarian.

Socialist Islam also retains the title of "progressive Islam," especially in Tunis. The Arabic word for progress (*taqaddum*) is a Qur'anic term that is in opposition to regression (*ta'akbur*). In each society, there are generally two social forces: one pushing forward to change the status quo and the other stopping and resisting all efforts of social change, and defending the status quo. Each force interprets the Qur'an to benefit itself. Socialist Islam co-operates with progressive forces, whether secular, religious, Marxist, nationalist, or even liberal, to enhance social and political progress. Indeed, Socialist Islam sees Revelation itself as a progressive force in history, moving society towards equality, justice, and welfare. Gradual revelation and the succession of the prophets indicate how revelation was an educational factor that aimed to accomplish the goal of autonomy of reason and freedom of will, which is also supportive of Lessing's "Education of the human race." Revelation is essentially equivalent to progress, as it compiles theoretical truth as well as encourages a practical truth. Praxis is the natural continuation of Logos. Reasoning and implementation of reason are endless. No longer is there a need for a theoretical Divine intervention through the text or for a practical one through miracles.

Nationalist Islam

Nationalist Islam is linked to contemporary national liberation movements where Islam played a major role in unifying national forces against imperialism and colonialism all over the Arab and Muslim world. Although the term for nation (*Watan*) is a modern one, the classical term *Umma* is used in a larger context to name a community without national geographic borders: a community of faith and common good. This Islam is intertwined with a nation's language, values, customs, and manners. It may vary in form, but stays the same in content. The Qur'an, for example, can be read in Arabic or in a variety of other languages, except when it comes to prayer. Islam has always been carried by different nationalities: Arabs, Persians, Indians, Malays, Chinese, Turks, Mongols, some Africans, as well as by Europeans and Americans. Each nation gave its flavor to Islam, to the point that some do not hesitate to name their type of Islam "Arab Islam," "Asian Islam," or "African Islam." Islam is one and many, identical and

different, universal and particular, and similar and dissimilar. Islamization has been related to Malayisation, Indonesianization, and Africanization.

Islam goes from regional, to national, to international levels as a religion that is not specific to a single nation or people.

Nationalist Islam is also called "Afro-Asian Islam," since this kind of Islam has for a long time been identified with Arab Islam. The Arabs were the first to carry Islam to other nations beginning with Asia, then to Africa, and lastly, to Europe and the Americas. The Afro-Asian solidarity movements, the three continents bloc, Third World countries, or non-alignment movements are different labels for contemporary Islam on the international level. Islam goes from regional, to national, to international levels as a religion that is not specific to a single nation or people. Islam came into history stretching eastward towards Asia and westward towards Africa, inheriting Persian and Roman Empires, and emerging in the center of the Old World. Islam is doing likewise in modern times, emerging as a third force between the two major blocks of West and East; finding in Europe a fertile land for expansion. Islam, characterized by an Islamic Resurgence, may be beginning its modern times following seven hundred years of stagnation from Ibn Khaldun till now.

Nationalist Islam is also called humanist and universal Islam, like all similar trends in world cultures. This is why it is sometimes identified with Latin Averroism or contemporary Sufism. Islam does not recognize any geographic borders or ethnic differences as it goes beyond all human particularities. The name "Islam" is not derived from the name of a prophet nor is it derived from the name of a people. Rather, Islam is derived from the name of an act of freedom not of surrender, and from a human being not a slave even of God (*Abd*). In slavery, as a psychological structure, mastership may switch from God to the Sultan, ruler, governor, head of state, leader, senior, etc., but the structure of authoritarianism remains the same. Freedom is followed by equality. A society of free men and women is a society of equals, irrespective of ethnicity, heredity, social class, and other kinds of human differences. If social discrepancies between classes do occur, social justice will bring human beings back to a state of equality. These three principles are the outcome of *Tawhid*, or unification.

The Future of the New Voices of Islam

These new directions of Islamic thought do exist in modern times but have been marginalized by authoritarian states. Usually, they are the preference of the informed elite. Mass movements are recruited by Islamic conservatism based on text and faith and alienated from the problems of daily life and the socio-political and economic needs of the community. Political regimes support this depoliticized traditional direction. Once it becomes politically active, such as that practiced by the Muslims Brothers, it is banned. The challenge is to understand how these new directions can switch from elitism to populism, how an academic discourse can become a popular discourse, and how the message can reach not only the student, but also the masses. Some, such as Sayed Qutb and Abdel Kader Ouda in Egypt, Khomeini in Iran, Turabi in Sudan, and Ghannoushi in Tunis, have succeeded in this challenge. They are admired but are not always followed because intellectualism is not always charismatic.

These new directions are surrounded by political regimes, being a part of the opposition and the voices of socio-political dissent from one side and conservative and part of the governmental religious establishment from the other, anathematizing them as out-laws. An authoritarian political regime may tolerate a secular, liberal, socialist, nationalist, or even Marxist opposition because they are generated by elitist western ideologies sold to foreign powers. Authoritarian regimes cannot, however, discredit new Islamic directions because they come from within the tradition, not from without. Once the political regime becomes more democratic, it will legalize political parties like the Wasat party in Egypt and the Nahda party in Tunis that represent these new directions. Once masses are de-alienated from the impact of the mass-media that is under the control of religious and political establishments, they will comprehend these new directions and will be able to express their own interests. The emergence of these new directions needs time and effort and a long-term vision for social and political change according to gradual phases in the historical process.

Conclusion

Such a progressive course of history, from conservatism to liberalism, from the old to the new, and from tradition to modernism is the guarantor of such demands, shrinking the old directions and expanding new ones. Constant social change brings with it gradual intellectual change. A long-range project based on three parts is needed for the total liberation of history. First, there needs to be a reconstruction of classical Islamic disciplines such as theology, philosophy, mysticism, jurisprudence, and the five scriptural sciences (*Qur'an*, *Hadith*, *Tafsir*, *Sira*, and *Fiqh*). These must be rebuilt according to new historical circumstances in order to deconstruct the old and to rebuild the new in order for the tradition, the major component in the popular socio-political culture, to move away from stagnation. This time, it should be done in a more holistic and radical way, to switch from religious reformation to total renaissance.

The second step is to take a radical stand vis à vis the West. Rather than it being a source of knowledge, it should become an object of knowledge. The West is observed, historicized, and returned to its geographic borders to make room for non-western cultural creativity. The motive is to cure the West from its superiority complex and to cure the rest of the world from its inferiority complex. The purpose is to attempt to be free from the fear of the yoke of tradition and yet not to fall into the yoke of the new. A master is a master, whether it is an old master or a new one, whether it is Ibn Taymia or Karl Marx. Finally, we must encourage a direct relation with reality, which is to be seen without the textual perspective of the old or new. Up until today, the West had monopolized the power of theoretization as Husserl and Weber declared, while the rest of the world is confined to interpretation, namely, seeing reality through text. The challenge is to transform reality into a new text such as that of decolonization, liberation, unification, human and social development, authenticity against alienation, and mass-mobilization. This is what the "Tradition and Modernism" projects have been trying to do for half a century. Did they succeed? If not, the question is: How and when will they?



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