John Ruedy (ed.), Islamism and Secularism in North Africa

Corinne Lathrop Gilb
In the past 200 years, North Africa has been placed in a number of different political molds. Underlying everything was tribalism, especially in the interior. In 1519 all of North Africa except Morocco became part of the Ottoman empire. The Mahgrib was moving into its precolonial era by 1815. Then came European colonialism. The French occupied Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881, Morocco by 1912. The Italians seized key parts of Libya in 1911-1912.

The next stage was political independence. Libya became an independent kingdom in 1951, the French protectorate over Tunisia ended in 1956, the Kingdom of Morocco regained its independence that same year, and France recognized Algeria's independence in 1962 after a brutal war. The only available model at that time was the European-style state. The model was adopted even though it was suspect because of its Western origin. It was difficult to emulate because of tribalism and ethnic differences. Coastal elites who had a long history of relationships with Europe differed in language and orientation from residents of the interior. Newly trained technocrats had a different viewpoint from that of the gun-toting, often illiterate men from the interior who had won Algeria's war for independence and controlled the government afterwards.

The Cold War division of the world between communism and capitalism affected the domestic politics of these new states. They were also affected when the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991 and when the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank became ascendant.

Before independence, the debate in the Mahgrib was often between those who wanted to modernize and the traditional 'ulama (religious scholars). Modernization was often assumed to imply secularization. After independence, states subordinated the 'ulama. New governments appropriated Islam as an ideology for their own purposes. All except Libya also wanted to modernize.

Meanwhile, there was a population boom so that the average age in Algeria by 1990 was 17 1/2. Except in Libya, large num-
bers of young people were educated and urbanized. Algeria enjoyed a flush of prosperity in the 1970s followed by economic downturn in the 1980s. Family purchasing power declined rapidly, but expectations had risen. In the Maghrib at large, conflict developed between those who were excluded or marginalized and the prosperous middle class. By 1988 the newly educated young in Algeria were faced with a general unemployment rate of 25 percent. They wanted into the system. The people who were already in the system wanted to hoard their privileges.

Although the tensions were economic, it became apparent that something beyond economic theory was needed to legitimize rulers, provide identity for individuals, undergird political culture, and ultimately aid political mobilization for protest. Facing similar problems, many regimes in the Middle East had turned to Arabism or Islamic fundamentalism.

Within a tripartite framework laid out in the Table of Contents, *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* proceeds to analyze Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya case by case, and—in detail that might lose a nonspecialist reader—to document the many differences from one part of the region to another, as well as changes over time. Its three sections are entitled "Secular-Islamic Encounters in Historical Perspective," "The Islamist Challenge," and "Reform or Repression: State Responses to the Islamic Revival."

Over half of the authors of the various chapters of this book currently teach in American universities, but some of this half are Middle Eastern in background. The others are based in England, France, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. All are expert.

If anyone were so foolish as to think Islamic civilization is a monolith, he or she would be disabused after reading this book. The situation is complex, just as the religious struggles in 16th and 17th century England were complex.

In many parts of the Middle East, Arabism became a way to preserve a sense of traditional community and at the same time sidestep the issue of whether modernization required secularization. It was also a path toward unity since some Arabs were Christians. However, Arabism was no solution in Morocco and Algeria with their large Berber populations.

That left Islamism. Emad Eldin Shahin comments in chapter
10 of the Ruedy book (p. 167) that contemporary development theory "assumes that religion is a traditional, or, at best, a transitional force that will wither in the process of modernization and growth of rationalism in society. In fact the experience of the Middle East since the 1970s reveals that religion is becoming an ideological vehicle in the struggle for power.... This suggests that the phenomenon of Islamic revival may not be adequately understood or easily analyzed through a secular conceptual framework." Many in the Middle East view secularization as a product of Western cultural imperialism. Others argue that reformism and modernization do not have to adopt the Western model.

In 1990, Christine M. Helms wrote a pamphlet for the Institute of National Strategic Studies in Washington, D.C., entitled "Arabism and Islam: Stateless Nations and Nationless States." She wrote, "Islamic resurgence was palpable in nearly all segments of Middle Eastern society by the 1980's" (p. 34). The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt provided leadership. Her conclusion was that Islam works well as a political vehicle. It provides guidelines for the moral-ethical relationship between rulers and ruled. It provides political legitimacy and genuine authority, such as King Hussein enjoys among his people in Jordan. It also provides rules for personal conduct. "... there are explicit guidelines about civic responsibility to avoid social chaos" (p. 37). It focuses people on the common goal of unity. a unique and highly developed sense of sacred time and space ... imbues daily life with resonance" (p. 37). Islam is able "to circumvent illiteracy and carry a political as well as sacred message" (pp. 40-41).

Although all four North African states were officially Muslim from the start, neither Libya nor Tunisia has seen a strong Islamic fundamentalist movement, for different reasons. Tribalism prevails in Libya. The population is dispersed in a large number of villages, even though there are concentrations in two main areas. As Marius K. Deeb has written, in chapter 11 of Ruedy's book, when Qadhafi took over, he tried to maintain this localism. He encouraged only small family enterprises. At first his religious position seemed to be that of a quasi-fundamentalist Muslim. Before 1975 he was also pan-Arabist. Then he became a de facto functional secularist. By the end of the 1970s he was anti-clerical. In 1990 his government issued an order that any member of
the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya would be executed. It is not surprising that he is opposed by those who back traditional Muslim institutions, but the most active opposition comes from an organization asking for private property, free enterprise, pluralist democracy, and a bill of rights.

When Tunisia won its independence, it focused on nationalism, relegating Arabism and Islamism to second place (Abdelbaki Hermassi, p. 95). Tunisia is much smaller than Algeria, has a more open society, and has been more prosperous. It did have a moderate Islamic revival movement in the early years. When that was suppressed, it split into factions. The attempted use of violence backfired. From 1989 Tunisia has had a de facto two-party political system, although there is low voter participation (Michael Collins Dunn, chapter 9).

Mary-Jane Deeb asks in the final chapter of Ruedy's book: "Why are Islamic fundamentalist movements so powerful, and cohesive in their organization, their ideology, and their popular support in some parts of the Muslim world, while in others they are weaker, more fragmented, less able to mobilize support or provide a real challenge to the state?" (p. 275) To answer her own question, she contrasts Algeria and Morocco. She concludes that the differences result from differences in the way these two areas were treated by the French. Under French colonial rule, Morocco kept its traditional political institutions and political culture. The Moroccan monarchy was identified with the family of the Prophet Muhammed and so the person of the king was and still is holy for Moroccans (p. 286). After independence, the state's approach to modernization was one of cautious gradualism (p. 285). The state used religious symbolism to legitimate itself, but adopted many secular institutions — a constitution, a party, political pluralism, professional organizations, and a modern education system. Because Morocco, like Algeria, has a number of discontented recently urbanized, educated, but unemployed young people, there are now activist Islamic groups. Some argue that the hereditary nature of the monarchy is unIslamic. However, the movement is fragmented and weak.

During its lengthy colonial rule over Algeria, France imposed French culture and institutions there in the name of "civilizing" the Algerians. Independence had to be won by violent confronta-
"The dominant trait of the postcolonial state was its takeover of Islam for use as political ideology" (Hermassi, p. 91). The traditional 'ulama were marginalized in favor of an official clergy under state control. State socialism was adopted. Modernization was imposed rapidly from the top. The real power was the army. This worked as long as oil prices were high and there was prosperity. When economic difficulties arose in the 1980s, the government switched to a policy of doctrinaire economic liberalism. The socialist government had promised that all citizens' needs would be fulfilled. When this did not happen, there was fierce popular reaction. After revolts in 1988, the constitution was amended to allow multiple parties. In the 1990 elections, Islamic fundamentalists won over two-thirds of the popular vote. In reaction, an army-backed government was installed in January, 1992, but the figurehead president was assassinated in June of that year. Algeria has been in a state of virtual civil war for the past several years led by a highly popular Islamic fundamentalist organization.

Because Algeria's traditional Islamic leaders were largely kept out of decision making after independence, the protest groups in Algeria could depict the ruling junta as anti-Islamic. In short, the conclusion is that to avoid radical fundamentalist challenges, a Muslim state and its modernization processes must be seen as harmonious with Islam. John P. Entelis writes in chapter 13: "no meaningful democracy can emerge that does not first have popular sovereignty founded on a collective national identity, shared historic vision and common cultural values" (p. 248). Many Mahgrib people want modernism, but they also want Islam. In Algeria discontented young people are hostile both to the secular elites and to the traditional 'ulama. They want restoration of a more egalitarian Muslim community as envisioned in the Qur'an.

Ruedy provides us with case studies of the political effects of intercivilizational encounters--i.e., the encounters between various facets of Western with Islamic civilization. Is modernization today synonymous with Westernization so that a modernizing world is one where civilizational differences are obliterated? Not necessarily. The Muslim world was once in the forefront of innovation in science, agriculture, industry, and commerce. It could
Are modernization and religion incompatible? The answer appears to be "no," but Ruedy leaves open the question of just how modernization and Islam can be reconciled.

What will be the impact of the Information Age upon the Islamic world? Ruedy's authors do not address this question, but others tell us that Muslim countries do want to have modern technology.

Is the nation-state necessarily a Western-type institution? Does effective nationalism require that there be a sense of common ethnicity undergirded by religion? If so, what will be the fate of countries with ethnic pluralism? Is nationalism a necessary prerequisite for modernization or—in today's world—would a broader Islamic community be a more facilitative framework? Ruedy's authors do not give complete answers to these questions.

Is Islamic fundamentalism necessarily an obstacle to democratization? Quite the contrary. Fundamentalist protest groups want more democracy, more participation. They use Islamic fundamentalism as an ideology so that their voices will be heard. "Without exception, the Mahgrib countries have sought to make ideological concessions in the area of re-Islamization at the same time as they have blocked every form of political participation" (Hermassi, p. 97). None of the states has learned how to provide an adequate degree of popular participation in government. None has coped satisfactorily with the challenge of population growth and the impact of modern mass education. Sixty percent of the candidates for parliament in Morocco in 1993 had university degrees (Dale F. Eickelman, p. 267). They often protest in the name of Islam.

Mary-Jane Deeb concludes (p. 277) that ". . . the more pluralistic the state is, the more numerous the loci of legitimate authority, the more likely the opposition is to be fragmented and multidimensional.... the more monolithic the state, the more likely the opposition is to be centrally organized and monolithic as well." Islam does not necessarily breed monolithic states. Islam can also serve as an antidote to a sense of spiritual aridity. In other parts of the world, people turn back to fundamentalist religion or joint cults in a search for spiritual renewal.

Is Islamic revivalism a destabilizing influence in world
geopolitics? Ruedy's authors do not think so. They suggest that Islamic fundamentalism is not intrinsically a threat to Western interests, however it may seem.

Corinna Lathrop Gilb


This book defies easy classification. Is it history? Is it economics? Is it anthropology? Is it gibberish? Gibberish it is not! Yet, Gates acknowledges some potential difficulties when she confesses: "This is a book of immodest scope, written from a distant perspective that makes most historians grumpy and many anthropologists tart. I write in this fashion not out of simple ignorance or for lack of sympathy for close-grained concrete analysis." (p.4)

Hill Gates is a Senior Research Associate at the Center for East Asian Studies at Stanford University, and has published two other books, *Chinese Working-Class Lives* and *Getting By In Taiwan*. The title of China's Motor suggests that its subject is Chinese economic history. The book's twelve chapters, which include such titles as: "The Tributary and Petty-Capitalist Modes of Production", "Motion in the System", "Cities and Space", "Patricorporations: The State and the Household", "Patricorporations: The Lineage", "Dowry and Brideprice", "Folk Ideologies and Commoners", "Folk Ideologies: Women and Men", "Petty Capitalism in Taiwan", and "Re-creating the Tributary in China," reveal a broad range of topics, suggesting the book is neither fish nor fowl, but, at base, an anthropologically oriented economic study of China from the Song Dynasty to the present.

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