

the current sovereign Hassan II) established himself both as head of state and as leader of the religious community. Claiming to be descended from the prophet Mohammed, he marginalized the traditional religious leaders so as to personally embody Islamic legitimacy. Despite Morocco's multi-party approach to politics generally, the King holds his power by "divine right" and is above the law. No one can criticize him, put his person in question, or contest his acts. As a result, fundamentalist movements in Morocco have been confined mostly to the cultural realm and have not been able to present alternative political solutions. This may be changing, judging from recent bloody events at the university, where Islamic fundamentalist students clashed violently with their leftist counterparts. The resulting arrests, injuries, and deaths from this episode, almost certainly guarantee there will be other incidents.

WHAT IS ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM? CONTRARY to appearances, it is not an organized movement; at its core it is a feeling of shared identification, of affirmation of self and of one's differences, in the cultural sense. As the Egyptian historian Mohammed Said Al-Ashmaoui states in his book *L'Islamisme contre l'Islam*, it is not a question of theological controversy, but rather of being against certain kinds of political regimes. The Koran is invoked mostly as a substitute for existing norms and socio-political reference points, as a way to clearly set the movement apart from the cultures of the West, and not as a metaphysical and religious resource. Generally, people become attached to a charismatic personality in the movement, rather than to an organization and its particular programme.

The ultimate goal of Islamic fundamentalism is the creation of "Islamic Republics" along the lines of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Nothing substantial is spelled out in the economic, political and social arenas, other than that democracy will be guaranteed by the *Choura* – or, as its name in Arabic indicates, consultative assembly, itself not defined. The judicial apparatus will be regulated by the *Charia*, Islamic law, based above all on tradition – the Koran contains only eighty verses dedicated to legal matters, out of a total of 6,200. There is also the rejection of Western democracy, and above all a diminution in the status of women – something of a major preoccupation of the fundamentalists.

Until now, the Islamists' strategy has been limited to harassment and violent action. In Algeria, three weeks before last December's elections, they attacked a frontier post of the National Guard, causing injuries and some deaths. The army retaliated, arresting

the majority of the members of the group responsible, who, it turned out, had been trained in Afghanistan. In Tunisia, the fundamentalist plot uncovered last May aimed at assassinating the Chief of State would have used, among other sophisticated weapons, American *Stinger* missiles furnished by the Afghan *moudjahadin*.

The Iranian revolution has undoubtedly served as catalyst, an example that was followed in Sudan and Pakistan. And all of these fundamentalist groups, while forthrightly nationalistic, have not neglected to cultivate relationships among themselves. They have even established a kind of fundamentalist "internationale," with headquarters in Khartoum, Sudan. But Iran of the Shia and Saudi Arabia of the Wahhabi are to some extent competing for the leadership of these fundamentalist forces. The competition is purely political of course, since in the religious domain both practice a conception of Islam that closes the door to all progress and turns in on itself.

For the middle class as well as for most of the senior government and private sector officials, Islamic fundamentalism is regressive and retrograde – an obstacle to scientific and technological progress. And even though disenchantment with the present social and economic conditions runs throughout the population, many still refuse to come out in favour of the *barbus* – the "beards."

IN ALGERIA, IT WAS THE ARMY THAT DECIDED TO put a brake on fundamentalist power, which it regarded as an obstacle to its own power and ambitions. An April 1991 editorial in the army newspaper *Al Jaich* explained the concerns of a military traumatized by the Gulf War, and made a point of opposing what it considered to be the beginnings of Western hegemony. At the same time, it did not hesitate to brand the fundamentalists the "objective allies of this Western strategy." Still, the army is anxious to accelerate the country's access to science and technology, and to rebuild its own military arsenal, nuclear weapons not excluded.



For fundamentalists the "Satanism" of the West is a recurrent theme, with the Americans and French being the most strongly condemned for their actions during the Gulf crisis. This position has religious roots to be sure, but secularism and all that stems from it – like democracy – is a threat to the fundamentalists' power and is held up to ridicule. But this position serves electoral purposes as well.

As in the case of Iran, a fundamentalist regime needs an external enemy. There would certainly be relationships with the West, based on economic self-interest, but these would be limited and difficult. For the Maghreb as a whole, the prices of raw materials and energy (oil and gas) would likely be unstable and OPEC's internal dynamics would change substantially with the reinforcement of the "hard-line" camp (Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Algeria). The Maghreb market, representing nearly 100 million people, could not long remain the private preserve of France – something Islamic leaders have already hinted at.

Since the fundamentalists are nationalists first and are not united, even if they do forge links among themselves, it is unlikely that their nations' international policies can be unified. We can expect conflict where national interests diverge, and some observers believe that in the Maghreb and elsewhere, the question of borders inherited from the colonial era will be the first point of confrontation. "Little" Tunisia thus has everything to fear from an Algeria ruled by fundamentalists. Tunisia's social and political system, tilting towards democracy and economic liberalism under the current leadership, would be under severe threat.

THE PROBLEM NOW IS HOW TO CONFRONT AND combat what a significant portion of the population considers to be a serious menace. The regimes in power have not been able to subdue the fundamentalists, either by repression, or conciliation – as former Algerian president Benjedid learned to his cost. While the wind of democracy has begun to blow through the region – in Tunisia and Algeria – fundamentalism amounts to religious dictatorship, and those in power ask themselves: "must we allow the enemies of democracy to use democracy to destroy it?"

The installation in Algeria of the High State Council to run the country and wage a fierce battle against FIS is hotly debated by democratic purists. Some see in the Council the only hope for a democratic transition; the only chance to plant democracy on solid foundations. There are still others who go as far as to prefer a military dictatorship – at least the people can rise up against the army; it is much harder to fight God. □