

Aziz Al-Azmeh

Revivalism, Religion, Nationality, and Communalism in the Developing World

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Papers: Nasr H. Abu Zeid: *The Manipulation of Democracy in Popular Islamist Discourse in Egypt*; Nahla Chahal: *Le mouvement islamiste en Syrie et la conjoncture entre le discours et l'idéologie de ce mouvement et sa base sociale*; Nilufer Göle: *Islamist Ideology and New Political Issues in Turkey*; Mushirul Hasan: *The Rise of Muslim Communalism in India*; Sudhir Kakar: *Constituting a Riot*; Gilles Kepel: *The Prophet and the Pharaoh Revisited*; Azar Nafisi: *Evanescent Modernity*; Olivier Roy: *Does Islamic Fundamentalism Provide a New Political Strategic Framework?* Jonathan Spencer: *The Politics of Tolerance and Intolerance: Buddhists and Nationalists in Sri Lanka*; Fawwaz Traboulsi: *Christian Communalism and Nationalism in Lebanon*; and *Functions and Rituals of Violence in the Lebanese Civil War*; Peter van der Veer: *Religion, Violence and the Politics of Tolerance in India*.

A symposium on the topic "Revivalism, Religion, Nationality, and Communalism in the Developing World" was held at the Aspen Institute, Berlin, organized by Aziz Al-Azmeh, Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg under the auspices of the Wissenschaftskolleg and the Centre

Marc Bloch, during the period 15 -17 May, 1995.* It was attended by scholars from India, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Germany, France, Holland, and the United Kingdom.

The questions that guided the conception of the symposium and its agenda are the phenomena, increasingly acquiring political salience, of cultural nationalism world-wide, which take the various forms of religious revivalism, exclusivist nationalism, sectarianism, and communalism. These phenomena are apparent in the United States no less than in Western and Eastern Europe, in India and Sri Lanka no less than in Muslim countries and in Israel. They are also evident among diaspora communities.

Although there is some sound empirical research on many of these movements, most particularly on Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish Revivalism, little fruitful investigation has been done of the very striking concordances between them. These concordances are most particularly visible in the domains of ideology, modes of organization and political mobilization, and the socio-economic conditions that sustain these movements of exclusivist and para-nationalist revivalism. The task of the symposium was to expose to each other scholars from the different fields of sociology, anthropology, political science, and history, and persons with expertise in different historical trajectories and religious traditions.

This was particularly salient due to the spread of the thesis that different parts of the world are differentiated by an entity termed "culture", and that each of these cultures, and most particularly that of Islam, is self-enclosed, intransitive, incommensurable, and incomparable to others. A natural corollary of this position is that no overarching categories in the social and human sciences are available for the proper study of these "cultures", each of which has, paradoxically, to be studied "in terms of itself".

In contrast to this, the participants at the conference utilized the common equipment of historical, anthropological, political, and sociological research to describe specific geographical and historical fields in terms accessible and comprehensible to scholars working in other fields. Accounts of the modern history of India, Sri Lanka, and Lebanon in particular showed how the momentous social and cultural transformations of the past century have led to the emergence and crystallization of novel forms of organizing cultural, social and political life. In these contexts, the emerging separatist and exclusivist ideologies and

* The seminar was sponsored by the Otto und Martha Fischbeck-Stiftung.

social movements were modelled on the patterns of nationalism and of religious reformism, the latter entailing the expansion of religion into areas of public life which had not been previously available or open to it.

The present-day social, cultural, and ideological articulation and organization of these new social movements was discussed with reference to India, Sri Lanka, Iran, Turkey, and the Arab World. The common modes of political organization in the Arab World and India, the common psycho-pathologies of prejudice and of communalist violence in India and Lebanon, the political and cultural contestations of modernism (broadly defined) in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and India, and the reaction to this by state and society in Turkey and Syria: these were all matters that led to much mutual enlightenment among the participants and to the emergence of very concrete notions of generality. The assumption that these movements follow a common rhythm allied to the rhythm of international history was amply sustained.