

Emmanuel Sivan

Nipped in the Bud



Born in Kibbutz Kfar Ha-Khoresh, Israel, 1937. B. A. and M. A. at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Ph. D. at the Sorbonne. Has been Visiting Professor at Columbia, Princeton, Penn, The New School, Rutgers, University of Paris X (Nanterre), and EHESS (Paris). Currently Professor of History at Hebrew University. Recent books: *Radical Islam* (1990), *The 1948 Generation* (1991), *Mythes Politiques Arabes* (1995), *War and Remembrance in the 20th Century* (1999). – Address: 20 Zeitlin Street, Ramat Danya, Jerusalem, 96757 Israel.

I find myself in the unenviable position of having to report on a stay, as Guest of the Rector, which was scheduled to last for five months, but which was cut short after two and a half months due to the terrible illness that struck my aging mother and ended with her death in March 2000.

My sadness at having to leave the Kolleg is rendered even more acute, because my stay was exceedingly pleasant and productive. Never have I found in the research institutes where I worked personnel as welcoming, cooperative and efficient. The physical environment, the landscape and the office services made my work very pleasant, despite the constant struggle to give shape to my thinking in words – a task which sometimes wears you down if you do it for days on end.

My endeavour concentrated, first, on writing the final chapter for a book I authored jointly with Gabriel A. Almond, tentatively called *Strong Religion*, which deals with the comparative study of contemporary fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. This final chapter looks at the future of the phenomenon dissected in the earlier chapters, trying to speculate about possible scenarios – violence, integration in the political process, decline, etc. – and the contingencies and factors that may contribute to each one of them. The final draft, which was sent to my editor at Chicago U.P., owes a lot to the frank and incisive critiques I received from a number of Fellows who kindly spent time on the manuscript.

I then proceeded to the second task, writing an essay, commissioned by the *Journal of Democracy*, about some impediments to democratisation in

the Arab world. My major thesis is that, while the powers-that-be seem to be winning the power struggle with Islamist extremists, they are not likely to be magnanimous in victory and allow expansion of human and civil rights, which was curtailed in recent years, for fear that the pro-Islamist though non-violent movements would benefit from this.

I pondered the question of the origin of this suspicion of all Islamists as ultimately anti-democratic, a fear also shared by the liberal opposition, and saw it both as an outgrowth of the cycle of violence and vengeance and as a product of the ambiguous attitude of even most moderate Islamists to the issue of democracy.

Still, I detect an evolution towards genuine acceptance of democracy in certain Islamist circles, born less from theoretical cogitations than from a growing consciousness that only a democracy might give them a real chance to fight effectively, be it in opposition, against the unfurling tide of secularisation and globalisation; and to that end they themselves must accept with no reservations the rules of the democratic game and try to convince the rulers and the liberals of their sincerity – not an easy task at all. Here again, critiques from certain Fellows were most pertinent.

My third planned project, a study of the development of Catholic attitudes towards democracy in the 19th–20th centuries compared with those of Islam, intended to find out whether there is a similar pattern to be laid out and insights to be gained for a better understanding of the potentialities of future Islamic evolution along this path. This project was unfortunately nipped in the bud by my mother's illness.