

As many institutions faltered, Islam, in a sense, was able to salve some of these wounds. Religion replaced a void, created connections, flexibility, esteem, by celebrating a universal ethic and promising individual salvation. Entering Islam has become an act of officialization, aided by its status as a symbolic alternative with relatively deep roots. It's a route to self-assertion, self-revelation, and tenacity. It is often excessive and vindictive, spurred by the comforting high of an about-turn that says a great deal about the depth of this rupture. With time, religious conversion becomes reconversion. Islam is folded into a now-acceptable past. It forces an acceptance of certain moral failings, and it ennobles daily life. It re-moralizes, re-intellectualizes, re-aestheticizes, re-founds, re-enlarges, in constantly shifting proportions. A meaningful path becomes possible. Yet Islam doesn't necessarily become the measure of all things. It's often eclipsed in the face of far more pressing commitments. In short, it, too, finds its place.

However, controversies over its visibility continue to swell. When requests to build mosques or create Muslim areas in cemeteries are presented as signs of a provocative foreign invasion, it could be objected that wishing to pray and rest in eternity in France are probably the greatest possible marks of integration. The same is true when these "bad seeds" reconvert, an act which, as we have seen, grows out of disillusionment with the meritocratic ideal, a furious desire for intelligence, a quest for truth, and a taste for verbal sparring. Many foreign observers would call such passions typically "French." Disillusionment is always a measure of the promises once believed in – and these, because they are more than simply lies, continue to shine. To observe the periphery of the social world is, ultimately, to see what its center is made of. At the extreme end of any phenomenon stands the radical – that which founds a line of succession and presents a total, almost definitive, picture of the world. The radical does not foretell a rupture. It lays bare the foundations in which continuities and reconversions are rooted. Any situation of domination rests on an ambiguous acceptance of the established order, the tacit creation of a consensus around what is valid and what is not. Such *radicalized loyalties* are a very concrete expression of fidelities to a particular set of individuals who matter, and to what is valid. They're experienced in daily life through gifts and counter-gifts, moral debts, social obligations. Implicitly, they speak to intense feelings of loyalty toward things that elevate loved ones in the neighborhood, but also, more generally, the French nation and the Western economic system. In this respect, they have multiple referents, which intersect and are less in competition with one another than is commonly thought. A

commitment to Islam is often a way of injecting a little coherence and nobility into these knots. Commitment to an exclusive and exclusionary Islam is only one possibility among others. First and foremost, it reflects a paucity of things to identify with and believe in. It represents an endpoint – an ultimate loyalty which, like any last stand, is more a caricature than anything else. Capitalism today is the orphan to a counter-narrative. As long as the communist utopia existed, the meaninglessness of materialist accumulation could be armed with a rallying cry. There was, indeed, something larger than profit in the proud struggle against what appeared as a totalitarian threat. Within this void, and in supposedly more connected Western societies, Islam can represent both a cause and a mystery for the nation's "bad seeds." This is the great power of what religion offers: a political imaginary, the enigma of the gift, a celebration of connections, an aestheticism and intellectualization of spirituality, and a newfound morality. But despite the claims of those who seize on it with noisy fanfare, its power of attraction is in no way external to capitalist reason. An imaginary can float, but human behaviors cannot: they remain anchored in the story of each person's sometimes contradictory and turbulent socialization.

On the side of peace, the reconvert fashions his own individuality through an effort of personal bricolage; perpetuating the act of officialization allows him to hang on to his "chosen" values. When tied to the intimacy of a couple, religion helps to cultivate inner reforms that make the world's injustices more acceptable. Religion creates a personal zone of comfort and tenacity. It's not a once-and-for-all revolution, but an individual accommodation with reality. Which isn't nothing.

On the side of war, the jihadist fighter resembles a byproduct of capitalist narcissism. A combination of martyr, hero, victim, and star, he takes competition, predation, a desire for power, and displays of victory, and pushes them to extremes. What shines through is an aestheticization and performatization of politics, in which ideas are replaced by showmanship. But the jihadist fighter, too, dies invoking the superiority of morality over self-interest, in a desperate form of altruistic dispossession. Here is another individual accommodation, by force of arms.)

In 1843, Karl Marx wrote that religion was the "opium of the people," because it diverted humankind from what was most important: "The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions."<sup>13</sup> Today, illusions about the state of the human condition