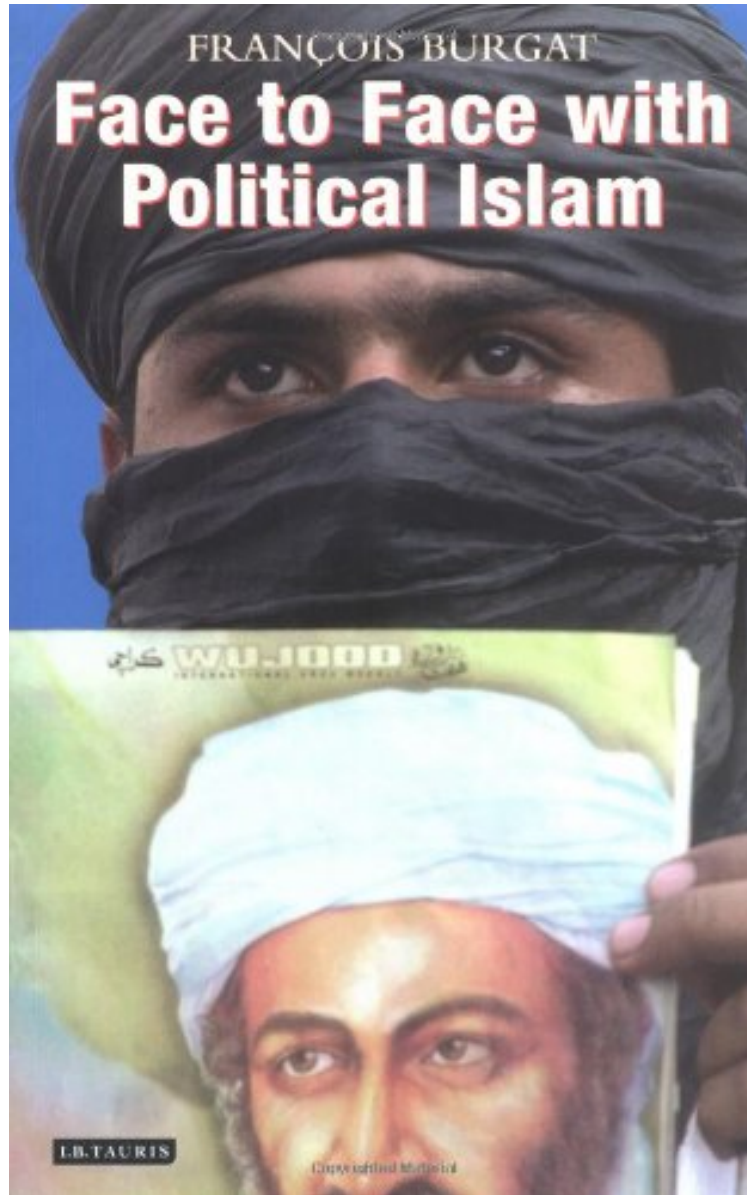


[Library ebook] Face to Face With Political Islam

## Face to Face With Political Islam

*Francois Burgat*

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#2208860 in Books I. B. Tauris 2003-01-17Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.12 x .78 x 4.921, .73 #File Name: 1860642136288 pages | File size: 44.Mb

**Francois Burgat : Face to Face With Political Islam** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Face to Face With Political Islam:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Face to Face: I couldn't face more than a few pages; skip itBy C. RoyallI ordered this book, hoping it would assist me with a discussion on the rise of Islam in North Africa.

Unfortunately, it is an intellectual diatribe that would put even the most hardened intellectual asleep. The language is turgid and overwrought. I am not researching for a doctoral dissertation, so I cannot tolerate this kind of writing. Wish I'd been warned.<sup>8</sup> of 8 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Francophone Scholar By Tron Honto As a french scholar, Burgat is a good alternative to either Olivier Roy or Gilles Kepel. I met him in Yemen and he struck me as an acute, level-headed scholar. His position is contrary to "post-Islamism" or "failed Islamism" model which basically states that the Islamic trend has reached its heights already, failed miserably and has nothing more to offer. The bombastic, vulgar displays of force we see now, from this perspective, are outgrowths of the frustration resulting from this failure. Finally, his work, previously only available in French, *Islamisme en Face*, has been made available and updated in English. Burgat's thesis, to the contrary, is that Islamism is essentially nationalism bathed in religious. Therefore, Islamism functions as a type of ersatz nationalism, replacing failed nationalist projects [mostly socialist] and claiming to restore cultural authenticity. I don't buy it [can't account for Pan-Islamism and unjustifiably reifies political aspects over religious ones], but he makes probably the most convincing argument out of those scholars that push forward this view. Much of the work that is particularly valuable draws upon his extensive field work and experience in the MENA region. The excerpts on Rashid Ghannouchi, Adel Hussein, and Tariq al-Bishri are good as well.<sup>7</sup> of 8 people found the following review helpful. An Uncommon Perspective on Political Islam By Chairman Luedtke According to Burgat, the movements that we call "Islamist" arise out of three sequential factors: 1) a disjuncture between Western-dominated international politics and the authentic identities and experiences of Muslims; 2) the need for a mobilizing device or oppositional rallying point to counter Western domination and re-assert authentic identity; and 3) defensive responses to the savage repression that has been visited upon Islamists (those who offer this mobilizing device) by unrepresentative states that are propped up by the West. While the first two factors explain the political appeal of Islamism to "the masses", the third factor explains much of the violence that has in turn sprung from Islamism. This account obviously goes against the two main conventional explanations for political Islam: materialism and theology. Against those like Bernard Lewis, who would argue that political Islam springs directly from the texts and laws of the religion, Burgat makes the case that Islamist individuals have themselves created political Islam, to serve social needs, rather than Islam creating them. In other words, Islam is a device to be used for emancipation from domination - the religion does not mold "fundamentalists" in its image. Islamists are not directly inspired by actual religious doctrine or belief. Burgat feels that if "theologians" like Lewis actually talked to Islamists, they might come away with a different viewpoint. Burgat's account also goes against those that would seek explanations for the rise of political Islam in poverty and underdevelopment alone. While Burgat cannot ignore the additional force of poverty in pushing recruits into the arms of Islamism, he eschews a materialist approach even for this dynamic, arguing instead that the lack of meaningful unemployment alienates one from one's true identity - "who am I, if I am not given the right to exist by working?" (21). Thus, poverty only exacerbates (but doesn't cause) the identity crisis that Burgat sees as fomenting political Islam. But what is the actual nature of the "authentic" Muslim identity that is in crisis? Burgat never really offers a concrete definition of its content, other than a continual narrative of Islamism as a new nationalism (a reincarnation of an older Arab nationalism, he says at one point), which grants to the Arab "a beneficial reconciliation with the categories (real or mythical, it is not important) of the culture he lives in intuitively" (50). Thus, the categories are not defined, and the content seems unimportant for Burgat. It doesn't even matter if it's real. What is more important is the "vocabulary or terminology based on local references", and the "precious symbolic continuity interrupted by . . . Western categories" (50). Thus, the argument seems to be a post-modern kind of process-based, discourse-based argument, using symbols and language as key variables in defining identity and difference. But not only does this "precious symbolic continuity" have a rather utopian quality to it, but we are not sure of the actual benefits of the reconciliation. What is gained? Dignity? Is this some kind of psychic therapy? One answer is offered by one of the Islamists that Burgat interviews, who, while undergoing a personal transformation from socialist to Islamist in Egypt, realized that "if I feel tied to these people in many ways, that must mean we share a common culture, and this culture should be infinitely more respected than it is at the moment [under Nasser]" (41). Acting on this feeling of tied-ness is presumably what Burgat means by reconciliation (one shudders to imagine a rational choice scholar attempting to calculate a utility function based on "symbolic continuity" and reconciliation with intuitive cultural categories!). So if we are to believe Burgat that Islamism is just organic nationalism, why should the West fear this social change? Is nationalism inherently chauvinistic? Burgat makes a strong case that political Islam's violence is itself a response to state repression and violence, carried out by unrepresentative leaders who are propped up by the West. The West itself props up these leaders, and turns a blind eye to their savage tactics, partly because the West is fed a steady diet of distorted media, in which reporters focus on a few tidbits that reinforce conventional stereotypes of Islamists, while selectively framing what little positive information that leaks through (about possible moderation by Islamists) as mere political ploys to gain power. Burgat implies that some Islamists may not recognize the universality of democratic rights, but only because they have never themselves been granted these rights. How can one be a democrat when one's government routinely makes a mockery of democracy? Thus, being anti-democratic has become a symbolic marker of identity assertion against the West, which sadly reinforces the West's perceptions of Islamists. The book has a hopeful theme, however, which is the future likelihood of Islamism adapting to modernity.

Burgat seems to feel that Islamism has within itself the seeds of this adaptation, once it has gone through a seemingly necessary phase of self-definition free from Western "categories". Indeed, several of the Islamists interviewed seem to show a strain that we would simplistically call "moderate"; namely, seemingly mocking people that read only the Koran, disapproving of people who are "dogmatic", etc. And the strongest real-world case for this potential future adaptation, of course, is Iran, where a terrifying "Islamist" government was (after a rough transition, to be sure) able to achieve something that no pro-Western (thus ostensibly pro-democratic!) Muslim government could do: achieve a peaceful transfer of power at the ballot box. But why should we expect that Islamism would necessarily adapt to modernity? Burgat's explanation is that after taking power, Islamism would lose its utopian quality (the ideological shine that comes from being in opposition), and would be forced to adapt to social reality. Thus, political Islam might just be like socialism and secular nationalism, another passing political fad.

The portrayal of Islamist movements as a tide of religious fanaticism threatening the West and major players in the coming clash of civilizations, has provoked a multifaceted debate of great significance to the future of international relations. In his latest intervention in this debate, Francois Burgat argues that political Islam's desire to restore a culture distorted by colonization does not necessarily compromise its progress to more democracy and greater tolerance. Among the burning issues addressed are the relationship between Islam and modernity, Islamism and women and the question of violence.

""...issues addressed are the relationship between Islam and modernity, Islamism and women and the question of violence.""--Fred Rhodes, *The Middle East Journal*""Extraordinarily salutary reading. . . it helps to show the movement that is political Islamism as it really is - a challenge to all our certainties, received ideas and 'universal' and 'absolute' truths."" -Mouna Naim, *Le Monde*