

Lettres de Byblos

Letters from Byblos

No. 22

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Paradoxes or Foundational Dialectic?**

Centre International des Sciences de l'Homme
International Centre for Human Sciences

Byblos 2008

Lettres de Byblos / Letters from Byblos

A series of occasional papers
published by

UNESCO Centre International des Sciences de l'Homme
International Centre for Human Sciences

(Arabic)

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Published in 2008 in Lebanon by the International Centre for Human Sciences, B.P. 225 Byblos (Jbeil), Liban.

ISBN:978-9953-9023-2-6

Religion and Democracy – Paradoxes or Foundational Dialectic?

CHARLES W. AMJAD-ALI

Introduction

The theme of the Byblos' research project and the paper that my dear friend and colleague Prof. Theodor Hanf has asked me to produce is one which has been close to my heart for well nigh a quarter-century. Though Theo had set me a broad parameter in which to place my presentation, because of existential and contextual reasons, I have restricted my conversation. I focus on political theory, rather than policy, and concentrate on the monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity in its Western manifestations, and Islam in a more global context, although mostly Sunni. I have dealt with these historically, but only insofar as that history is critical for laying out the context in which some of these discussions took place. The Byblos research project brings together two elements that until recently have been seen as mutually incompatible, viz. "religion and politics." Indeed, for a long time, these two elements could not be brought together in any serious academic, theoretical or policy discussion, and was even considered to be inappropriate in theological discourse. The fact that this is now the topic under discussion is a major transformation, one that for me is a sign of epistemic honesty that has been needed in our fields for quite some time. So in order to proceed further, we must attempt what Michel Foucault so profoundly advocated, "to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criti-

cism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult.”¹ With this important imperative in mind, here are some of my initial reflections on these matters and their surrounding elements. These are not meant to be, nor must they be assumed to be, my final thoughts on these matters. Here I am only trying to look at the various aspects from a slightly different perspective and hope that this way of viewing may open some new possibilities to address these fundamentals.

I

To start with, let me list four issues which are critical for this exercise. This list is obviously not exhaustive but it lays out some of the parameters that are necessary for such a discourse. Once these parameters are accepted, we can then move on to the critical task of laying out some of the foundational issues surrounding not only religion and democracy, but also how they will function with justice, peace, and sustainability, and for the well-being intra-nations and within the comity of nations.

Church and State / Religion and Politics

There has been a confusion of categories in the West which emerges because we have interchangeably used two seemingly transposable bi-polarities which, in fact, should be kept distinct for a proper social analysis and critical prognosis. These are the bi-polarities of “church and state” and “religion and politics.” The church and state bi-polarity deals with institutional and juridical issues and the distinct spheres of their respective influence. The religion and politics bi-polarity deals with foundational issues of human participatory life and generates values which claim to have at least similar goals or ends (*telos*) even though they may be from different sources and principles (*arche*). While the polarity of church and state is and should be separated (especially where such distinct institutions do exist), religion and politics cannot and should not be separated. The West has at least on the surface rightly claimed and maintained the separation of church and state,² but with the confusion of these bi-polarities, it has then

¹ Michel Foucault, “Practicing Criticism,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 155.

² While this was the claim of the Reformation which was later under girded epistemologically by Enlightenment Reason, state churches are still *de jure* a practice in almost all European states, though *de facto* church has very little power in the daily life of the people and as a

also gone on to claim an unreal separation of religion and politics. This confusion leads to one of the major continuing *problématiques* of understanding and working with Islam.

Religion and Social Change

Any discussion of politics must also deal with the question of social change. I view social change as a public, self-conscious and deliberate activity and/or mechanism which, to a large measure, deals with the issues of the distribution of power and resources (scarce or otherwise) in any given human community. What gives social change political significance, is that it covers pretty much the same parameters as democracy. Simple electoral structures, though critically necessary, are not sufficient without covering these other aspects of social change which I have articulated above. Both the political and social dimensions in human affairs are dependent upon inter-subjective activity, and are therefore also fundamentally related to religion which also expresses this inter-subjective activity.

By inter-subjective activity I mean any human interaction of which we are part, and which we need to do, and can do, together. Inter-subjective activity, therefore, entails all acts which bring people together for participatory activity in the public arena.³ Since the activities and/or mechanisms for social change are largely dependent on the structure and role of authority in the public arena (which is a perennial question), religion and politics play important roles in determining the nature of social change, even though within the West the bifurcation of religion and politics had till very recently assumed almost epistemic permanence (but more on this later).

moral and faith referential. The US on the other hand has a *de jure* separation of church and state constitutionally in place, but *de facto* the church plays an immense role in the daily life of the people, and as a moral and faith referential.

³ Inter-subjective activity inherently involves a critique of the fundamental premise of Liberal democracy and politics which assumes an isolated vying individual as the *locus politicus*. For a good discussion of this see the works of Fred Dallmayr, especially, *Twilight of Subjectivity: Contributions to a Post-Individualist Theory of Politics* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); but also *Beyond Dogma and Despair: Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); *Polis and Praxis: Exercises in Contemporary Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

Religion and Social Construction

For the sake of brevity, I think that most theories of social construction can be lumped together into two broad frameworks. The *first*, generated largely by Max Weber's thesis in his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and indeed other places,⁴ is a religio-cultural reading of social construction and instrumental rationality. The *second* is the common theme that runs through the works of people like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, etc. It combines social differentiation and social integration for their reading of social construction on a unilinear, almost evolutionary, scale (some have indeed classified these theories as Social Darwinism) and are "Progress" oriented, in the philosophical sense. Briefly, the theory states that a society and culture evolves/progresses from superstitious religious irrationality to a rational scientific basis for organizing social relations.

It is apparent, both through the appropriation of these two social theories by political thinkers, and through the very political nature of these theories, that the issues of social construction and even change and politics are inter-related. Indeed they are interchangeable when one is involved in analyzing and theorizing about "values" which are constitutive in human affairs. It is also exactly at the point of values that religion becomes a very important key for understanding and evaluating this whole process.

Organized religion, through its claim of access to the sacred, represents those networks of powers designed to defend established ideas, values, and norms, as well as power itself. Therefore, the basis on which we define and choose the arenas and space of organized religion, and organized polity, become very fuzzy in terms of our allegiances. Since we are connected to both the political and religious arenas (i.e., we are simultaneously *homo religiosus* and *zoon politikon*) through a whole web of relationships in community, politics, sociality, culture, economics, etc., the problem is how to define our own roles in this nexus on a personal level. This is the axiomatic question which both the religious and the political realms pose on us; and this question defines the nature and character of change in those patterns of relationships and interaction in which we find ourselves. Put in another way, how we understand others, and their underlying sources (such as *imago dei* for Christians, or *Khalifa* of Allah for Muslims), shapes our attitude and our interaction with them.

⁴ *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was originally published as a two-part essay in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* in 1904-5, this was later incorporated as part of a German text, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionsssoziologie* (or *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion*), published in 1920-21 just after Weber's death. The English version was translated by Talcott Parsons in 1930, I am here referring to the copy with a new introduction by Anthony Giddens (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

Religion and *Locus Politicus*: Individual and/or Community (*Koinonia/Catholicity/Umma*)

In general, the fundamental question we face when we discuss democracy is the character of the basic unit that is to act as the *locus politicus*. In the West, for at least the last three hundred years or so, this has been the individual (preferably, but not necessarily, rational).⁵ The concept of the individual who is the locus of politics in democracy has not been static but has been expanding over time. Within the Anglo-Saxon world, for example, it has escalated from only land-owning white males, to all white males over 21,⁶ to men of all races over 21,⁷ to men and women over 21,⁸ and finally to all adults over 18.⁹ The role of other identity factors has been seen as an impediment to the freedom of this essential individual and his/her political choices. Yet in recent decades the politics of identity has emerged in ways not anticipated just a few decades ago and it has begun to determine all contemporary discourses on democracy. The current debate on identity can be broadly defined, for the lack of a better term, as a conflict between *ethnos* (i.e., ethnic group or nation) and *demos* (i.e., the people in a political sense).¹⁰ These two Greek words lie behind a lot of our contemporary politics.

⁵ It could even go as far back as René Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, see his *Meditation on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979). This phrase and with it the idea of the self has changed the concept of "subject" to that which lies in me (the ego) and determines the other, from its origin in the Greek *hypokaimonen*, i.e., that which lies ahead and lures me (Latin *subjectum*), as Heidegger argued. See especially Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Translated and with an Introduction by William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). For a brilliant contemporary exposition of this see also Paul Riccoeur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁶ By 1856, the original 13 states/colonies of the USA had dropped property restrictions on adult white male suffrage (i.e., after some 80 years of independence), while in the UK they were only completely lifted in 1918 after the First World War.

⁷ This was through the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution of 1870 (i.e., after the Civil War), although it was not fully enforced until the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

⁸ In the UK, women over 30 with property were granted suffrage at the same time as the property restrictions were lifted from men, i.e., 1918. Universal suffrage was granted to all adults over 21, with no property restriction, as late as 1928. In the US, women were granted suffrage through the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of 1920.

⁹ This was granted in the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1971, and in the Representation of the People Act 1969 in the UK.

¹⁰ Thus our modern English word democracy - the power of the people.

We can generally use *ethnos* in the broader sense to define the character of identity groups that are based on commonalities of culture, language, religion, or other similar factors - that is, for those groups who have a shared symbolic universe and shared horizons. These are normally treated as pre-political, "primordial" affiliations that need to be transcended in a rational political order. The assumption is that when such rationality becomes effective overall in a given society, then these affiliations and their symbolic universe and horizons will also wither away. Against this notion is the concept of *demos*, which is a more politico-economic identity group. This is exemplified by the concept generated by the French Revolution of the "people" (or in French "*peuple*") over against the aristocracy, nobility and monarchy, and the concept of the "masses" generated by Marx and by subsequent socialist and communist revolutions.

Until recently, most western scholars have tended to either negate or overlook the *ethnos* factor in their theorizing and analysis of politics. With Kant, all true *episteme* had to transcend such locatedness and its prejudices, and to be subjected to an *apriori* rationality, which in liberal political theory was translated into individuality: an individual uncontaminated by the location and loyalties that the concept *ethnos* demanded. In most cases *ethnos* was seen as a problem of superstitious and primordial political orders; that is, it was seen as being an issue restricted to the Third World and recently has been applied almost exclusively to Islam.¹¹ This tendency, however, has begun to shift in some scholars since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of communism in Europe,¹² and after the battles and genocide in the former Yugoslavia. Together these events led to the emergence of 23 new nation-states, cut largely along ethnic lines, with the potential of a couple more looming large. Thus the imperative of *ethnos* in political discourse has been dramatically highlighted. Further, in some of the European states where the *ethnos* was not homogenous there were and are still some tensions, which at times have been quite violent in character, for example, the Protestant-Roman Catholic battle in Ireland and the Basque-Spanish battle in Spain.

Besides the liberal and transcendent rational argument against dealing with the politics of identity and ethnicity in political discourse there has been the confusion

¹¹ Two good examples of this among many are Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996) and Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Anchor Books First Edition, 2000).

¹² It should be emphasized that communism has not collapsed universally as is so quickly assumed and stated from the Eurocentric perspective. The largest communist state in the world, the People's Republic of China, North Korea, and some of the Indo-China states still classify themselves as communist, as does Cuba and there are ever-increasing socialist polities in Latin America, such as Ecuador and Venezuela, of whom Chavez is a vociferous example. This caveat is essential in order to give a factual and proper picture rather than a triumphant universal projection based exclusively on the European experience such as the one expressed triumphantly by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man*. (New York: Avon Books, 1993).

caused by the Hitler era, with its emphasis on the superiority of the Aryan race over all other races. Here a biological racial identity was promoted over other races, which resulted in a shying away from considerations of *ethnos* in later scholarship. We see a similar tendency of not dealing with *ethnos* in post-apartheid South Africa since 1994 because race and other distinguishing factors were all used in the service of the white regime.¹³ We have to differentiate between cultural identity (*ethnos*) and racial identity based on biological factors (*bios*) in order to properly assess the current political dilemma and its implications for democracy and just political order.

II

Having laid out these four points, let me move to some of the foundational issues which lie behind the current discourse on religion and politics and by extension cover the issue of religion and democracy. Let me reiterate here that in the West the question of the religious and politics, as well as other social constructions including democracy, has had a particularly problematic history. It has normally been cast in terms of the separation, or even divorce, of church and state, even though a religio-political element was behind the people who first articulated this separation.

Religion and Politics in European History

The break-up of the medieval Catholic synthesis of church and state and religion and politics was generated long before the Reformation, through the work of such people as Marsilius of Padua and Laurentius Valla. Marsilius wrote *Defensor Pacis* (Defender

¹³ Neville Alexander, "Language Politics in South Africa," in *Shifting African Identities*, vol. II: *Identity? Theory, Politics, History*, ed. Simon Bekker, M. Dodds, and M. M. Khosa (Pretoria, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, 2001), 141-152. See especially 141-142. He argues, correctly I think, that, "In South Africa, the major social markers of difference, i.e. 'colour' or 'race', language, 'culture', gender, religion and region, as well as 'class', have at different times played a decisive role - either alone or in some combination - as determinants of group or social identity in recent times... [T]he connection between the theories of nationality (or 'ethnicity', as this is now called) held by the apartheid ideologues, and the development of the idea of 'independent homelands'... played the central role in their conceptualization.... This historical fact has meant that for most of the post-war generation of black - as well as progressive intellectuals and activists generally - language-based social movements were suspect. Such movements were routinely dismissed or condemned as 'tribalist.'"

of Peace)¹⁴ in 1324 in which he uncompromisingly resolved the perennial conflict of jurisdiction between ecclesiastical and temporal order firmly in favor of the temporal, i.e., the state. He then went on to argue that the church should be stripped of its power in the temporal arena and that the state should have sole authority over all its subjects including the clerics. *Defensor Pacis* is considered to be the most influential contribution for the development of later political theory, and to have laid a firm foundation for all future attacks on the notion of a united Christendom ruled over by a central authority in Rome. *Defensor* influenced the work of such people as John Wycliffe (1330-1384), and the Reformers of the 16th century, especially John Calvin's notion of the removal of the king by lesser-magistrates in the fourth book of *Institutes*.

Laurentius Valla (1406-1457), who many regard as the father of historical criticism, challenged the authenticity of a number of accepted documents by carefully scrutinizing their literary styles. His most significant contribution was the debunking of the famous "Donation of Constantine,"¹⁵ thus challenging the primary basis for the claim to highest power in the spiritual and temporal arenas, which that document granted to the Pope through the hands of Constantine. Valla's critical method later stimulated a much broader attack by the Northern Humanists on the theology, doctrine and political practices of the church.

Following Marsilius and Laurentius, the person best known in this process is Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), whose main historical work, *The Prince* (1512-1513), searched for an "a-moral" reading of the political life (notice that it is not "im-moral" but "a-moral"). He provided a critique of the Florentine Republic, rigidly rejecting all theological interpretations of the state and sought to discover those natural laws which should govern the life of the people in the state.

Martin Luther negated the Roman Catholic idea of the supremacy of the church over the state (echoing Marsilius) in *On Civil Government* (1523), written prior to the Peasant's Revolt of 1525, though he was largely reacting to being condemned as an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. After the Peasant's Revolt, however, Luther wrote a very different treatise, entitled *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* (1525).¹⁶ Here he protects order and promotes the exercise of force by the state only, by what he termed lawful authority. Whereas earlier Luther had challenged the existing authority of the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, he now asks the newly created order of independent nobility to kill the rebellious peasants and Anabaptists.

¹⁴ Marsilius of Padua, *Defender of Peace* translated and edited by Annabel Brett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, 2006).

¹⁵ Lorenzo Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine* translated by G.W. Bowersock (Harvard: Harvard University Press, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 2007).

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther* (Lodge Press, 2007) pg 248-256.

We then have the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*¹⁷ written by John Calvin around 1559 where, especially in “Book Four,” he deals with the issues of religion and politics and church and state. He argues that if the king does not fulfill his covenant or his duties then the lesser magistrates may throw him out. This is clearly a reiteration of Marsilius of Padua's position in *Defensor Pacis*.

Besides this particularly problematic history, the most debilitating factor behind the separation of church and state, and by extension between religion and politics, were the religious wars. After the emergence of Catholic-Protestant plurality, Europe was wracked by religious wars in the 16th and 17th centuries, especially the Thirty Years (bloody) War. The Document of Concord, which was mainly drafted by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), and the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, concluded these wars.

This Treaty is correctly interpreted as the beginning of the formation of modern nation-states and secular politics in Europe (secular here simply meant non-Catholic). Further, the nation-states in the post-Westphalian phase assumed four main characteristics:

1. homogenous *ethnos*: after all, the “nation” in nation-state was simply a matter of ethnicity;
2. homogenous *ethos*: linguistic, cultural, social, ideological - mostly religious/denominational - foundations, etc.;
3. fixed *topos*: a territory in which this specific *ethnos* resided and its *ethos* was exercised; and finally
4. fixed *borders*: beyond which other nation-states with similar characteristics existed.

It must also be remembered that one of the critical clauses in the treaty of Westphalia was a re-articulation of the treaty of Augsburg of 1555, that *cuius regio, eius religio* (lit. whose region his religion), or in other words that *the religion of the prince would be the religion of the state*. Whereas the treaty of Augsburg had restricted that freedom to Lutheran princes, the treaty of Westphalia expanded it to also include the Calvinist princes who had been behind the beginnings of the Thirty Years War in 1618. The Treaty, however, still left the Anabaptists out of this equation, possibly because they did not have any princes. Those who did not want to follow the religion of their particular state had the right to migrate away from it to one that fitted their religious need; thus allowing freedom of religion and movement, but still restricting religion to the determination of the princes. This was a total integration of church and state, despite Luther's rightful demand to separate them. So *de jure* and *de facto* these European states became religious states, which to date is still the reality for most of

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1989).

them, for *de jure* a state religion remains, even if *de facto* very few people practice their religion.

Religion and Politics in America

The true political separation of church and state was articulated by Thomas Jefferson, both while working on the Constitution and while setting up the University of Virginia,¹⁸ and therefore it was first genuinely exercised in the US. What is ironic, of course, is that today while there is no *de jure* connection between religion and politics in the US, they are, however, *de facto* deeply interconnected in that country.

The move towards homogeneity in *ethnos* and *ethos* that Europe set into motion in the construction of its nation-states, continued to impact their migrant states as well, though with some variation. This is the case particularly in the USA, for despite its extreme heterogeneity (*vis-à-vis ethnos*¹⁹ and *ethos*²⁰) and its very confused notion of the *topos*,²¹ the new “nation-state” of the USA used the same process and grammar as the European post-Westphalian creation of nation-states. In order to generate a sense of loyalty (for the natural organic loyalty that existed in Europe was not present in the US), a transcendent homogenous *ethnos* had to be generated through new artificially generated myths. So whiteness, immigration of choice, freedom from religious coercion and persecution, were raised up as part of a new nationalism wiping out the differing ancestries, and transcending old European tribal infighting.

All of these *de facto* and *de jure* excluded the Native Americans as well as the African slaves. In place of a common culture, symbols such as the flag, the constitution and even a reworked version of English with Germanic spellings, were generated as buttresses for a new transcendent *ethos*. A new myth of *topos* was also generated, because there was no organic link between the land and the immigrant people, there

¹⁸ Conceived by Jefferson in 1800 and established in 1819, the University of Virginia was the first university that was not associated with any religious denomination, constructed with no chapel and banning the teaching of theology.

¹⁹ I am not even talking about the large amount of diversity within the Native American nations (who had not migrated) and among the African Americans (who were coercively brought as slaves). I am talking here only about the diversity of heterogeneous immigrant European tribal identities.

²⁰ This was exclusively a European Christian reality with no recognition at all of the native or slave religions and spirituality.

²¹ Therefore it had almost no concept of borders, but always the emphatic symbol of *frontier* and its related metaphoricity.

was no mother- or fatherland. In this generated, mythic story, the land was *Terra Nullius* - i.e., “no man’s land,” or simply empty land, a land unoccupied by anyone. This newly “discovered” land was then mythologized in anthems and folk songs. Through this myth the Native Americans or First Nations (*ethnoi*) of America were regarded and treated as non-people. Their land was occupied and stolen, and whenever they resisted *they* were called the barbarians who were doing the aggression. Therefore they were beaten and put into reservations where their every movement was controlled.

Not only did Europeans claim the right to this stolen land, their occupation was given a religious legitimation. This was done through the generation of yet another myth - of the Promised Land, and the migration to it, as part of God’s covenantal design for those who had faced religious persecution in Europe. So God justified the theft of land by God’s chosen people as Manifest Destiny.²² To work this land, God was again quickly pressed into service, now to justify slavery and the theft of the slaves’ labour. These actions were never acknowledged to be the fault of the invading people’s immorality, but were regarded as obviously part of God’s grand design, which was justified through the double predestinarian theology of Calvin. Similar developments also took place in South Africa, Australia, etc., with similar justifications. There has therefore never been even a vague attempt at something similar to the Truth and Reconciliation process in the US.

In these immigrant states, the more recent Third World immigrants who are people of colour and not of European origin find themselves being treated as not-quite citizens. For, while they may be immigrants of choice and even running from religious and other persecutions like the Europeans claimed, they are not white (whiteness now acting as the sole criterion for the new authenticity), so they only fulfil part of the requirements of ideological and paradigmatic citizenship. For their ethnic, race and colour reasons, however, they remain closer to Native-Americans and African-Americans. Thus while having a highly pluralistic society the emphasis and paradigmatic value still remains focused on a highly homogenous criterion, even if now a totally transcendent and mythical one. If these immigrants of colour make a demand for a different social structure they are told to go back from whence they came. This attitude has been most exercised against Muslim immigrants, both in these migrant states as well as in the European states.

Given this attitude, and with an almost ontologically defined paradigmatic citizenry still restricted to white immigrants (no matter how many generations ago they immigrated), the project of building a society which reflects the genuine plurality on the ground is a very difficult one, claims to the contrary notwithstanding. The current use of the terms “multicultural” and “plurality” so frequently heard in the US are a false pre-

²² For an early and profound discussion of this see Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

mise because they include no commitment to giving up the privileged status accorded to the normative paradigms of the white immigrant of choice criteria.

Thus even when the actual heterogeneity of these societies began to be recognized in the West, they still operated on an assumed homogenous ethnicity, linguistic, cultural and ideological *ethos*. On this homogenous *ethos*, a multiparty system could be built that would reflect a plurality of interests, but the multi-identities and pluralist societies had to be kept in check by continuing to pledge allegiance to homogenous nationalist principles. Liberal political theory in the US in the 1950s post-war reconstructive period generated a paradigm based on the not-so-apparent but crucial distinction I am trying to articulate here, i.e., the difference between plural politics (the multi-party system), which was to be encouraged, and plural society, which would be disintegrative of the homogenous nationalist principle which had been foundational for the modern nation-state since 1648. In this understanding, the former had to be promoted and the latter had to be, at the least, minimized, if not rejected outright.²³ This homogenous identity and heterogeneous party system was then treated as imperative for democratic processes everywhere, irrespective of history and the actual realities in non-European societies.

III

Islam is often condemned by the West as having no separation of church and state, when in fact it does not have an analogous ecclesial and denominational structure with either that kind of power or organization. Thus such a quick condemnation is at best a distortion of history, and a condemnation that, at least partially, needs to be brought back to Europe and to the European history itself. Of course, none of this history can be repeated in other places unless the West assumes such exclusive omnipotent historical hegemony that what was a product of a particular history in a particular time and location must be universally and atemporally applied everywhere else. This puts the application of such concepts as nation-state and even democracy into jeopardy in Islamic states from their very inception.

²³ The concept of a plural society was developed by Furnivall, a Dutch sociologist and apologist for colonialism, who studied the Dutch colonies of Southeast Asia. The distinction between “*pluralist societies*” and “*pluralist politics*” is implicit in a discussion of the former in Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), see especially the first chapter. For a brilliant discussion of this point, see Cris E. Toffolo, *Liberal Conceptions of Cultural Pluralism: A Critique from the context of Pakistani* (Notre Dame, IN: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1995).

To read this largely European history as a valid development for the total *oikoumene*, (the whole inhabited world) is pure hegemony and worse. It advances a Eurocentric pseudo-universal, which is seen as a genuine, rationally provable, universal applicable and valid for all, everywhere. That is not only bad historiography, it is also a blindness to other realities which exist. It is, in fact, an eclipsing of these realities as they impinge on history everywhere. Having said all that let me very quickly add that European history is important, since the modern state is a product of this history. The European history determines the history of all those peoples who seek to be a "modern nation" with all the dimensions of social constructions, including democracy, in it.

Throughout the vast ranges of world history and different peoples, it has been normal for religion to be closely linked with politics. The practice in the West of separating church and state has made Western scholars also very suspicious of the relation between religion and politics, as I have argued above. But as I have said, while church and state is an institutional issue, religion and politics is a more fundamental issue of life and the meaningfulness of human existence. It concerns human beings' inter-subjective activity as they live together. Because of the inability to make, or at times even to see, the distinction between the foundational bi-polarity of religion and politics, and the institutional bi-polarity of church and state, Western scholars have had serious difficulties in understanding, or even appreciating, those societies and cultures where such distinctions have not existed, and where this sort of atomization between religion and politics is almost considered a moral death. In the study of such societies and cultures, there has been an imposition of unquestioned epistemological and metaphysical prejudices, which has led to an inability to see fundamental values in societies where religion and politics are very closely linked, or are seen as inter-critiquing axiomatic structures.

It is apparent that the character of democracy and even the nation-state will have a different manifestation in those societies that are dominated by Islam. Islamic societies struggling to establish a democratic political order are averse to reducing the basic political unit to the individual, and instead project the *ethnos* and *demos* factors into the political discourse. This is a fundamental challenge to the foundations of Liberal democracy with its emphasis on the isolated vying individual. Further, the debate in Islam on the contemporary role of the *umma* (which is the conjoining of the *ethnos* and *demos* factors into one universal identity), and its status in the modern nation-state is clearly a most critical issue. In this way Islam is contributing a very novel element to the larger democratic discourse. Raising the *ethnos* and *demos* factors as a prerequisite for democracy also highlights the inability of Liberal democracy to deal with these components in a fundamental way. This becomes much more apparent where we have fundamentally pluralistic *ethnoi* and *demoi* and not just pluralism along denominational and clannish lines. In fact, the experiment with, and demand for, democracy that is emerging in Islamic states will always be tinged with the *ethnos/demos* factor, which is very difficult for a Liberal structure to accept. The only way it knows how to catalogue this *ethnos/demos*-based democracy is through the negative

nomenclature of “tribalism,” “primordial politics,” “fundamentalism,” “Islamicists,” “Jihadists,” etc.

The Western confusion of categories between religion and politics and church and state prevents the West from truly being able to grasp the complexity of the issue of democracy in an Islamic context. Officially, Islam has never had an institution like the church, nor has it had a priestly class, though at times the role of ulemma is confused and equated with the ecclesial hierarchy. Thus the concept of the separation of church and state makes no sense in an Islamic context. Neither does the transference of the western notion of a theocratic state, which was based on the power of the church and the priestly class.

The separation of religion and politics is irrelevant, illogical, and nonsensical in an Islamic context, which has a hard theological and philosophical commitment to keeping the two together in order to provide ethical and moral parameters for the political order and to show the relevance of religion and its ability to be translated into the political order. Both religion and politics demand a high singular *tawhidic* (monotheistic) loyalty which pervades all orders and not the overly simplistic, polytheistic-sounding, two spheres (*Reiche*) or two kingdoms of Luther, with almost their own respective gods, which is often justified through the current incorrect reading of Luke 20:20-26 and by throwing around the cliché of “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” Further, it regards the whole Muslim world as being fundamentally one in its concept of *umma*, which should be constituted ideally as one state, but more on this later.

I must state here, even though rather cryptically, that recently I have been working to see where there is a separation of religion and state in Islam (notice not religion and politics and not church and state). I want to argue that there has been a completely different approach to such a separation and that it has been practiced by Islam, and even the Prophet himself, from its very earliest days. The Prophet decided not to make Mecca the capital of the new state of Islam, after his victory and capture of Mecca in 632, even though that victory was one of his central goals from at least the Hijra in 622, if not from the beginning of the revelation in 612. That he returned to, and left, Medina as the political capital of his state (*Ummah*) indicates the difference which I am trying to point out here and which needs to be elaborated and further argued for the sake of contemporary Islam. It is significant that the religious *qibla* (the point of reference and therefore the direction of prayer)²⁴ remains permanent, whereas the political capital of the caliphate moves and changes from Medina to Kufa, to Damascus and thereon as far afield as Spain and Istanbul. None of these political *poloi* ever acquired the status of being religious *topos*, in the sense of *qibla*, which gives us a clear potential for differentiation that the West accomplished through the notion of the sepa-

²⁴ It must be remembered that Jerusalem was the first *qibla*, but it was changed to Mecca. *Qibla* was and is therefore critical for the religious life of Islam but that this status was not changed while the capital remained Medina is what I am trying to point out here.

ration of church and state. Such a separation will allow for the multi-nation Islamic *Ummah* having a common religious *qibla* while also allowing them to exist in their respective states without always demanding a central or overarching universal Islamic state based on a transcendent, almost mystical, *Ummah*. This will help in overcoming some of the almost internally incompatible demands of the radical Islamists.

IV

With the development of post-Reformation and post-Enlightenment secularism in the West, religion was privatized for the proper functioning of the state. By contrast, in the Muslim world, Islam from the very beginning was the *grundnorm* for the polity and for the *Ummah* - which was a normative transcendent homogenous ideological community, rather than one based on homogenous *ethnos*, *ethos*, and *topos*. From its very inception in the early seventh century and through many later developments in Islamic polity over the next 800 or so years, this foundational (*grundnorm*) function of Islam remained more or less intact. While the idea of Muslim nationhood along these lines was established in Islamic political discourse from its very beginning, the identities of its citizens along ethnic, linguistic or other similar bonds were not subsumed under some paradigmatic homogenous *ethnos* and *ethos*. Rather, their plurality was maintained, but within the unity of Islamic *umma*. Muslims saw this as a sign of God's mastery and creativity:

Among His other signs are the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for all mankind. (*Surah Al-Rūm* - "The Greeks" [lit. Rome referring to Byzantines] 30:22).²⁵

This creativity existed so that people could identify themselves into tribes and nations and in this way they could compete with one another in the doing of the good:

Men, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you might get to know one another. The noblest of you in God's sight is he who is most righteous. God is all knowing and wise. (*Surah Al-Hujurā* 49:13)

Compare this to the traditional Jewish and Christian exegesis of the biblical story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 in which the human community's plurality is viewed as being part of God's punishment for arrogance:

²⁵ All Qur'anic references are taken from *The Koran, with a Parallel Arabic text*, trans. With notes by N.J. Dawood, (London: Penguin Books, 1995).

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. ... Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, ..." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. ..." ... the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

The key difference between these two approaches is that the Jewish and Christian reading of the plurality of human existence, based on this Genesis account, has been traditionally articulated as "punishment" of God. In Islam, however, such plurality - especially of ethnicity and ethos - was celebrated and even seen as an occasion for good as long as there was homogeneity vis-à-vis the faith. This difference remains visible when we look at the emergence of the secular, liberal bourgeois politics in the West, which demanded social and ethnic homogeneity and allowed a multi-party system within the state. Islam, on the other hand, asked for a singular homogeneity vis-à-vis faith and in following Islamic law, while allowing for heterogeneity in ethnic, cultural, and social life. So while almost all of the major political theories in the West have argued for the necessity of this homogeneity as a prerequisite for state formation, Islam has kept claiming the homogeneity on the basis of Islam itself.

Since Islamic political theory developed during the heyday of the existence of the Islamic state, with its multi-cultural, social, national, and tribal affiliations, Muslims have had difficulties with the "modern" western concept of a nation-state which emerged only after 1648, because Islam's emphasis has always been on state-nations, i.e., a single Muslim state encompassing the entire *Ummah* (state), which contains many nations (*ethno*) within itself. In this context a state characterized and limited on the basis of *ethnos*, *ethos* and *topos*, is incorrect and unsustainable. The only relevant topographical or geographical demarcation recognized by Islam is the one grounded in the ideological boundaries of the Islamic state, i.e., *Dar-al-Islam* - the abode of Islam, and *Dar-al-Harb* - the non-Muslim states which are an abode of war or struggle (or *jihad*). Sometimes the latter is also seen as *Dar-ul-Kufr* - the abode of non-believers. This topography is therefore not restricted to physical realities but to ideological and spiritual ones because they can exist in a number of locations at the same time.

In spite of this idealization, the historical facts of early Islam give a slightly different picture. Between 622 and 661 AD, the Prophet, and after his death, the four rightly guided and pious caliphs (*Khulfa-e-Rashdeen*), headed all three branches of the government (namely, executive, legislative, and judiciary) on the basis of their religious standing. That this was only the case for 39 years (from 622-661 AD), becomes problematic when these years are taken to be central for all later developments. Leaving aside the Prophet's ten-year rule in Medina (622 to 632 AD), the much-touted

paradigmatic rule of the *Khulfa-e-Rashdeen* lasted merely 29 years. Further, even within that early golden euphoric period, the last three of the *Khulfa-e-Rashdeen* (viz., Umar, Uthman and 'Ali, who together ruled for just over 26 years), were murdered by their fellow Muslims for various political reasons and all while they were performing their ritual prayers. Only the first caliph (viz., Abu Bakr), being quite old when he took the office, died a natural death after ruling for just two years and three months (or 27 months).

Abu Bakr spent most of even this brief period fighting the Ridda Wars (or wars of apostasy/repudiation). These wars took place because the confederation that the Prophet had created began breaking up immediately after his death. Some of the confederating members demanded separation and autonomy and some even claimed their own new prophets and were not willing to accept the central doctrine that the Prophet Muhammad was the last of the Prophets.²⁶ There is also a claim in some Muslim traditions that the Prophet himself was poisoned from within the Muslim community. This goes to show that even in this "golden age," power was challenged by those within the earliest *Ummah* in spite of the religious justifications for this power.

The continuing debates on the priority of one caliph over the other and the process of succession (or usurpation as some still see it), which was challenged from the beginning, led to a very early schism between the Shi'a and Sunni factions, and to a further division with the *Kharajites* (still within the first 39 years). Added to this is of course the two parties of the *Muhajir* and the *Ansar* (the Immigrants and the Resident Helpers), which was initially set up for the hospitality and convenience of the *Muhajir* in 622 AD. This acquires permanence after the death of the Prophet and after the failed attempt of the *Ansars* to acquire the leadership of the community in 632 AD.²⁷ The simple fact that all the four rightly guided Caliphs were taken from the *Muhajirs* and no *Ansar* was ever considered for that leadership position gives an indication of who had become the controller in Medinese polity. So the character of *Dar-al-Islam* and *Dar-al-Harb* and their location is not as easy to distinguish as some would like to claim,

²⁶ The main people mentioned in the context of the Ridda Wars are: *prophet* Musaylima of the Banu Hanifa (the Liar); *prophetess* Sajah al-Tamimiyyah; Malik ibn Nuwayra; b. Asad in Najd; Tal bin Khalid; B. Hanifa in al-Yamama; *prophetess* Al-Kahinat (real name Dihya or Damiya) of Jrawah; *prophet* Dhu-l-Himar (Man on the donkey), otherwise known as Al-Aswad (the black one), or Dhu-l-Khimar (veiled one) from southern Yemen; and *prophet* Tulaiha ibn-Khuwailid of banu Asad.

²⁷ The story goes that the leaders of the *Ansar* tribes of Medina met in a place called *Saqifah*, to discuss the new leader of the community. When Abu Bakr got the information of this meeting, he, Umar, Abu Ubaida ibn al-Jarrah, and a few others (all *Muhajirs*), rushed and stopped the Ansar from making their decision. There are of course varied accounts of this meeting. Apparently during the meeting Umar somehow convinced the Ansars that Abu Bakr should be the new leader, and declared his own allegiance immediately to Abu Bakr, followed by Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah. Abu Bakr thus became the first Muslim caliph with the title Khalifa-tul-Rasool (*successor of the messenger of Allah*).

especially in the contemporary times, in order to promote or create a new consciousness of *jihad*.

In ideal form, an Islamic polity calls for a single Muslim state which should encompass the entire *Ummah* and negates separate Muslim states. Islamic law deals with an individual on the basis of his being a Muslim. The territory of the state to which he belongs becomes an issue only to the extent that such a territory is, or is not, governed by Islamic law. In such a case the almost universal demand for the application of *shariah* becomes very critical for the discussion of the *Ummah* and the individual.

The possibility of this kind of state-nation (i.e., an *ummah* based polity, and the distinction between *Dar-al-Islam* and *Dar-al-Harb*) came largely to an end with the colonization of Muslim states that were outside the so-called Middle East, cf. the Mughal rule in India, and the various sultanates that spread through South East Asia, etc. That in the colonial period the Muslims were defeated and ruled by people of another faith was a challenge to Islam and its efficacy, and brought about a serious crisis of faith, theology and piety, which was of similar in nature as the invasion and victory of the Mongols over Baghdad in the 12th century. The latter for some unknown reason, adopted the religion of the vanquished after a very short period, which made their conquest somewhat palatable for the Muslims. This acceptance and palatability, however, was not universal, as the contemporaneous writings of Ibn Tammiyyah clearly indicate. These texts and the Tammiyyan reaction have become critically important in the current discussion among the radical Islamists like the Wahabis and people like Qutb and Mawdudi. The fact that the West not only occupied Islamic lands, etc., but showed no signs of accepting Islam, and more, continued its hostility, is a significant new development in the Islamic history. Another major problem in the context of our discussion here, however, was the inability of Sunni theology and political theory to provide a justification for resisting any existing ruler since all rulers were in place because of the will of God. This lack became critical during the period of European colonization of Muslim lands. For how does one challenge the authority of even these non-Muslim rulers?

Arab Muslims, who had been colonized by the Ottoman Turks as the new Caliphate for well over 600 years, were caught up in a different struggle. For them there was a major ethnic problem, because while the Ottomans were Muslims (and thus part of the *Ummah*), they were ethnically not Arab. Therefore that issue was exploited in the creation of new Arab nation states after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire during and after the First World War. The pan-Arabism of Michel Aflaq, on the other hand, was trying to create a homogenous ethnic identity in the public domain while privatising, or at times rejecting, the role of religion as a controlling *grundnorm* in the Arab countries.

In the Middle East, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire after the First "World War," through the direct intervention of the British colonial structure, led to the emergence of the first secular polity in Islam - Kamal Ataturk Pasha's struggle for a constitutional democratic modern Turkey which came to fruition in 1923. A number of

states emerged in the Arabic speaking world following the reduction and secularisation of the Ottoman Empire. These varied in their attitude towards Islam, the debate was vibrant and robust as to the role of Islam in these states from Wahabism, to Arab Nationalism, to Baathist Socialism, to real Socialism, and indeed there were quite vociferous demands for secular states with a clear separation of religion and politics, etc.

This was the final nail in the coffin of the medieval Islamic state and all the structures that Islamic political theory, philosophy and theology had generated to date. There was almost no source material available to deal with the post-caliphate Islamic nationhood, neither was there a serious attempt to do a contemporary contextual hermeneutic of these sources and even more specifically for Muslims living as minorities in states which were controlled by other religions and/or ideologies. When such attempts were carried out, either the colonial and western model was proposed as the answer, or the hard fundamentalism which began to emerge in the post-euphoric period after independence from colonial rule, cf. Qutb, Maududi, etc.

Therefore one of the major critical issues which Islam must face today is the fact that at least some 28 percent of the *Ummah* live as a minority in states largely dominated by people claiming other religious and ideological affiliations and loyalties. In such states there is no foreseeable chance or even hope of the application of Islamic *shariah* and other codes of Muslim orthopraxes. Both the *shariah* and such orthopraxes demand a reference not only to the Qur'an, *Hadith*, and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, but also to their hermeneutics (interpretation) which make them valid and applicable today. While the high orthodoxy of Islam has restricted such interpretive moves by restricting *ijtihad*,²⁸ even the most orthodox has allowed the role of *qiyas*²⁹ and even some role to *ijma*.³⁰ The question therefore is whether the analogical interpretation and imagination applied in *qiyas* is exclusively an *analogia fidei* (analogy from faith), or does some *analogia entis* (analogy from experience) also need to be employed for the true and proper working of this *qiyas*? Indeed both these analogies need to be brought together in a dialectical fashion, and often have been throughout the Islamic history. But to date such interpretations (including the application of the two

²⁸ *Ijtihad* literally means "effort," but is applied to those issues not covered by the Qur'an, *Sunnah* (praxes of the Prophet), and *taqlid* (the precedents already established), nor by direct *qiyas* (analogy) from known laws. At that point there is a combination of "reason" and faith and piety. The door to *ijtihad* is considered to have been closed for some nine hundred years.

²⁹ *Qiyas* (lit. measure, scale or exemplar, hence the more usual translation of analogy) is the principle by which the laws of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* are applied by analogy to situations not explicitly covered by these two main sources of law in Islam.

³⁰ *Ijma* (lit. assembly) is the consensus of religious authorities (or *ulema*) but popular consensus can lead to this learned consensus given the equality of each believer as foundational. Thus in modern times democratic elections and processes are seen as acts of *ijma*.

analogies) have been carried out almost exclusively in the contexts where Islam was the majority, and a controlling majority at that.

These interpretations and traditions do not work within the contexts where the Muslim communities are a minority with no real foreseeable chance of controlling the state mechanisms of power. Therefore they need to be reworked and rethought out in these contexts if the *Ummah* is truly a comprehensive concept and reality. Here a hermeneutic based on a true and effective dialectic of the *analogia fidei* and *analogia entis* is critical. Such interpretations should not be based on the controlling hegemony of those who live and work in a largely, and in some cases exclusively, Islamic majority. This does not, however, mean that those working on this project, as a minority, should let go of their sources (*arche*) and the ends (*telos*) of Islamic faithfulness and make easy compromises and apologetics to the context in which they find themselves. People like Tariq Ramadan, Arkoun, and others who are dealing with this minority experience seriously, are doing a noble job. They have, however, at times shown a tendency either to make an apologetic, which does not help in the end; or, rather too quickly, to amalgamate the Islamic experience with the Liberal bourgeois politics. In such a process they have tended to overlook the native contributions of Islam or to romanticize them hyperbolically. The task at hand is instead an imaginative and critical attempt to construct a political theory from *within* Islam, which takes the experience of Muslim minority as a prerequisite for the construction of the *Ummah*-based polity. They must then go on to see how this Islamic political theory will fit into the various particular contexts in which these minority Muslims find themselves.

Such a task will require a reworked hermeneutic of the sacred sources and a true understanding of the context in which this hermeneutic is to take place. It is imperative here that the pertinence of Islam does not get reduced, either to some romantic ideal past, or a romantic and ideal apocalyptic future, or for that matter to the more common lip-service for the sake of uncritical simple chauvinistic religious loyalty. Those states that have a Muslim majority, and even call themselves Islamic states, equally need to undertake this task for the sake of the *Ummah*. This is critical if these states are to become relevant in the contemporary historical context and prove their oft claimed, but not always practiced, ideals of human rights, etc. They cannot look to some romantic and ideal past as providing both their *arche* and *telos* for current Islamic politics and expression of faithfulness. Such a romantic revival and retrieval, though very appealing to people of faith, also makes the faith highly static and dogmatic. Further it leads to pathologies which erupt in destructive intra-communal strife and harms the believers as well as all those who come into contact with them.

The latter has been the case in the various revivals and expressions of the *Salafi* conservative movement³¹ and the others which surfaced such as the *Wahhabi* move-

³¹ The term *salafi* (lit. predecessors) refers to the period of the first three generations of Muslims, a "golden-age" of pious Islam.

ment in Saudi Arabia,³² Qutb in Egypt,³³ and Maududi in India (later Pakistan),³⁴ could not impede the struggle for, nor the later emergence of, nation-states with large Muslim populations and an Islamic identity (cf. Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.). After the emergence of these post-colonial nation-states, these same *Salafi* Muslim theologians, who had first seen them as heretical, began to demand that these states exercise the full panoply of Islamic political ideals within these highly territorially restricted nation-states. In other words they paradoxically asked for the revival of the caliphate and *ummah*-based Islamic polity but for this to be developed inside of individual, topographically and geographically determined Muslim nation-states, without taking cognisance of either the contradiction entailed in such a demand, nor the defunctness of the foundational parameters that are necessary for such an Islamic polity.

Thus for example, initially Maududi and other *ulemas* in India railed against the demand for an independent Pakistan for the Muslims of India, because such a demand was fundamentally against the state-nation *Ummah*-based Islamic polity. After its formation, however, they demanded the application of *shariah*, etc., and claimed that their *salafi/wahhabi* understanding of Islam was essential for Pakistan. To support their position, every one of these Sunni scholars/leaders evoked Ibn Taymiyyah, the only Sunni theologian who had raised the theological possibility of not only resistance to the ruler but also provided theological and legal grounds for the overthrow of a bad leader by invoking and retrieving the concept of *Jahiliyyah*.³⁵ Thus a bad Muslim ruler

³² *Wahhabism* is based on the teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, (1703-1791), who felt that Islam had departed from its roots and was in danger of polytheism, and therefore must return to the purity and original teachings of Islam. The movement calls for *tawhid* (strict monotheism), and the literal interpretation of the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* and believes in an Islamic state based on Islamic law and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The movement spread in the early 1900's with the support of the powerful Ibn Saud family and became the established form of Islam in Saudi Arabia after that country was established in 1932 and from where it has attempted to influence many Muslim countries particularly those dominated by the Sunnis.

³³ Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), was an Egyptian scholar, writer, and activist. He followed a strict approach to Islam and rejected modern interpretations of Islamic law. Qutb believed that all laws governing human life must be based on God's word as revealed by the *Qur'an* and that all Muslims had a duty to wage *jihad* against the enemies of what he considered to be the true Islam. He condemned governments and societies that did not function in strict agreement with Islamic teaching. Since his death, Qutb's ideas have influenced radical Islamic organizations in Afghanistan, Egypt, the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank, and elsewhere.

³⁴ Sayyid Abu'l-A'la Maududi (1903-1979) was dedicated to reviving Islam in India. He established the *Jamaat-e-Islami* Party in Lahore, in what is now Pakistan, in 1941. He assimilated western ideas of activism and oppositionalism to postulate a mechanism of power transfer in an Islamic state. He has also been very influential in the formation and spread of what is now called Islamism.

³⁵ *Jahiliyyah* literally means ignorance, and refers to the pre-Islamic period.

was considered to be reviving *Jahiliyyah* and was therefore to be challenged and overthrown for the sake of Islam. This stance was now most apparent in the coining of a very interesting term, which entails a pun critical to understanding the attitude of these Islamists, viz., “Westoxification.” This contradiction continues to plague the current political and theological debates within Islamic discourse and shows both the anachronistic tendencies as well as the intellectual laziness which prevents them from dealing seriously with the contemporary realities which face Islamic communities, their faith, praxes and theology.

V

When discussing the current situation of Islam and democracy, one must be cognizant of three particular points of tension:

The Threat of the West

Whatever the position of the elites in Muslim societies vis-à-vis the West, the population at large generally perceives the West as a threat to its existence. This leads to a tension for the critical thinking “moderates” (read elites) as it puts them between the Scylla of the post-colonial *status quo*, and the Charybdis of a large majority of poor “unwashed masses.” The former are kleptocratic but established political regimes, while the latter (which include the lower middle class) have been left out of any possible state largesse and find cultural, symbolic, and political comfort in the more radical, militant, but also conservative, Islamic movements. For they see in them a hope for a more just economic arrangement and the possibility of political participation for the masses. This reaction has grown exponentially since the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and particularly since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, following the events of September 11, 2001. It has also been fuelled by the already existent, and subsequently rising, anti-Muslim racist and xenophobic rhetoric of the European nations, and the easy equation of terrorism and Islam by the US and its allies. The relatively recent colonial experience, and the even more recent neo-colonial domination, all influence and inform the current perceptions of the West in the Islamic world. These attitudes are intensified when public statements are made either against a particular state with an Islamic identity or against Islam itself. Serious consideration needs to be paid to the perceptions, apprehensions, and anxieties of populations in both the Islamic and western worlds, if peace is to have a durable role within these societies and within the larger international comity of nations.

The Internal Contradiction of Radical Islam

There is a strong internal contradiction within radical Islamic identity, with its vision of a trans-national Islamic *Ummah*, which exists (not always harmoniously) alongside a radical nationalist identity that strongly presumes a nation-state along modern lines. This contradiction is further exacerbated by questions of ethnic and linguistic identity. That is to say, on the one hand, there is the supra-nation-state ideology, represented by the Islamic concept of *Ummah*, while on the other hand there are the so-called sub-national "primordial identities" which lie deeper than the post-colonial transcendent national identity.

At the same time, in the middle of these two sets of identities, most people also support some concept of the modern nation-state, which is at odds with these other identity commitments. When the modern nation-state fails to meet its declared ideals, in terms of services and public morality, then people very quickly and almost pathologically turn to the other options, i.e., Islamic identity and/or sub-national identities. The three-pronged quest for identity (i.e., supra-national Islamic - *Ummah*, transcendent nationalist - state nationalism, and sub-national ethnic, linguistic, and tribal identities), and the attempts to integrate these conflicting identities, remains one of the crucial issues of political debate in contemporary Islamic states, as well as in other post-colonial states. This task challenges the concept of democracy as understood in the West and is judged in the light of Islamic theology and ideology.

Islamization of Modern Institutions

Finally, is the issue of the desire, on the one hand, to preserve at least those aspects of the modern nation-state (weakened and threatened as it may be), that follow an instrumental rationality and through that provide for the efficient working of systems and institutions, and yet on the other hand, to give that system at least a veneer of Islamic legitimacy. The problem, however, is that these institutions are largely the product of a particular historical evolution in western social and political theory and statecraft which I have discussed briefly above. Although there is an adoption - and in some cases even a certain amount of adaptation - of these systems and institutions to the local contexts, in most cases there is either a conscious ignorance or rejection of the underlying *geist* (spirit), which is quickly replaced by an Islamic spirit or ideology. In other words, in order to justify the existence of these instruments, they are renamed and claimed to be Islamic. For example, the shift in Pakistan of the nomenclature from

Parliament to *Majlis-e-Shoora* (originally an unelected Council of Advisors to the caliph) becomes a critical shift because now the institution of parliament does not have the sense of being made up of elected legislators, but rather it simply connotes a body of advisors appointed by the head of the state. Interestingly, no mention is made of the equivalent analogue of the modern office of the head of state, which would be the medieval office of caliph. This is because the latter may require an accountability and transparency which these leaders are not willing to subject themselves to.

So we may have elected presidents and elected parliaments but the latter's name gets changed to meet the need for an Islamic veneer. In most cases, however, the office of the President has simply been usurped by the most western institution in these countries (i.e., the military). So although they may re-dub the parliament "*Majlis-e-Shoora*," they do not take on the title of Caliph for themselves. This shift in nomenclature and the Islamic veneer placed on these very western institutions causes anxiety in the West and among westernized elites in Muslim societies because they see this as a slippery slope, leading to the reestablishment of an anachronistic form of polity.

These above three tension points produce a high level of anti-western rhetoric, which is fed as a regular diet to the general populace to gain their political support. At this point peoples' participatory expression begins to surface (which is, of course, critical for any democratic society), and clearly targets the *status quo*, which is seen to be western, secular, liberal, and even anti-Islamic in character, or at least thoroughly contaminated by Westoxification. So what is largely seen by the West and by westernized elites within these societies as a fundamentalist thrust against the modern state, its instruments and institutions, is paradoxically a phenomenon that is partly dependent upon the modern concept of democracy and the equally modern value of a high level of peoples' participation for its success against the *status quo*. In this sense the more traditional groups see themselves as victims of the modern controlling elites who are the agents of the West in the Islamic states. They use traditional religious symbols to evoke political activity and anti-West sentiments to attack the ruling groups that control the state's institutional structures.

The contradiction between the upholding of traditional values and symbols, and the use of people power against the *status quo*, dominates the current political process and practice in most Islamic states. This seeming contradiction, however, is not readily apparent to the controlling elites of these societies and even less so to western political theorists and analysts. Hence the very inaccurate predictions by western pundits about Islam and Muslim countries that we have witnessed over and over again in the recent history. The lack of accurate perceptions of these issues is also one of the major obstacles to coming to terms with Islamic societies and their role in the international arena. It also poses a serious threat to peace processes vis-à-vis these nations and for future development in these areas.

Modern nation-states that have majority Muslim populations are either a product of the end of colonialism, or a creation of the direct intervention of the West, through the

breaking of the Ottoman Turkish Empire as mentioned above. Except for Iran, most of the non-Arab Muslim states have large heterogeneous ethnic and linguistic communities. Islam has been seen as the transcendent ideology that was to hold these heterogeneous multi-social and multi-cultural societies together. In this sense, Islam was to play the same ideologically transcendent role in these newer Muslim states that secularism did in the West after the collapse of Christendom and the generated mythic transcendent nationalist ideology did in the US.

It is now quite apparent, however, that using the rhetoric of Islam as a unifying glue has failed, in spite of the “head in the sand” attitude of some of the Muslim leadership. Islam, as interpreted and used as a tool, failed to provide cohesive opposition against the state of Israel in the two wars of 1967 and 1973. It failed to provide the necessary integration in the 1971 conflict between what are now Pakistan and Bangladesh. It plainly did not have any kind of irenic and binding force to stop one Muslim state from attacking another during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980 to 1988. Nor did it stop Iraq’s aggression against Kuwait. And it was clearly incapable of bringing Muslim states together against the US during the first Gulf War of 1991. Although one can and would want to see a homogenous Islamic response to the US and its war coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq, Islam still does not play either a peace-making role, nor is it able to bind Muslims together in the way that either the West claims or that Muslim leaders would like. It must be said, however, that we have witnessed a lot more cohesion and anti-western unity in the Islamic world over the last six or so years, than in a very long time. This seems to be growing because of a perception in the Muslim world of the character and constancy of the attack against Islam and the daily new manifestations of this attack in Europe and by the US.

VI

In conclusion, I want to say that an Islamic perspective on democratization demands a different understanding of democracy and political order, and one that clashes in some very fundamental ways with the Liberal understanding of democracy and politics that now dominates international political discourse. If there is to be an international order grounded in a just peace, one has to push for a plurality of political orders and democratic expressions. Peace is most threatened when the historical basis and experience of a particular people is hegemonically thrust upon others who have completely different histories and experiences, and when one side not only claims universality but also the sole possession of truth and rightness about their own position while belittling the other as having no validity or grounds for challenging this position. Both sides make claims to universality, but this pseudo-universalizing is clearly more applicable for those who possess the power to dominate, dictate and impose this universality, i.e. the West. This pseudo-universality both

challenges and is challenged by Islamic states, which possess their own ideals of polity, with established moral and philosophical bases. These have a clear application in their own political orders and thus Muslims would like to experiment with people's participation on a different scale that cannot be judged along liberal political lines. They must not do it to please the West but to do justice for their own people, rather than coerce them into one singular hermeneutic of the Islamic sources and way of life.

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