Islam and Terrorism: Beyond the Wisdom of the Secularist Paradigm

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Abstract: Since the end of the Cold War, the West has mounted a campaign against Islam as the essential source of terrorism and the Muslims as necessarily terrorists. However, the problems of violence and terror are not isolated issues but have epistemological and unspoken real causes. Violence is related to despotism, especially the despotism of hegemony. The US-led war on terrorism is not a simple struggle between good and evil. The hidden reasons behind it makes it difficult for the Muslims and others in the Third World to appreciate the efforts.

Constructed mostly by reporters of such powerful TV cables like CNN, intelligence analysts and "experts on Muslim affairs," the Muslim is perceived as the terrorist, the imminent menace to civilization and the universal values of democracy and freedom. This campaign gained much momentum and became more intense with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. The untiring rhetoric associating Islam and Muslims with terrorism serves only the purpose of substantiating and reinforcing the clash of civilizations thesis which would certainly push the world into the abyss of disaster and destruction.[1] It is ironic that all of this is being done in the name of cherished values such as freedom, self-determination and democracy. Distortion is being systematically spread on various levels and by different means to make people lose sight of the causes that have led to the strained and explosive situation the world is facing today.

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This study analyses some aspects of the problem to promote a peaceful and a humane world order. After a brief statement on the basics of the Islamic vision for human coexistence, the paper discusses terrorism and its relationship to Islam and Muslims.

Islam, Muslims and the Others

The Qur'ān is addressed to all human beings. It reminds them of their common origin and stresses the brotherhood of their race as one human family (al-Qur'ān, 4: 1). In the Qur'anic view, the evolution of mankind into "nations and tribes" (49: 13) is no reason for enmity or superiority of one group over the other. Rather, it is a means for fostering "their mutual desire to understand and appreciate their essential oneness underlying their outward differentiations."[2] Accordingly, all racial, national and tribal prejudices are condemned in Islam because, as the Prophet Muḥammad (SAS) has said, "Man is either a God-conscious believer or an unfortunate sinner."[3]

The Qur'ān's emphasis on the unity of humanity is only superseded or matched by its insistence on the oneness of God as the true Creator and Sustainer of the world who alone deserves to be worshipped. The Qur'ānic universal message is clearly linked to the ontological relationship between the Unitarian principle of *tawḥīd* and the essential unity and brotherhood of the human race. In its call for people to submit to God's will, the Qur'ān repeatedly avers that its message is nothing but a continuation, consolidation and elaboration of the eternal truths preached to mankind from the beginning of time (35: 24;14: 4; 42: 13). The Qur'ān, therefore, is God's final revelation and Muḥammad (SAS) the last in the long chain of messengers who have carried the divine word to man (33: 40). Hence, it is clearly asserted that the divine decree (*kitāb*) vouchsafed to the last Prophet sets forth the truth and provides the criteria for judging previous writs by "confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein" (5: 48), thus proclaiming that *Islam* is "the true religion in the sight of God" (3: 19).

The Qur'ān's decisive self-image as the final embodiment of religious truth might be misconstrued to mean that Islam leaves no choice except to convert the non-Muslims or to kill them. The truth of the matter is that in calling people to its message, the Qur'ān has adopted two rational

methods. One, it refutes wrong beliefs and, two, it establishes the veracity and soundness of the articles of its faith by demonstrative argumentation and rational proof.[4] As repeatedly indicated in the Qur'ān, even the Prophet (SAS) himself has no authority to force people to accept Islam and convert to its faith (3: 20; 6: 104; 10: 99, 108; 28: 91; and, 88: 22). It is part of Islam's fundamental principles that "there shall be no coercion in matters of faith" (al-Qur'ān, 2: 256) because the only way to belief is by "convincing proof, rational reasoning and free choice."[5] It is the categorical nature of this principle that led Muslim scholars and theologians to debate the issue whether faith based on blind following and mere imitation (taqlīd) is valid.[6] They went as far as maintaining that the first duty of a mature person is not to believe, but to reflect and reason. Once the person has accepted Islam and professed allegiance to its beliefs and teachings based on conviction and free choice, it then becomes incumbent upon him/her to abide by that allegiance and live up to its requirements. Thus, while Islam respects and reinforces human beings' freedom and choice, it enjoins upon them to be responsible for their choices.

Islam has laid down at a very essential level the basis for sustainable plurality and multiplicity in human socio-cultural life both within and without the abode of Islam. Within Islam, pluralism has been manifested in various theological and juristic schools as well as political groups all vying for the leadership of the Muslim community. On the external level, Islam acknowledges differences in terms of religious faith and cultural identity as characteristics of human socio-historical existence. In fact, the Islamic view of human socio-cultural pluralism is not confined to just allowing variation and differentiation within its abode or acknowledging other religious faiths and cultural traditions outside it. The Islamic socio-political order, exemplified by the Prophetic model in Madīnah, is typical of a pluralistic society in which both Muslims and non-Muslims can live together peacefully as one body in which the rights and obligations of each of the communities and groups are clearly defined. This was outlined in the famous *kitāb* drawn by the Prophet (SAS) immediately after his migration to Madīnah, preceding the *Magna Carta,* promulgated in 1215, by many centuries.[7]

In respect of propagating the message of Islam, the Qur'ān categorically forbids Muslims from compelling others but to call people unto God's path "with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with

them in the most kindly manner" (16: 125). This Islamic vision of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is not confined to the level of creedal discussions and theological disputes. Rather, it includes all aspects of human life requiring social interaction and exchange between individuals and communities both internally within Muslim society and externally with other societies.

Unlike certain religious traditions that has sanctioned an "exclusivist attitude," Islam from the outset emphasized the principle of tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*) and promoted pluralistic attitude in dealing with others living in Muslim society.[8] Not only have the Qurʾān and the Prophetic Traditions asserted and emphasized tolerance as part of Islamic teachings and values, but they have also considered it one of the main foundations of the Islamic social order. The high consideration accorded to tolerance in the original sources of Islam is grounded in Islam's approach to reforming human personality intellectually and morally.

The Qurʾān and the Sunnah repeatedly teach that diversity of beliefs and differences of opinion as well as variation in mental capacity and intellectual perception are natural facts among human beings. A psychological and intellectual principle is thus laid down which makes the Muslims look at the existence of different religious beliefs and of individuals and groups with different views and attitudes as something normal and understandable and, therefore, acceptable. Likewise, Islam establishes a solid basis for religious, intellectual and political pluralism and educates its followers to be psychologically, doctrinally and morally attuned to it, notwithstanding its persistence to imbue them with the sense of confidence in their faith by providing the rational evidence and proofs about its veracity.[9]

Islam has not contented itself with mere theoretical assertions or general moral recommendations on *tasāmuḥ* and religious pluralism. Juristic measures and legal ordinances in the Qurʾān and Sunnah give those assertions and recommendations their practical and socio-historical and cultural dimensions. The way the Qurʾān has presented and, indeed, celebrated the messages and life experiences of earlier prophets provide a sufficient ground for Muslims to find excuses for the followers of those prophets even with their deviations for which the Qurʾān itself has blamed them. Moreover, Muslims are advised not to yield to their sentiments and indulge in any provocative acts against those differing from them in religion.

The Qur'ān has plainly forbidden its followers from "reviling those beings whom the polytheists invoke instead of God, lest they revile God out of spite and in ignorance" (6: 108).[10] As Muhammad Asad explains, " ... while Muslims are expected to argue against the false beliefs of others, they are not allowed to abuse the objects of those beliefs and to hurt thereby the feelings of their erring fellow-men."[11] Rather, Muslims are ordained to treat people of other religious faiths nicely and deal with them kindly in worldly affairs and matters of social interaction. As specified in the Qur'ān (60:8), Allah (SWT) does not forbid Muslims "to show kindness and to behave with full equity" towards "such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you (i.e., Muslims) on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands." This verse does not only require them to be just to fellow-men of other faiths who live with them, as belief in absolute justice for oneself and for the other is a fundamental principle in the Qur'ān, but they are also required to be benevolent with them and to honour their leaders and dignitaries and share with them the celebration of their religious occasions.[12]

Islam's fundamental attitude to the human personality consists of: (1) rejection of compulsion and coercion to force people to convert to Islam as God's final and true religion; (2) freedom of choice and willing submission to God's will as a result of rational personal conviction and internal acceptance of His message; (3) prohibition of waging war on non-Muslims simply because of the falsehood of their beliefs; and (4) proscription of attempts to deprive others from their fundamental rights to live and benefit from the bounties of Allah (SWT) just because they follow different beliefs. Accordingly, Islam has laid down the most solid psychological, intellectual, moral and legal foundations for a sustainable pluralistic society and civilization. This is done with a high consideration of human dignity in which freedom and justice occupy a prominent position and with a clear realization that its mercy is not restricted to those who embrace its faith and subscribe to its laws.[13]

Relationship between Nations and Peoples

Islam, it must be re-emphasized, celebrates the unity of mankind and stresses the essential dignity of human beings and their place in the world as God's trustees on earth. The Qur'ān envisages that the primary

and most fundamental values that should govern the relationship between different peoples and nations are those of human brotherhood, mutual understanding, peaceful interaction and cooperation for the good and well-being of all.

Unlike certain religious traditions and ideological systems, Islam believes in the primordial goodness of human beings and its teachings are geared towards consolidating and promoting the universal good values and positive practices shared by the different communities and cultures of the world. Its mission is not to abolish the good things humanity has cherished and lived by but, as the Prophet Muhammad (SAS) himself described it, to complement and perfect human's good manners and rectify what went wrong in human spirituality and morality by linking all that to the well-spring of *tawḥīd* and the submission to the will of the One Merciful God. For sure, the Qur'ānic teachings are essentially compatible with human nature; hence, Islam is considered the religion of nature or *dīn al-fiṭrah* (30: 30).

Likewise, according to Islam, the essential relationship that should exist between the different peoples and nations of the world is one of peace, mutual understanding and cooperation. It consists of what the Qur'ān has expressed in the term *ta'āruf* (49: 13), which, in one of its meanings, refers to what is commonly known among human beings as good (*ma'rūf*). Some fundamental values must govern this relationship, such as mutual respect, justice and compassion (al-Qur'ān, 6: 108; 60: 8). However, Islam is not a set of unrealistic teachings or abstract principles that turn a blind eye to the realities of history and complexities of the human condition and the various factors at play in it. Nor is it a utopian religion or solid dogma standing beyond what is humanly realizable. In other words, the Qur'ānic message and the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (SAS) have consistently combined idealism and realism in dealing with the different aspects of human life, whether at the level of the fundamentals of faith and belief, moral values and rules of conduct or legal ordinances, both internally within the Muslim community itself and externally in its relationship with other societies.

One basic feature of Islam's realistic approach to human affairs and problems is its recognition of an essential aspect of human socio-cultural life. Conflict, the Qur'ān plainly indicates, is part of the dynamics of human society and the working of history. In fact, the notion of conflict (*tadāfu'*) is seen as one of the norms or laws (*sunnat Allāh*) governing

the development of human society and the unfolding of history. In Islamic view, conflict between humans whether individuals or societies should have no rationale other than removing corruption and injustice and salvaging the good values and institutions of human morality and spirituality and make them prevail (al-Qurʾān, 2: 251; 22: 40). In other words, the Qurʾān gives preeminence to spiritual and ethical values promoting the wellbeing of the human race over all other considerations that might cause conflict and strife amongst people.

It is in this context that the Qurʾān has legitimized the idea of *jihād*, which many Western writers have erroneously translated as "holy war" or "guerre sainte" giving rise to the misunderstanding and misgivings between Muslims and non-Muslims.[14] The term *jihād,* taking its root verb *(J H D)* into consideration, revolves around the basic meaning of the utmost, mental, psychological and physical, effort one makes to achieve something, whether material or immaterial. In a wider and more general sense, the term *jihād* can mean struggle and strife. These lexical meanings have been preserved almost integrally in the Qurʾānic usage.[15] The only difference is that, in a number of Qurʾānic verses and Prophetic sayings, the notion of *jihād* has been associated with the path of God (e.g., 2: 214; 4: 95; 9: 20; 61: 11). For, in fact, any act and activity undertaken by a Muslim who takes his faith seriously must be for the sake of God, as all spheres of life are covered by the comprehensive meaning of *ʿibādah* or worship. Nowhere in the Qurʾān or in the Prophet's traditions does one find any qualifications of *jihād* as *muqaddas* (holy), let alone the term *qitāl*, which is the appropriate equivalent of the word war or military fighting in the English language. As Marcel Boisard argues, when implemented according to its proper conditions and its rightful purposes as expounded by the Qurʾān and elucidated by the Prophet, *jihad*, including warfare and violent fighting, is actually a commitment towards promoting universal peace.[16]

Terrorism: Its Meaning and Root Causes

Despite Islam's repeated emphasis upon peace and prosperity for all, the Western news media, many governments, academic and corporate experts present Islam as a dangerous religion that is inherently violent and Muslim culture intrinsically prone to violence. Long before the September 11, 2001 events, the truth of which is yet to be revealed, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, Islam has been identified as

the new threat to the civilized and democratic West. Samuel Huntington argues that Islam is not favourable to democracy and that "whenever one looks along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living peacefully with their neighbours."[17]

The September 11 events seemed to confirm the main argument of *The Clash of Civilizations* that the future would be characterized by conflict among civilizations, ideas and cultures, and particularly between "Islam" and the "West." Instead of acknowledging the inherent complexity of the situation and looking into its root causes, many policy makers in the West have opted for an all-out assault, for a "crusade" against the alleged culprits and the nations who harbour them. The same policies of "zero tolerance," which the United States has adopted towards urban violence and crimes[18] are now being applied to the political realm with the aim of completely "eliminating violence" and eradicating "evil and "barbarity" from the international scene.[19]

Muslims have often defended their religion and culture against what they perceive as a highly partial, biased and constricted presentation of world events which obscures the reality of the Muslim world. Yet, their view of their own societies is considered irrelevant and the reality they describe remains absent not only in the media, where only the most sensational and controversial events are covered, but also in more serious and learned analyses of the Muslim world. Both in the media and in these analyses, there is hardly any attempt to look into the root causes of what happens in this part of the world. Only the highly visible and most sensational aspects of its events receive wide attention, while the field of vision becomes surprisingly narrow when it comes to investigating beneath the surface of these events. The word terrorism is often used in this context to smother any discussion about the real historical processes and dynamics at hand, and, very often, the causal link between religion and violence stands for the only explanation that is ever advanced. To cure this ailment, secularization, as an essential component of the process of modernization, is proposed as a universally valid imperative. The separation of religion and politics is presented as a necessary condition for a democratic and pluralistic political culture. It is considered as a panacea and as the way towards a peaceful social existence and the construction of a strong civil society.

But is this a correct diagnosis of the ailments of the Muslim world? Is the lack of a secular political culture the cause of its problems? Is the

conceptual framework of the modernization and secularization theories valid for a genuine understanding of its reality? Why is the Muslim narrative about this reality, the Muslims' view of their societies, considered irrelevant? Why are the negative images of the Muslim world still predominant in the great "Information Age"?

Much has been said in the intellectual milieus about the "radical newness" of the post-9/11 world and the irrelevance of traditional political categories to analyze and understand the "new realities" of our world and to be able to predict its future. The need for innovative and creative ways of conceptualizing the present has often been emphasized as an urgent task facing those who set themselves to analyze world current affairs. However, today's ideational landscape is still a captive of lazy stereotypical thinking about the current challenges and dilemmas of human collective existence. What is urgently needed is a critical evaluation of the universal validity of current conceptual frameworks and an analysis of the fundamental continuity of historical processes. A critical evaluation of the theories of modernization and development as applied to the study of the Muslim world highlights the dangers of an essentialist view of the world organized around binary oppositions between pure entities.

The Narrative of Modernity and Perceptions of the "Other"

The established grand narrative of modernity is founded on the idea of progress. It is characterized by an evolutionary understanding of history as a transformation from the "barbaric," "traditional" societies to the "civilized" and "modern" societies. The modern times are perceived as times different from and superior to the previous eras of darkness where the human mind was under the tutelage of religion. The modern times are believed to achieve emancipation from the "malefic cycles" of the "return of the same" that dominates "traditional", "static" societies.

In this dominant grand narrative, the separation of church and state, of the "socio-political sphere" and the "ontological sphere" liberates the human mind and enables it to fulfil its rational potential through a scientific knowledge of the world. Liberated from religion, the modern secular mind is self-sufficient and self-regulating.

Modernity introduces a rupture in historical time, in the flow of history, and becomes the epitome of the reign of the *Novum*, synonymous with

change and movement. This rupture characterizes in a negative manner not only the pre-modern times, but also the rest of the non-modern world. Thus, a binary system of representations of the "self" and the "other" is constructed to set the "Great Divide" separating the moderns from their past and from the non-moderns.[20] A set of dichotomies generated by this "Great Divide" becomes the foundation of a body of an "objective" knowledge of human societies such as modern/traditional, secular/religious, and barbaric/civilized. In this system of representation, modern Europe and its American extension are considered as the subject of history and knowledge, whereas the rest of the non-Euro-American, non-modern societies are perceived as passive objects. These passive objects are described by the Orientalists as irrational, disordered and deeply confined in tradition. Firmly ingrained in the discourse of colonization, these negative images of the "other" constitute in the past the rationale of the "civilizing mission" of Europe and in the present that of the "liberating and democratizing mission" of the United States of America.

As the subject of history, the Western civilization perceived itself, indeed, not as one civilization among others, but as the uniquely "civilized" one. This meant that the rest of the world was tributary to the "unique river of civilization" that the "West" incarnates. The transition of Europe and the American colonies to modernity was consequently perceived as a universal and value-free model for historical change and transformation. Based on the belief in the possibility of human perfectibility, provided that it is done rationally and scientifically, social science offered itself as the surest method to understand and control historical change and to achieve progress in the socio-political sphere that has been liberated from religion. Social science was founded on the optimist idea that "as we proceed towards this knowledge of the real world, we proceed thereby to a better governance of the real society, towards a greater fulfillment of human potential."[21] Social science concepts and definitions of the problems worth pursuing are permeated with modern secular humanist values. Its credo is that "whatever it was that happened in Europe in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries represented the pattern that was applicable everywhere because it was a progressive achievement of humankind or because it represented the fulfillment of humanity's basic needs via removal of artificial obstacles to this realisation."[22] This constituted the foundation of modernization and development theories in the post-World War II.

Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s in a context marked by crucial events: the rise of the USA as a superpower, the spread of communism–the "Red Menace"–and the disintegration of the old European colonial empires giving birth to new nation-states in the "Third World." American social scientists were called upon to study these newly independent nation-states–potential prey to communism–and to promote modernization as the way out of their "backwardness." In these studies, modernization was conceptualized as a "phased, irresistible, progressive, lengthy process that moves in the direction of the [Western] model."[23]

Modernization theories' commitment to evolutionary theory is the result of the post-enlightenment value-free self-identification of the modern Western thought. According to Habermas, the concept of modernization

> performs two abstractions on the concept of modernity: dissociating 'modernity' from its modern European origins through styling it into a spatio-temporally neutral model for the processes of social development in general, while breaking the internal connections between modernity and the historical context of Western rationalism, so the processes of modernization can no longer be conceived as rationalization, as the historical objectification of rational structures.[24]

Secularization is an essential component of the theories of modernization and development. It is described in social theory as "a process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."[25] Conceived as having universal sovereignty, this process was considered as a requirement for the modernization and democratization of any society. As a consequence, Islamic resurgence movements are very often perceived, in mainstream social theory, as extremist, anachronistic and retrogressive. Whether they belong to the classical or to the new trends in the field of modernization studies, analysts of the Muslim world fear that "these movements would bring about authoritarian regimes, escalation of ethno-religious conflicts, and political disintegration."[26] New modernization studies in the 1980s claimed to adopt a more critical stance towards the basic premises of the "modernization school," such as the opposition between modernity and tradition. One of the recent themes in the field is that "tradition can play a beneficial role in development and Third World countries can pursue their own paths of development."[27]

However, the basic assumption that Islam as a religion is an obstacle to democracy remains a prevalent stereotype among Western academia. For instance, Samuel Huntington has stamped Islam as conducive to authoritarian rule.[28] His thesis that Muslim societies have slim prospects for democracy because of their religion, poverty and their violent nature has been much more influential and widespread among Western policy-makers than those of the more critical modernization studies. It nicely dovetails with the old Orientalist assumptions about the Muslim world, which provided colonialism with its legitimizing discourse.

Culture-bound Analysis and Strategic Pragmatism

The bulk of modernization theories and area studies have important policy implications. Modernization theories, for instance, were a response to specific policy-needs of a new superpower. Since the fifties, modernization theories "provided an implicit justification for the asymmetrical power relationship between "traditional" and "modern societies."[29] Moreover, they helped counter the threat of communism, which was identified as a modernization problem in the "Third World." The suggested solution involved economic development, the replacement of traditional values through exposure to modern values, and the institutionalization of democratic procedures. American foreign aid policy was presented and legitimized as having meliorative powers. Thus, most modernization studies justified the intervention of the USA in Third World affairs.

Many critics of modernization and development theories have presented them as an apology of capitalist expansionism. Immanuel Wallerstein defines social science as a body of knowledge which justified and provided the means for the re-ordering of the world. Social science's construction went, thus, hand in hand with the extension of the modern-capitalist world system through the conversion of the whole world to modern capitalist production and exchange. He rejects "the nineteenth-century myth of a universal, objective knowledge, uninfluenced by the social structure of which it is part." His view of social science is, rather, based on the assumption that "the institutionalization of science and knowledge structures is one of the pillars of the modern world-system."[30] For him, this explains social science's "Eurocentrism." Some of the expressions of this "Eurocentrism" are its universalism, its assumptions about Western civilization, its Orientalism and its attempts to impose

the theory of progress. They created a language justifying the geopolitical dominance of the "West" which was evident in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[31] They paralyze our intellectual landscape, so "if social science is to make any progress in the twenty-first century, it must overcome the Eurocentric heritage which has distorted its analyses and its capacity to deal with the problems of the contemporary world."[32]

In the same vein, Edward Said starts from the Foucauldian premise that knowledge is inextricably tied to power and that pure scholarship does not exist. He analyzes Orientalism and the modernization perspective that inherited its negative perceptions of "traditional societies"–especially of "Islam"–as a field of study which arose primarily from a colonial "series of interests… (from) a certain *will* or *intention*… to control, manipulate or even incorporate what is manifestly a different world."[33]

Said was one of the first scholars to establish explicit connections between Western colonialism, the post-colonial modernization theories,[34] and perceptions of the Muslim world. According to him, the discourse of Orientalism created the levers of power by providing the binary system of representations that established absolute and systematic differences between the "West" and the Muslim world. Describing the "Orient" from a Western standpoint, this system of representation uses a highly generalized vocabulary and textual analysis, which bears no relation to direct evidence. The world is, thus, defined according to a framework of pure binary categories obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic following the principles of reciprocal exclusivity between the irreconcilable entities of the "self" and the "other."

In *The Clash of Civilizations,* Huntington's "strategic pragmatism" proceeds to the definition of future zones of conflict by drawing such a sharp contrast between "the self" and the "other" or between the "West" and the "Rest." His culture-bound analysis pursues this strategic aim by even using the argument of "the revival of non-Western civilisational entities."[35] Depicting the Muslim world as a zone of turmoil and potential conflict with the "democratic West," situated in the "zones of peace," it prepares the ground for the application of the "right of intervention" or "interference" for the defense of the "vital interests" of the West. This culture-bound analysis "demonstrates a Western self-perception based on a

subconsciousness of being the subject of history: the West has a mission to lead and specify history and, therefore, has the legitimate right to develop necessary strategies against the Rest, [who] are supposed to be the object of the specified flow of history."[36]

Methodological Absolutism: Its Principles and Perils

This culture-bound and strategy-oriented analysis is based on a system of representations that can be described as a methodologically absolutist system. It, indeed, proceeds from a "hermetically sealed-value system" or an ideological framework whose first principles as well as its facts, its interpretations and myths cannot be disputed. John Ladd's analysis of the ideological framework of collective violence provides us with a systematic analysis of the principles and consequences of methodological absolutism.[37] These same principles constitute the rationale for colonization and its legitimization as well as the justification of the bellicose logic inherent in the clash of civilizations thesis.

According to Ladd, there is a basic logical structure in the thinking that lies behind collective violence and bellicose conduct in general. To demonstrate this, he examines a typical ideological framework of arguments and concepts used to vindicate violence. He describes it as divided into five premises. The first argument, which he calls "the doctrine of bifurcation," opposes two irretrievably separated groups that are "perceived as having incompatible 'natures' and belonging to different categories morally speaking:" the "Chosen Group"–politically dominant group–and the "Other Group."[38] According to Ladd, this bifurcation is "based on the Chosen Group's perception of the Other Group as outside the pale, as moral outcasts." Consequently, the "Chosen Group" lays its own specifications of whom, for its purposes, is to count as a member of the "Other Group." Following these specifications, members of the "Other Group" are believed to be "morally incompetent, and so lack the minimum attributes necessary for being members of the moral community [i.e., intelligence, education, moral character, temperament, religious faith, or divine election]."[39] It is worth noting that the way the "Others" define or identify themselves matters very little in this respect. In addition to this, double standards are applied to those who are within the moral community and those outside it on the basis of a set of doctrines (theological, metaphysical,

epistemological, biological, psychological, political, economic, etc.) that are highly mythological in content. This justifies "acts like killing, maiming, taking away liberty, exporting and exterminating others, acts that would be immoral if they were performed on ordinary human beings who are members of the moral community and of the Chosen Group."[40] Moreover, the "Chosen Group" perceives itself as assigned a "plenary mission often divinely commanded…to protect [its members] and its values from perceived threats to it by the Other Group." Carrying out any and every possible kind of violence against the Other, including expelling or destroying the Other Group as a whole becomes the "sacred duty" of individuals in the "Chosen Group."[41]

Both groups, Ladd maintained, are perceived as locked in an irreconcilable conflict. It is an either/or relationship because "the line between the groups is drawn [so] sharply and absolutely – at least by the Chosen Group – [that] from a purely logical point of view, an impasse is inevitable." This is also due to the fact that the Chosen Groups select as their point of departure a hermetically-sealed value system that automatically excludes members of the Other Group from being considered as equal human beings. This logic makes the "Others" the natural and rightful targets of violence.[42]

Ladd calls the methodological category, implied in the competent/incompetent distinction, absolutism. To him,

> Methodological absolutism in its numerous forms is based on the assumption that, for logical reasons, ethics must by its very nature be a hermetically sealed system and that, therefore, its first principles are not open to dispute or challenge from the outside, that is, by incompetents, ignoramuses, and people from other traditions.[43]

This absolutist ideological rationale is also the basis of the binary system of representations according to which the reality of the Muslim is negatively portrayed. It is generally used to justify the domination and demonizing of the other. This is how the image of an absolute enemy is created and becomes the legitimizing basis of a war of annihilation. Instead of allowing for a normal intensity of conflict that can be tolerated in a normal political relationship, this absolutist system of representations transforms conflicts into total and absolute clashes between reciprocally exclusive entities.

These absolutist systems of representations lead to the reification of such categories as "Islam" and the "West." They become immediate but closed blocs instead of being perceived as dynamic intellectual-cultural and socio-historical realities. Analyses based on such systems of representation of Islam and the West pay little, if any, attention to the internal dynamics of societies and cultures and to the continuities across cultural and civilizational boundaries. Furthermore, opposing "Islam" to "democracy" not only ignores the different forms of liberal democracy, but also attributes to Islam what is specific to particular regimes.

Taken as two different categories, Islam and democracy should not be understood to simply refer to monolithic blocs or pure realities; they rather designate "composite structures," rich and complex realities that the analyst must not oversimplify. The idealized image of modernity and the "West" as well as the negative perceptions of Islam, or the Muslim world, obscure the innovative and rich contribution that Muslims can make in the current process of revision and reconstruction of the grand narrative of modernity and its conceptual structure. If peace is to be achieved, we indeed need to reach a more pluralist and "democratic understanding of democracy" and of civil society.

Secularism and Islam: Beyond Culturalist Accounts of Violence

The second half of the twentieth century gradually opened the conceptual framework of modernity to revision and reconstruction. Secularism, democracy and civil society have become essentially contested concepts that are open to redefinition. Critics of secularism present it as a fiction that the existing data do not support. They describe it as "an inadequate category of social analysis" because "far from providing an objective description of modern society with scientific validity, the term secularization acts mainly as "a tool of counter religious ideologies."[44] Some sociologists even suggest that we eliminate it from our conceptual matrix.[45]

Secularism is also questioned as a unified theory or a systematic doctrine. Many of its critics point to the fact that the relationship between the state and religious institutions in modern democratic societies has not taken a single form. There are, according to them,

several models of secularism in these societies.[46] Other analysts highlight the fundamental differences between the French Jacobean and the Anglo-Saxon models of secularism to show that Western democracy is not necessarily antithetical to religion.[47] The first of the two models does not only separate religion and politics, it is also based on an anti-religious stance and aims at eliminating religion and religious symbols from all aspects of social life. In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon model has a more tolerant attitude towards religion and does not totally separate religion and politics.

Contrary to the prediction of the evolutionary theory of secularization, religious belief did not disappear in the age of science and technology. Instead, it witnessed the re-emergence of religion as a "significant factor in the articulation of socio-political reality." This phenomenon has been described as a "de-privatisation of religion" or a "de-secularisation of the public sphere."[48]

Furthermore, secularization can be analyzed as a "sacralized" idea. For the radical secularist, it is not a mere separation of church and state, but a *weltanshauung*, or "an anti-religious and anti-clerical belief."[49] In several Muslim countries, modernizers adopted this radical secularist stance as a normative political dogma, as an imperative, and thus considered the mixing of religion and politics as "necessarily abnormal, dangerous, and extremist."[50] They perceived "Muslim politics" as a fundamental threat to democracy. In addition, the forced implementation of secularism as an essential component of the process of modernization was not synonymous with the establishment of democracy and of a strong civil society. It has, on the contrary, led to the subjection of society to authoritarian rule, state terrorism and the spread of intolerance.

Such is the case of modern Tunisia's and Turkey's violent experiences with secularism. In these two countries, secularism was not the choice of the majority but imposed by a tiny, Westernized elite through the use of force and in total disregard for the local culture and customs. Muslim culture was seen as the remnant of backward tradition, while modern secularism was seen as the only way to progress and civilization. Muslims in these two countries, as in many others, are not the perpetrators of violence but the ones who suffer abuse, torture, oppression and the denial of basic human rights. This aggression against human personal rights has indeed

reached such intolerable levels that it included even the way people should dress, as is the case with the persecution of women wearing the headscarf or *ḥijāb*. In the name of modernity and secularism, Muslim women who wear the *ḥijāb* in Tunisia, Turkey, and Uzbekistan are not allowed to pursue their education or work; in Tunisia, they are not allowed to receive medical treatment in hospitals and are persecuted while they are on the street. In Turkey, hundreds of women were imprisoned for wearing what is seen as a religious dress violating the modern dress reform set up by Ataturk.[51]

The forces of secularization in these and other countries understood modernity as a process of "civilisational conversion which equates modernization with Westernisation."[52] But this forced process of modernization-cum-secularization has utterly failed in answering the real needs of society and has rather triggered unending protests that have been met with violent repression in many parts of the Muslim world. Thus, popular violence has mostly been a reaction to state repression systematically carried out by a self-styled ruling Westernized elite guided by the devastating belief that modernization and progress can be achieved by the negation of the people and their cultural values. This shows that instead of being a universal requirement for democratization and modernization and a solution to social conflict, secularization might only have been a successful solution to Europe's violent medieval religious wars. This typically "Western" cultural product, which was the result of certain dynamics inherent in the European Western culture and experience, "cannot be mechanically transferred to other cultures because they do not share the 'West' medieval experience of ecclesiastical tyranny and obscurantism."[53]

Secularist assumptions prevent the analyst from understanding that religion in the Muslim world is not the predominant cause of oppression. On the contrary, it falls prey to oppression and violence that the fundamentalist secular apparatus of the state perpetrates against civil society with the quiet acquiescence of Western democratic governments! "Muslim" or "Islamist" politics, in this regard, is rather the expression of the resistance of civil society to state violence. It is not the result of so-called religious fanaticism or the so-called irrational impulses of ignorant and poor masses. Rather, they express demands for a greater political participation and for

true democratization. In fact, as John Esposito argues, far from being a "movement of the poor or marginalised, the alienated, and the uneducated…. Islam emerged as a presence and force in mainstream society, informing political parties and organisations, social movements and institutions of civil society."[54] In addition to this, "in most cases this was an urban not a rural phenomenon, its leaders and supporters were educated professionals."[55]

In order to be able to understand this reality and to integrate religion as a significant variable of political analysis, the analyst has to avoid reified conceptions of religion that are integral to the secularist paradigm. Political analysis can gain interesting and pertinent insights into the reality of the Muslim world by not separating religion from its historical, political and economic contexts and by starting from the assumption that "religious traditions are the product of a dynamic changing process in which the word of revelation is mediated through human interpretation."[56] Isolating Islam from the socio-historical and cultural reality of the Muslim world, which it has shaped over the centuries, can only produce a truncated image of the actual situation of Muslim societies. Such oversimplification of history and society has policy implications whose consequences are likely to exacerbate rather than ease future problems.

Looking into the real social and historical processes will enable the student of Muslim affairs to understand that violence and, for that matter, terrorism in the Muslim world cannot be explained with religion or with the intrinsically violent Islamic or even Arab culture. The root causes of the problem ought rather to be sought in the longstanding and deeply felt real grievances. Identifying these grievances and redressing them is the first step towards establishing peace and stability in the world. It is important to distinguish between two types of violence in the Muslim Arab countries: people's or popular violence and official or state violence. Most governments in that region and in the Muslim world in general have drastically suffocated all possibilities for political participation and blocked all avenues for peaceful dissent. Thus, the only alternative left for the ruling elite to remain in place is to subject the people to oppression and exploitation mostly accompanied by what is widely perceived as contempt for Islamic culture and total subservience of the governing regimes to Western forces, especially the USA.

When Muslims criticize the "West," it is not because of their religion, nor is it because they hate its values of freedom, democracy and accountability. They are themselves striving to promote such values and live by them, but they are frustrated at what they see as an unconditional Western support to illegitimate and unpopular autocratic and repressive regimes in their countries. They perceive Western democracies as uncritical allies of these regimes that are the actual producers of terrorism.

Similarly, the Palestinians who are against Israeli occupation of their lands do not take this stance just because of their religion. They do not fight the Israelis simply because they are Jews but because they are colonizers who have robbed them of their land, killed their children and destroyed their homes, thus depriving them of the basic means of human life. The Palestinian/Israeli conflict is not a mere "battle of belief," but a political struggle for land and the means of life. Jews of the region lived and flourished among Muslims in peace and harmony for centuries and enjoyed high-ranking government positions in the times of the Islamic State. This harmony was only broken with Western-born ideology of Zionism and its implementation by the force of tanks and the uprooting of a whole people from its land with overt support and sanctioning by Western democracies!

While the Palestinian people are being left to the mercy of the merciless Israeli army and their institutions and leadership are being systematically destroyed, Western media and so-called experts depict the Palestinian struggle to end the occupation as terrorism and present the Israeli State war crimes as self-defense. This lopsided coverage and representation of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict gravely mislead the European and American communities who remain largely unaware of major US and other Western governments' involvement in enormous human tragedies in Palestine. Meanwhile, anger at what is seen as Western governments' complicity in Israel's destruction of Palestinian society is reaching a boiling and explosive point in the Arab world and in many Muslim countries.

The US and other Western governments will find, indeed are finding, themselves reviled in most of the Muslim world, especially after the invasion of Iraq and the scandalous revelations that are now unfolding, no matter what slogans of democracy and liberation

might be raised by people at the White House and Westminster. For what really matters at the end of the day is what takes place on the ground and what the people concerned are daily experiencing in terms of exploitation and humiliation.

Conclusion

To establish a solid and lasting ground for peace in a world beset with violence and terrorism, it is necessary to address the deep-seated grievances of the Muslims and reform the conceptual tools towards a better understanding of the historical processes in the Muslim world, and its encounter with Western powers. Reducing these historical to the *cliché-ed* culturalist accounts of the absolutist nature of Islam or the violent Muslim culture would only exacerbate the existing problems and lead to the criminalizing and demonizing of the other. The permanence of these stereotypes in present-day analyses of the events of the Muslim world expresses nostalgia for the old days of colonialism and leads to the conclusion, comforting for the desire of imperial conquest, that only its return could bring tranquility to the world. These stereotypes supply a specific image of Islam creating a confrontational political situation pitting "us" against "them." However, rather than through demonizing the other and waging a war to end all wars, peace can only be achieved through a just treatment of the other (*justus hostis*). How is this possible? Achieving peace becomes possible, as John Keane said, when it is based on a "pluralist view of humanity and a political project that is determined to enable a genuinely non-hierarchical plurality of individuals and groups openly and non-violently to express their solidarity with–and opposition to–each other's ideals and ways of life."[57]

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Notes

1. Samuel P. Huntington: "The Age of Muslim Wars," *Newsweek International*, Special Edition (December 2001-February 2002); also Mark B. Salter: *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations*, (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

2. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984), 794.

3. This is a portion of a *hadīth reported* by traditionalists Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

4. Muhammad al-Tāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr: *Usūl al-Nizām al-Ijtimāʿī fī al-Islām* (Amman: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1421/2001), 92-95.

5. Muhammad al-Tāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: Maison Souhnoun, 1997), vol. 3(3), 25-26; vol. 7(14), 323-32. Cf. Muhammad ʿIzzat Darwazah, *al-Tafsīr al-Ḥadīh,* vol. 2(Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1421/2000), 27.

6. Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Usūl al-Nizām al-Ijtimāʿī fī al-Islām*, 95.

7. See Zāfir al-Qāsimī, *Nizām al-Hukm fī al-Sharīʿah wa al-Tārīkh al-Islāmī*, Book I: *Al-Hayāt al-Dustūriyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1411/1990), 32-36.

8. Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Usūl al-Nizām al-Ijtimāʿī fī al-Islām*, 255, 81-108.

9. Ibid., 255-56, 356, 357.

10. Ibid., 359, 362.

11. Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān,* 188, Note 92.

12. Ibn ʿĀshūr: *Usūl*, 272-74, 359-61; *Tafsīr*, vol. 13 (28), 152-53. See also Muhammad ʿIzzat Darwazah, *al-Tafsīr al-Hadīth,* vol. 9, 273-79.

13. Ibn ʿĀshūr *Usūl al-Nizām al-Ijtimāʿī fī al-Islām*, 362; *Tafsīr*, vol. 8 (17), 165-69.

14. Marcel Boisard, *L'Islam aujourd'hui* [Islam Today] (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 105.

15. El-Tijani Abdelgader: "al-Namūdhaj al-Tafsīrī li-ʿAlāqāt al-Muslimīn al-Khārijiyyah," *At-Tajdīd,* 3, no. 5 (1999), 88.

16. Marcel Boisard, *L'Humanisme de l'Islam,* 3rd. edn (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), 204-274. English translation as *Humanism in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2003), 149-203.

17. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (London: Touchstone, 1997), 54.

18. Loic Wacquant, "L'Idéologie de l'insécurité: Ce vent qui vient d'Amérique," *Le Monde Diplomatique,* Avril 1999.

19. See Paul-Marie de Groce, " Dangereux concept de a guerre preemptive," *Le Monde Diplomatique,"* September 2000, and "The Nuclear Review" cited in *The Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 2002.

20. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* translated from French by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

21. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Social Science and Contemporary Society: The Vanishing Guarantees of Rationality, 1997," [Online] available from http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwitaly.htm, accessed April 20, 2004.

22. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science, 1997," [Online] available from http://tbc.binghamton.edu/iweuroc.htm, accessed on April 25, 2004.

23. Alvin Y. So, *Social Change and Development: Modernization, Dependency and World System Theories* (London: Sage Library of Social Research, 1990), 261.

24. Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1975), 2.

25. Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Penguin, 1973), 112, cited in Parvez Manzoor, "Desacralising Secularism," in Azzam Tamimi and John Espisito (eds.), *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 82.

26. A. Y. So, *Social Change and Development*, 77.

27. Ibid., 262. Examples of these studies are: Siu-Lun Wong, "The Applicability of Asian Family Values to Other Socio-cultural Settings," in Peter Berger and Hsin-Huang (eds.), *In Search of an Asian Development* (New Brunswick: NJ, 1988), 134-154; Ali Banuazizi, "Social-psychological Approach to Political Development," in Myron Weiner and Samuel Huntington (eds.), *Understanding Political Development* (Boston: Little Bron, 1987), 281-316.

28. A.Y. So, *Social Change and Development,* 82.

29. Ibid., 36.

30. Fernand Braudel Centre: Intellectual Report, [Online] available from http://www.binghamton.edu., accessed April 27, 2004.

31. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Eurocentrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science, 1997" [Online] available from http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iweuro.htm, accessed April 25, 2004.

32. Ibid.

33. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 12 (italics in the original).

34. See his *Covering Islam*.

35. Ahmet Davutoglu, "Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions of Secularism: A Comparative Analysis," in Tamimi and Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, 75.

36. Ibid.

37. John Ladd, "Collective Violence," in James Beady and Newton Garver, *Justice, Law and Violence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 1-48.

39. Ibid., 40.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 41.

42. Ibid., 42.

43. Ibid., 43.

44. Parvez Manzoor, "Desacralizing Secularism," in Tamimi and Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East,* 82.

45. See for example David A. Martin, *The Religious and the Secular* (London: Routledge and Kergan Paul, 1969).

46. See Munir Shafik, "Secularism and the Arab-Muslim Condition," in Tamimi and Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, 139-150.

47. Rachid al-Ghannouchi, "Secularism in the Arab Maghreb," in Ibid., 97-123.

48. Heba Rauf Ezzat, "Secularism, the State and the Social Bond," in Ibid., 124-138.

49. John Esposito, "Islam and Secularism in the Twenty-first Century," in Ibid., 9.

50. Ibid.

51. In its sustained campaign against Muslim women wearing this dress, the French government, heir to the revolution for rights and freedom of 1789, has found its inspiring model in the Turkish and Tunisian policies against the *hijāb*.

52. Davutoglu, Philosophical and Institutional Dimensions of Secularism, 172.

53. Manzoor, Desacralising Secularism, 91.

54. Esposito, *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East,* 3.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 11.

57. John Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London: Verso, 1989), 55.