# Modernity, Nation-State
# and Islamic Identity Politics[*]

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**Abstract:**

The history of perceptions between the West and the Islamic world does not begin with the recent terror attacks in the US, Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. These in a way only mark the moment in the West when awareness became overwhelming that something is fundamentally amiss in its relations with the countries of so-called Islamic world.

**Keywords:** globalisation, modernity, identity politics, Islam, culture, social structure.

Any resurgence of religion in the age of globalisation takes place against the backdrop of a world society that is guided by the ideas and values of modernity (Meyer 2009; Eisenstadt 2006). While pre-modern or non-modern cultural reference frames tend to take a social structure as basic, which ascribes roles to each individual according to age, gender, family, profession, cast, estate, tribe, or religion, the modern cultural reference

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frame takes the individual as basic. All other institutions like marriage, family, association or state are construed as based on the free consent of individuals engaged in them. It is by reference to the individual that the roles of these collective institutions are defined and not the other way around. No longer the collective defines the role of the individual but every collective is gauged by reference to the benefit that it gives to its members.

These advantages, Meyer reminds us, are expressed in terms of justice and progress in the modern cultural reference frame. If a collective does not stand the test of justice, it needs to prove at least that it progresses in the way justice prescribes. If it proves to be stagnating or even regressing, it looses its legitimacy. Progress in the way of justice is normally translated into expansion of equal liberties for all individuals. Accordingly, the political is construed as the result of individual citizens' decisions in elections and party memberships. Religion and culture are framed as based on individual choices regarding beliefs and values.

For those like Habermas (1985) who believe that modernity remains an incomplete project, these constructions play the role of regulative ideas. For those like Fukuyama (1992) who believe in the end of history, these constructions could only be myths, for their implementation in actuality is thwarted by what Meyer (2005: 149) calls "decoupling". In many ways the present world order reflects the global cultural reference frame and its universalist values of progressive expansion of equal liberties for all individuals (Meyer 2009: 290). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the creation of the United Nations system with its aim to ban any unilateral use of force in the international arena, the attempts to strengthen the international law regime by creating international tribunals, the attempts to create an international court of justice etc. all point in that direction.

In other ways, however, the current world order is also marred by contradictions that prove the incompleteness of the implementation of modernity's universalist values. These contradictions centre on the status of collective actors like ethnic groups, nations and individual states vis-à-vis their individual members. Can collective rights override individual rights? Can aspirations for national independence override the sovereignty of the states to which these "nations" belong? Can national sovereignty override

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the human rights of individual citizens? Can "national interest" override the ban on the unilateral use of force in the international arena?

While certain state actors benefit from the inconsistencies of the present order, others suffer the consequences of these indeterminacies. They are given a voice, however, by international human rights organisations who advocate strict adherence to international human rights standards by all collective actors including the most powerful states. Whence the call for their institutionalisation in the form of an international court of justice, which is consistently torpedoed, like all other attempts at consolidating an international order based on independent institutions, by states who base their foreign policy predominantly on what they perceive as their "national" interest.

Other challenges to this self-conflicting global order stem from churches or religious movements. The Catholic Church as well as Islamist political movements question the importance given to the so called "nation-state". To the Catholic Church, for example, the idea of absolute sovereignty of individual states has always been doubtful. It has, however unsuccessfully, advocated the idea of a religio-political order limiting the idea of absolute sovereignty for individual states. Until very recently and unlike the cosmopolitan order promoted by advocates of an independent global judiciary this alternative was not based on modern normative individualism. Only after Vatican II (1965) did the Catholic Church formally embrace normative individualism in the form of human rights and democracy.

The struggle of Islamic thinkers with the emerging paradigm of the "nation-state" and modern precepts such as secular law, human rights and popular sovereignty is as old as nationalism itself, possibly beginning with Rifaʿa Rafiʿ al-Tahtawi (1834) in Egypt (Tamimi 1997). While some oppose the introduction of the concept of nationhood on grounds that it would be divisive for the *ummah* others interpret the *ummah* itself as a nation. Some realise that modern politics needs a material base and thus a defined territory. Others remain silent on where the *ummah*, understood as a nation, should materialise. The need for a material basis for his "Muslim nation" has lead Jinnah to demand the partition of the Indian subcontinent while

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other Indian Muslims like Iqbal would have been happy with an *ummah* in the air and a religiously neutral polity on subcontinental ground.

Besides this, there is also a long tradition of liberal Islamic thought to demonstrate that Islamic principles of law can be brought into congruence with the nation state, human rights and democracy (An-Na'im, 1992, 1996a&b; Baderin, 2003). Until now, however, such liberal-Islamic thinking remains the mainstay of a mostly silent part of the *ummah*. Whether the majority of Muslims think that way or not, in any case liberal Islamic thinking has not sparked any brought social movement.

The present paper is not concerned with this literature. It is not concerned with the question whether Islam is ("essentially"), or could be, democratic and human rights abiding. This has been the subject of another paper (Dusche 2008). Instead what this paper is looking at are those brands of Islamic thinking that form the ideological basis for effective Islamist movements. The paper reviews the current survey literature on how Islamist movements and their ideologues relate to ideas of democracy and nationalism.

By "Islamism" the paper understands a political ideology that would like to base the polity on an Islamic foundation.[1] This does not necessarily mean that those adhering to such an ideology would like to advance it by violent means. Thus Islamism does not in itself amount to Islamic radicalism or "jihadism". From a perspective of liberal democratic theory, however, to base a polity on any religion is in itself problematic for it is precisely the task of the liberal democratic state not to grant privileges based on race, religion, caste, class, or gender to any of its citizens. Thus, trivially, Islamism, as any other ideology that would like to found the polity on religion, can not be liberal-democratic. The same holds true of any ideology that would like to base any given polity on cultural or ethnic identity. I have labelled such ideologies and their corresponding practices as "Identity Politics" (Dusche 2009).

The Islamist ideas examined here have some features in common with the phenomenon of Identity Politics. Firstly they are an expression of a

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[1] For a definition of Islamism and an intellectual history of Islamist thought see Abu-Rabi' (2006). For a history of Islamic political thought see Tamimi (1997).

lack of democratic political culture. Furthermore they are prone to conflict in specific ways that will become apparent when we analyse Islamism in relation to the larger phenomenon of Identity Politics. In the following section the phenomenon of Identity Politics shall be briefly reviewed.

### Identity Politics

This paper rests on the observation that Identity Politics dominates political culture in formative stages of new polities or in transitory periods of existing ones, often in the guise of ethno-religious nationalism. It features prominently during the birth of new states since the 1800s and it remains an indicator for the democratic quality of political culture in any established polity. This thesis was derived from explorative studies into various contexts, past and present, in which Identity Politics lead to the creation of new states. From these explorations it appears that Identity Politics is largely serving the ends of an activist elite. Identity Politics does not necessarily translate into an increase in democratic participation for those it purports to represent. On the contrary, participation remains largely symbolic.

The individual in totality tends to be seen as part of an organic whole and not as a party to a social contract which would limit the ends that may be pursued through politics. Moreover, the organiscist image of society derived from European, particularly German, romanticist political thought, renders Identity Politics inapt to handle inner conflict in a rational, non-coercive manner. Instead of managing differing interests non-violently, it attempts to create a unity based on fear. Those articulating difference are threatened with the stigma of heresy or treason. The paper attempts to show that similar propositions hold true of Identity Politics based on religion.[2] Islamist political thought is used as an example here but of course Identity Politics based on other religions run into similar problems.

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[2] For details see Michael Dusche. *Identity Politics in Israel, Palestine and Turkey.* Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE (forthcoming); and "Wissenschaftliche Eliten und vorherrschende Ordnungsvorstellungen unter dem Eindruck wahrgenommener Bedrohungen in Europa und der islamischen Welt – Indien, Israel, Palästina, Türkei." In Jamal Malik (ed.) *Mobilisierung von Religion in Europa.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang (in print).

**Ethnic Nationalism and Religious Fundamentalism**

Nationalism, especially in its integral form, has often been described as a religion of modern times or the substitute of religion (Meyer 2009: 57ff.). This makes ethnic nationalism and religious fundamentalism comparable. Both ideologies entail a higher readiness to use force in order to reach their goal, which has contributed to an increase in atrocities and civilian victims during the "new wars" of the last decades in comparison to conventional state warfare. The asymmetry of combatants has lifted the limits of violence and blurred the line between times of war and times of peace (Münkler 2002: 57ff.; Czempiel 2000). So-called ethnic conflicts have claimed millions of civilian lives after the end of the Cold War and the number of victims of terrorism motivated by religious fanaticism tends to be higher than the number claimed by terrorism of other ideologies (Wieland 2006: 14f.; Hoffman 2001). Gagnon (1994/5, 2006) exhorts in an analysis of the Balkan wars of the 1990s: "The greatest threats to peace in this century have come from those regions in which partitions along ethnic or religious lines have taken place". Examples include Greece-Turkey (1922), Ireland (1921), the Sudetenland (1938), India-Pakistan (1947), South African apartheid (1948), Palestine (1948), Cyprus (1974) (1994/5: 330 & Fn. 3).

From a normative perspective, Identity Politics in general and ethnic nationalism in particular are ambiguous. On one hand they have the potential to liberate groups of people from foreign rule (or from home-grown authoritative government). Modern mass-politics, on which nationalism is based, has the potential of including former subjects as citizens in processes of political deliberation. On the other hand, Identity Politics has the tendency to pitch one group of people against another, which frequently leads to violent conflict or even outright war.

The basic idea underlying ethnic nationalism is that "peoples" exist prior to, or independently of, any state and that ideally each "people" should inhabit its own sovereign state. This idea is rooted in the romantic notion of peoplehood following Herder. Later, due to developments in bio-philosophy in the 1860s, "peoples" where increasingly defined in racial terms. Social Darwinism following Herbert Spencer (1857) declared Darwin's "survival

of the fittest" as a natural law among racially defined nations. This school of thought helped the European powers to justify their dominance over non-European "peoples" and their hegemony vis-à-vis each other. Ultimately, the competition among the "fitter" ones among the European "nations" culminated in the First World War.

With Identity Politics focussing on religion instead of the *ethnie*, the postulated members of the religious group become the carriers and the resource of an ideology. The religious ascription of each individual develops into a political asset for the mobilising elites. A conversion into the other camp amounts to desertion. When religion and its followers become a political asset, conflicts are sparked off by religious symbols and conversions. Temples, mosques and churches, religious symbols and processions suddenly gain immense significance (Wieland 2006: 370).

Often religionists resist such misuse of their beliefs. As Wieland points out, in the case of Bosnia, the majority of Muslims did not want a Muslim state. Similarly, in the case of the Indian subcontinent, most Muslims did not support the idea of an independent Muslim state. The movement toward an independent state of Pakistan was spearheaded by the Muslim salaried class of North India (Abu-Rabi' 2006: 15), a class that was the product of the colonial transformation of Indian social structure in the nineteenth century and ... comprised those who had received an education that would equip them for employment in the expanding colonial state apparatus as scribes and functionaries (Allavi 1998: 68).

This class "did not represent the interests of the majority of the Muslim peasants in rural India or those of the Muslims in south India" (Abu-Rabi' ibid.). Consequently, the majority of the Muslims of the continent stayed back in India after partition where they still outnumber the Muslim inhabitants of Pakistan. Ahmad Khan's Aligharh Movement was against an independent Muslim state, as well as – for opposite reasons – Mauddudi's Islamist movement Jama'at-i-Islami.

Frequently the contents of the conflicts have little to do with the people's descent, faith, language or habits. These features serve only as "docking stations" (Wieland) for an accelerated political mobilization. Neither in India nor in the Balkans did ethnic groups fight each other as

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such (Wieland 2006: 382). Wieland points to the fact that the idea of an ethnically or religiously homogeneous state is self-defeating, because, as the example of Pakistan shows, once ethnic homogeneity is achieved the category of "ethnicity" becomes redundant. Since primordial cleavages *per se* do not exist, "ethnic groups" must be politicized to achieve political ends on the basis of ethnic or religious mobilisation. Once each "ethnic group" has "its" state, this logic leads to the creation of ever new and smaller entities (ibid. 387). Thus, predictably, Jinnah abandoned ethno-religious nationalism as soon as he received his "Muslim" state. Pakistan, however, is still struggling to get the *djinni* of identity politics back into the lamp. Whenever moderately Islamic or secular parties gain the upper hand, the military plays with Islamist identity politics to prevent further democratisation of Pakistan (cf. Nasr 2004).

These are examples of ethno-religious Identity Politics that remain within the framework of nationalism. There is however a different kind of Identity Politics which resorts to religion as a means to mass mobilisation but does not follow the paradigm of nationalism. Islamism is an example of this kind.

### Islamism as a form of Identity Politics

El-Solh (1993) divides Islamist schools of thought into three groups with regard to their attitude towards democracy and human rights.[3] Group one rejects democracy outright (i.e. the Lebanese "Movement of Islamic Unification" or the Algerian "Islamic Salvation Front"). There is not even a pretence to claim legitimacy from dominant patterns of normative order available from the global cultural reference frame. These groups thus represent a counter culture in opposition to modernity but also part of it (Meyer 2005: 110f.).

Group two maintains that Islam is inherently democratic, without necessarily implying that representative forms of government conform to Western standards.[4] This school of thought does not take into account the

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[3] Similarly Baderin 2003.
[4] I.g. Hasan al-Turabi, leader of the Sudanese "Islamic National Front". For a detailed account of his thought see Moussalli 1994. According to Turabi, "all the people believe in

inner plurality of legal and political views among Muslims. The evocation of a harmonious Muslim identity leaves no room for legitimate disagreement. It therein resembles ethnic forms of Identity Politics.

Group three, according to El-Solh, places more emphasis on democracy in its representative forms (i.e. Muhammad 'Amara, Egyptian public intellectual, and Muhammad al-Ghazali, co-founder of the Egyptian "Muslim Brotherhood"). According to El-Solh, this school of thought insists on the ruler being subjected to the rule of law and some form of consultation (*shurah*). They also advocate an adaptation of Western democracy to Islamic principles by some form of public reasoning (*ijtihad*). However "democratic" any of these groups may appear to Muslims themselves, none of their proponents take into account the equal right of non-Muslims living in the same polity to own the state and to be co-authors of its laws. This is not in congruence with democratic principles where state and law are owned in equal parts by each citizen no matter which religion she/he belongs to.

Democracy requires that traditional doctrines transform themselves into reasonable comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 1993) that take into account that "the fact of reasonable pluralism is a permanent feature of democratic culture" (ibid. xviii, 36). This pluralism, even in the Muslim world, includes non-orthodox Muslims as well as non-Muslims and apostates. Religious comprehensive doctrines are compatible with principles of democracy, as understood by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, only if

the principles and details of *shari'a* law, and apply them wholeheartedly as an expression of their free will. Thus there is no need for force" (after El-Solh 1993: 60). Turabi thereby denies the fact of plurality within the Muslim community itself, not to speak of non-Muslim minorities who by democratic standards should have an equal share in the authorship of the law by which they are governed. Muslims themselves may follow different schools of Islamic law and even within these schools there are divergent opinions regarding its applications to present concerns. In its denial of plurality, this brand of Islamism parallels ethnic Identity Politics. The evocation of a harmonious unity among Muslims leaves no room for legitimate disagreement and thus no peaceful way of resolving conflicts among Muslims themselves and among Muslims and non-Muslims. Where no space exists to resolve conflicts by democratic means the outcome is oppression and violence. Al Turabi will therefore have to resort to force to bring about the unity that he evokes. Denial of plurality is a feature of Identity Politics common to all the instances of ethnic nationalism surveyed so far. In this second group, religious Identity Politics resembles ethnic Identity Politics. As such it is indicative of a lack of democratic culture in the political movements that aim at the creation of new polities and states.

out of their own free choice they refrain from imposing by force their religious wisdom on others.

According to Habermas (2001) religious communities have to consider a reflection in three steps. "The religious mind has to first handle the encounter with other confessions or religions. Second it has to brace for the authority of the sciences that maintain the monopoly on world knowledge. And finally it has to get involved with the prerequisites of a democratic constitutional state that is founded on profane morality" (ibid. 17, translation MD). None of the Islamist thinkers that we have encountered so far meet these requirements of a democratic political culture.

A second important surveyor of Islamist literature, Gudrun Krämer (1993) bases her assessment of Islamist notions of democracy on what she considers "voices of the Sunni Arabic mainstream" (i.e. the Egyptian and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhoods, the Tunisian al-Ghanushi movement and voices of the so-called Islamic awakening; ibid. 4). Among these voices of the male urban elite and middle classes, Krämer notes, there is general agreement on the rejection of secularism and the applicability of *shari'a*. Islam, in their mind, is religion and state (*din wa-dawla*) but the precise form of government is left to human reason alone.

This does not rule out the adoption of democracy. Certain Islamic values are in congruence with ideas of democracy, i.e. that all people are born equal, that government is accountable to the people etc. Forough Jahanbakhsh (2001) hints at the fact that al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd used the Arabic word *jama'iya* in the same sense that the Greek of the time used "democracy". Thus a clearly defined model of democracy existed for the Muslim world as early as in the 9$^{th}$ to 12$^{th}$ centuries CE.

Other ideas however do not seem to combine well with democratic political culture. There are the ideas that sovereignty rests with God alone and that laws are not authored by the citizens of the state but by God, for example. However, the application of law admittedly rests with the people. This leaves room for an interpretation of Islamic law that conforms to Human Rights and democratic standards. The Islamist mainstream, however, does not take such a stand. Wolfgang Merkel (2005) shows that it is the combination of Arabic and Islamic culture that is accountable for the

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reluctance in those parts of the world to accept the globally dominant normative scripts of pluralism, liberalism and democracy. Quoting Clague et al. (1997), Merkel infers that it must be the Arab-Islamic cultural impregnation, way above any socio-economical variable, that explains the lack of democratic progress in the Muslim world (ibid. 52).

Most Islamist authors have difficulties, Krämer notes,

> In envisaging consultation and participation as a genuinely political process involving interest representation, competition and contestation. It reflects the continued prevalence of a moral rather than a political discourse, strictly speaking. The ideals of unity (*wahda*), consensus (*ijmaʿ*) and a balanced harmony of groups and interests (*tawazun*), often associated with the theological concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), are still paramount. In the debate about pluralism, there is general recognition that God created people to be different, and that therefore differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*) are natural, legitimate and even beneficial to humankind and the Muslim community – provided they remain within the confines of the faith and common decency. There is great reluctance to allow for unlimited freedom of speech and organization of those different opinions ... As long as there is no certainty as to who defines the "framework of Islam," and where exactly power and interest come into play, pluralism and democracy remain in jeopardy (ibid. 7f. italics in the original).

Krämer concludes, thereby reconfirming our earlier finding, that the denial of plurality is indicative of the lack of democratic culture among Islamist movements. The utopian vision of a harmonious body politic with no room for the articulation of disagreement and for the democratic organisation of competing interests is a feature that Islamism has in common with ethno-religious Identity Politics. In both instances an inability to deal with inner conflict leads to an upholding of a forced unity. To legitimise this use of force, an outward enemy, real or imagined, needs to be projected. This can lead into external conflict. Thus the inability to deal with internal disagreement, the lack of institutional means of resolving internal conflict democratically (i.e. non-violently) explains the propensity of Identity Politics to lead to external conflict.

### Differences between ethnic and religious Identity Politics

As we have noted earlier, a main feature defining an *ethnie* can be religion. Thus Hindu ethnic nationalism and Hindu religious fundamentalism are essentially the same. But this is not true of all religious Identity Politics. Islamic fundamentalism often stands orthogonal to the divide between civic and ethnic nationalism. Islamism does not accept the basic idea entailed in both that mankind has to be divided along territorial or ethnic lines and polities can only function within the confines of such entities. Islamism transcends such territorial or ethnic restrictions and bases the polity on the community of all believers. The Muslim *ummah* is neither territorially nor ethnically exclusive. Every human being and every country is welcome provided that they embrace Islam. The vision is of a global polity embracing all mankind turned Muslim. In this humanist and global outlook it is only paralleled by cosmopolitan visions of world polity or world state.

Despite many Islamists who identify the *ummah* with the "Muslim nation" (Usama bin Laden for instance speaks of the *ummah* as the Islamic nation [Fradkin & Haqqani 2005: 1]), the question arises as to how much Islamism falls into the same category as nationalism when compared on the level of Identity Politics. In a way it seems that Islamism overcomes the aporiae of nationalism in a similar way as liberal-democratic cosmopolitanism. The true controversy, thus, does not seem to be between nationalism and Islamism, i.e. between ethnic vs. religious Identity Politics, but between liberal and Islamic cosmopolitanism. This line of argument has been taken up by authors such as Talal Asad (2003), Saba Mahmood (2005) and William T. Cavanaugh (2002) among others. Their criticism of liberal democracy is summarised by Goldstone (2007). Goldstone argues that liberal democracy is founded on a mythical account of how religion as a foundation for politics engenders conflict and how liberal democracy is the way to prevent such conflict from escalating into violence. According to him, "[S]ecular liberalism ... far from eliminating extreme forms of violence (as it purports to do), instead tries to redefine the manner in which, and, most importantly, the *reasons* for which one should be willing to defend and

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offend, suffer and inflict suffering, and even to kill and die" (ibid: 208, parenthesis and emphasis in the original).

Goldstone suggests that in actuality it is the other way around. While religion, according to him, once provided a foundation for politics that was less prone to violent conflict, it is instead the modern nation state based on secular liberal-democratic principles that is the cause of much violent conflict and oppression. Here, "one's sense of *political* belonging (emphasis in the original)," Goldstone writes, "*no longer* derives primarily from one's religious community ... but is instead founded in the nation-state and its values" (ibid., emphasis mine). This suggests that Goldstone views the pre-modern religious world as a rather peaceful one. In his writing nothing suggests that the Latin-Christian world was forged into unity by the crusaders' swords and through the pyres of the inquisition and, similarly, the integration of the Muslim world was the result of military conquest and much destruction and violence against non-believers and their temples. While Goldstone is certainly right in pointing to the violence accompanying the unfolding of the modern world, his depiction of earlier periods seems rather idyllic.

Sure enough, the post-Westphalian system of sovereign states, has emerged out of thirty years of rampant war. It was the cause of much violence and continues to generate violence. Goldstone, however, seems to conflate the notions of unlimited sovereignty and nationalism with liberalism and democracy. The former may be questionable accompaniements of processes of modernity. However, liberalism and democracy are notions independent of these. Already in the late enlightenment period and well before the emergence of nationalism, liberal cosmopolitan thinkers like Immanuel Kant in his Perpetual Peace (2006) transcended the notion of unlimited sovereignty.

Goldstone, citing Cavanaugh (2002), correctly indicates that the post-Westphalian order emerged from decades of conflict where the emerging sovereigns of the newly independent states used religion as a means of mobilisation for wars that were primarily designed to wrest their autonomy from imperial and papal tutelage. To speak of "religious wars" in this context would be misleading. Instead both sides, the defendants of the

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old religio-political order as well as the proponents of the nascent order of independent states used religion as a resource for political and military mobilisation. Goldstone, however, suggests that only the latter used religion in that way.

Notions of the political have changed dramatically over the centuries. Goldstone's idea of "political belonging" equally carries very different meanings when referring to the 13th, the 17th or the 21st century. He takes no count of this. Instead he projects modern notions of "civil society" back into a time when such concepts had no, or very different, meanings (ibid. 221). Thus it remains in question what he has in mind when he refers to a pre-liberal, pre-secular "political" order that, as he alleges, would have been less violent-prone – or at least not worse – than the present secular and liberal-democratic normative order.

Goldstone seems to believe that present day democratic liberalism as a paradigm for normative order is ethically not better than the religio-political order of past days. For liberalism to function, it has to assume that everybody is liberal or otherwise be forced to obey its principles. Equally the older religio-political order rested on the assumption that everybody is Christian or else would have to be forced to accept Christianity. Today non-liberals are under suspicion of being fundamentalist. In the bygone age non-Christians where suspected to be siding with the anti-Christ. Thus where is the difference in terms of the use of force to maintain order? This seems to be the question that Goldstone and his paragons are asking.

Can one answer this question without already presupposing major tenets of liberal-democratic thinking? A liberal would answer that it does make a difference whether somebody is disciplined by violent means only when he/she in his or her outward behaviour does not obey the law or whether somebody is disciplined when his or her inner allegiance to the established order is in question. According to liberal precepts all that matters is that a person abide by the law in his or her outer behaviour. But if the credentials of a believer are disputed in a Christian or Muslim society life might become a little difficult. At certain times there may be provisions for certain minorities. But these are always limited in scope and do not

warrant an equal standing on a par with the subjects of the established religion.

To take this line of defence of liberalism presupposes that freedom of conscience and equality before the law means something to the opponent. If they don't, the dialogue has to begin with these matters. Why are human beings equal in value irrespective of their status, race, gender or creed and should therefore enjoy equal rights in any polity? Why should there be no coercion in matters of conscience? Why are political matters to be limited to a certain sphere and should not be all-embracing? These are the disputes of the enlightenment epoch. If these arguments fail to convince the opponent, the prospects for this dispute to take a non-violent form are slight.

Goldstone admonishes that even a secular, liberal-democratic order sanctions certain kinds of violence and is therefore, according to him, no better off than the religio-political order that it castigates as oppressive and worth overcoming. The only force, however, that can be justified within a liberal-democratic order would be directed against those who infringe on the liberties of others, i.e. as a defensive means against those who use force in the first place. The use of force in the case of self-defence is not normally put on the same level as the aggressive use of force that grows out of the intolerance towards religious dissenters. Goldstone does not seem to agree. Instead he romanticises the Middle Ages as an age of a peaceful "religious consensus of civil society" (ibid. 221). A Christian reverie, it would seem, paralleling the Islamist myth of the age of the four rightly guided caliphs.

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