

**Democracy in Question – the Persecution of the
Believers
Or
The Reverse Processing of Power and Powerlessness**



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Based on a Presentation to the 'Prisoners of Faith' Conference February 2002, organised by the Islamic Human Rights Commission, UK.

Opening remarks

The question arises: why is it that America or Western governments are continually insulting Muslims for not having democracy in Muslim lands? Why are they always encouraging us to establish liberal democracy in our lands - because they argue for us to do otherwise would mean that we are an uncivilised people with a barbaric culture?

I feel that there is a connection between the democracy they want us to practice, and the imprisonment of faith i.e. the terms of democracy that they put forward for us to follow and the isolation of faith, of religion from society.

This presentation will briefly define democracy, and will go on to look at what the concept of the democratisation of the world as currently being pursued in Western political theory and practice entails. Further we will explain in more detail my concept of the imprisonment of faith or the processes of secularisation. We will then look at and reflect on 9/11 and the concept of power and powerlessness.

Concept of Democracy

Democracy, like many central terms of politics is in origin a Greek word, combining two shorter words, *demos* and *kratos*. Both terms have more than one meaning. *Demos* could mean the whole citizen body living within a particular polis, or city-state, but might also be used to mean 'the mob' or 'the rabble' or 'the lower order'. *Kratos* could mean either power or rule; the two are not the same, so a formal democracy, in which the people or the people's representatives appeared to rule, might conceal a very undemocratic distribution of actual power. Democracy meant rule by the people or the many; but because the many were also poor, it was often taken to mean rule by the poor, or by the rabble. Aristotle is particularly clear about this. He did not think that a state in which a rich majority governed could be properly called a democracy (Arblaster, 1987:13).

In democratic systems there have to be regular and fair elections, as mentioned by Giddens (1999:68), 'elections, in which all members of the population may take part. This right of democratic participation runs parallel with the civil liberties, freedom of expression and discussion together with the freedom to join political groups or associations.' This is democracy as they define it, though there are many interpretations of democracy and this would entail a lengthy discourse in explaining the subject.

Democratising the World or Deluding it?

In order to answer the first question as to why democratisation of the world as an agenda for Western governments is so important we should keep in mind the following.

The first, commonly held perception is that democratisation is providing a better position for society, which these powers want to share from their goodness with the aim of initiating the betterment of human society globally. Unfortunately this is not a reality, and we cannot observe this utilitarianism or international philanthropy anywhere in the world. Further, we see that six hundred million Muslims are living in democratic countries and yet Muslims are still being blamed and accused by these powers for not practising democracy. Despite this political reality we are condemned as undemocratic – for what reason?

The second reason why democracy is demonstrated as highly significant is because democratisation concerns the expanding of a particular political agenda to the rest of the world. This is an American agenda through which Americanisation can be put into effect in all aspects of life in all communities. We are not criticising democracy per se. It is not a negative factor to be able to come together collectively and decide for the future or best interests of society. However we need to ascertain what is behind this concept of democracy, and what consequences its hidden implications have on the type of democracy that they want to impose upon us.

Democracy even in western societies is not an old phenomenon. Only at the turn of the 20th century did they begin to open the discussion on democracy. Before the First World War women had the right to vote in only four countries; Finland, Norway, Australia and New Zealand. In Switzerland women did not get the vote until 1974. During the last three decades, the numbers of democratic countries have enormously increased. Since the mid-1970s, democratic systems have spread to over thirty countries. This process began in Mediterranean Europe, with the overthrow of the military regimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal. In the early 1980s, some twelve countries in South and Central America have changed to a democracy, including Brazil and Argentina. Yet the political system of the west has preoccupied itself in targeting Muslim countries and reprimanding them for not recognising women's rights.

Muqtedar Khan (1999: 97) mentioned that the total number of Muslims living in democratic societies exceeds 600 million, yet we continue to question the Muslims ability to adapt to democratic practices. Amazingly, while the United States has not had a woman as head of state, Muslim states have even elected women as heads of state: Tansu Ciller in Turkey, Khalida Zia in Bangladesh, and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan.

Democratization in many cases means Americanization and Westernization of the World. This is because democratization has an underlying concept of Americanization as its backbone. Even sometimes humanistic values are used as tools for expansion of American territory in the world. During Clinton's election campaign in 1991 his vice-presidential candidate Al Gore gave a talk that later translated into a book entitled 'Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit.' It clearly states that today the world environment is subjected to 'pollution' and because of this America cannot ignore this issue. By referring to environmentalism, which is a nice humanistic concept, Al Gore was trying to expand the political geography of America (Albrow, 1996).

Let us look at the theories legitimising this idea and supporting the political foreign policies of America and those that criticise them, appearing as it were to consider all aspects of reality, professing to objectivity and dissociation from any sort of political influence.

Samuel Huntington's (1996) Clash of Civilizations theory, Frances Fukuyama's (1992) theory about the end of history, and Benjamin Barber's (1996) theory regarding *Jihad* versus McDonalds – these all legitimise the foreign policies of America. When Huntington talks about the clash of civilizations and then something like 9/11 takes place it appears to validate his argument, and its significance is compounded by the fact that Huntington is part of American political policy making machine, indeed he currently works for them. The idea that other cultures / civilizations are inimical to American super-culture is reinforced by various events subsequent to Huntington's (highly political and not solely academic) setting of a conflict scenario between the West and all or different facets of the rest.

When Fukuyama expounds upon his theory of how history has come to its end, he is essentially reflecting that people ought to completely forget their past and start afresh. This concept of denial is elucidated in the Qur'an when past peoples have said with regard to revelation, *'Hadha asaateeru alawwaleen'*¹. The same dialogue found here in the Qur'an applies to this theory of 'the end of history'. It means to say that the history belonging to non-liberal democracy has ended. It implies that no society can survive without practising liberal democracy. Ignoring former civilizations and defeating the stability and continuity of cultural heritage is part of the philosophy of America-centrism. There is an assumption that American civilization is unique and glamorous. Margaret Mead (1956) a well known American anthropologist has emphasized the novelty and creativity of American civilization. For Mead (1956: 372-73), 'American civilisation is new based on a philosophy of production and plenty, instead of saving due to scarcity of resources. For three centuries, men of vastly different ways of life have come to America, left behind their old language, their old attachments to land and river, their kin, their old joint families and their icons, and have learned to speak, walk, to eat and dress in a new fashion. As we have learned to change ourselves, so we believe that others can change also and we believe that they will want to change, that men only have to see a better way of life to reach out for it spontaneously. We conceive of them as seeing a light and following it freely.'

Mead (1956: 376-7) suggested that 'once the wild buffalo is destroyed, the once open plains enclosed, the spear and the bow and arrow rendered useless, and any need for lasting relationship with civilisation develops, the simple peoples of the world have to change. Neither their clothes nor their manners, their economic ideas or their political habits fit them to live in the modern world as they are. It is then up to those societies which have already invented ways of life compatible with these modern innovations to share their cultural patterns in entirety with the peoples who wish to have them. Those who wish to share and have their children share the benefits that civilisation has made possible for mankind, must change from one whole pattern to another. While it is dreadfully difficult to grasp one foreign habit on a set of old habits, it is much easier and highly exhilarating to learn a whole new set of habits, each reinforcing, as one moves—more human than one was before because one has learned to do one more complicated human thing—completely new.'

The mentality of American civilization has excessive emphasis on the value of 'change', 'innovation', 'newness' and 'youth' as the supreme and ultimate Good. On the contrary, they have contempt for the past, tradition and anything old (including old people). Islam, its civilization, and its institutions are condemned and rejected on the pretext that any order based on a Divine law revealed fourteen hundred years ago could not

¹ Translation: '...This is nothing but stories of the ancients.' Qur'an 46:17

possibly be valid and relevant to modern life. Lerner (1964: 405) clearly stated that 'the conception of the Qur'an as a practical handbook of rules for daily life is feasible for people who still live in a Bedouin desert setting much like that in which Muhammad addressed his vivid message of Allah. The historic development of public communication has been largely the work of groups excluded from the majority of Arab-Muslim syndrome.' Lerner puts Muslims between choosing either Islam or Modernity. For him 'the religious diversities and political rivalries in the Middle East suggest that a collective identity symbolized by pan-Islam can hardly be viable. Indeed, such sentimental sorties into the symbolism of a majestic past have mainly obscured the conditions of genuine area unity in the future. The key is modernization. The top policy problem has been for Middle Eastern leaders to choose between Mecca or mechanization and how they can be made compatible.'²

I feel that this exemplifies what I mean by the hidden face of democracy, or that democracy that Western powers wish us to pursue. More clearly it is believed by many that there is a hidden ideology behind American democracy concealed in a feigned image and this is what Newman, in the wake of 9/11 has clarified. Bush was continually saying that if they - the terrorists, the Others, Muslims, whoever - attack us they are not attacking us or our government or our people, but they are attacking the freedom and democracy of the liberal countries. Newman told him that if this is an attack on freedom then surely they should attack also Canada, Sweden, Switzerland etc. Yet nobody is attacking them. It is because these countries do not display the ideological hatred of Muslims as overtly as is demonstrated by American Government.

I have referred to democracy as an ideology and Americanism as an ideology as well. But what does ideology mean? Ideology – and unfortunately this has become mixed up within Islamic thinking, as have many other alien concepts - in the west³ means there is no acceptance of the rest of the world, instead deeming it meaningless and giving importance to American interests alone. This is part of American Exclusivism, which entails rejection of those who are not in the camp of America.

Dictatorship and militant power are the authoritative totalitarian powers behind this democracy, which can be seen explicitly when they say, 'you are free', and at the same time say as Bush has said 'you are either with us or against us'. What type of freedom is that? This is an ideological freedom, which looks for a particular political domination over the World. It is indeed very contradictory to support freedom by ongoing war. Five months after the shocking terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, George Bush announced clearly in his State of the Union Address on January 29, 2002, that the "war against terror is only just beginning" and also that if other governments exhibit timidity in the face of terror, America will act without them. Bush not only proclaimed a war without end, but suggested that the United States would act unilaterally throughout the world to enforce what he called "our responsibility to fight freedom's fight." Appealing to what he described as a resurgent sense of unity and community in the country, Bush announced that American citizens were no longer willing to simply live their lives devoted to material pursuits and a "feel good" attitude. According to Bush, in the aftermath of the events of September 11, America had been reborn with a renewed sense of patriotism, community, and public spiritedness. Painting the United States as a beacon of civilization, Bush urged Americans to perform voluntary acts of public service,

² ibid page 405

³ I am not referring to its good aspects nor its peoples in general because many things can be learnt from them. Rather what is meant, is the capitalistic concepts of the government looking to their own interests at the price of ignoring other societies.

be alert for signs of potential terrorism at home, support massive increases in the military budget, endorse an energy policy that involves more drilling for oil, accept a huge tax cut for the rich and major corporations, and tolerate the suspensions of some basic civil liberties and freedoms - especially those granting more power to the police, FBI, CIA, and other security forces (Giroux, 2002). This is all about mono-centric American ideology, which has imposed disaster and pressure for world society and relatively material improvement in some aspects of social life for the white American citizen. Democracy in an American context is more likely to be 'selling of American teleology' (Thornton, 2000) for dominating world society, it is indeed more legitimization for free market industry to create fertile ground for more selling and more domination of American economy in the ground of American Culture (Xing, 2001).

Before further discussion, we need to discuss the concept of ideology. The term 'ideology' was first suggested by the French writer Antoine Destutt de Tracy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He used ideology to label a proposed 'science of ideas that would attempt to discover the precise causal connections between people's sense experiences and their thoughts. However, the first really influential concept of ideology was formulated by Karl Marx (1818-1883), the most important intellectual founder of revolutionary communism (Willhite, 1988: 54). Willhite (1988: 55) defined 'worldview ideology' as a set of ideas that are intended to interpret society and politics, justify a particular kind of political and social order, and encourage action on their behalf. Such an ideology provides a picture of the social and political world within the framework of a particular interpretation of history. That is, it specifies what is 'wrong' with the world and why. If it is an official ideology, it explains how it has provided the cure for previously existing evils, and what new ones must be combated. From this perspective worldview ideology is closely linked to political power. Such an ideology can be seen as a set of ideas that are intended to interpret society and politics to interpret to justify a particular social and political order and encourage action on their behalf. Such an ideology provides a picture of the social and political world within the framework of a particular interpretation of history.' This is why history has been defined by Eurocentrism. For this reason many historians say that all civilizations are based on the Paris/ Rome civilization. This is Eurocentrism ignoring the civilizations of other parts of the world. There are Islamic civilizations, which have a long history, and there are the Chinese civilizations, as well as many others, which have an important history in the world.

When somebody puts their own agenda forward and wants to impose their own ideology on the rest of the world, then history and society will be justified accordingly to benefit that idea by means of propaganda. The characteristics of the monocentric ideological worldview can be illustrated in three ways.

1. Orientation: Every ideology has its own orientation: American ideology has its own orientation, as does an ideology such as democracy, which has its own agenda. Willhite (1988) argued that 'the ideological approach also creates a particular worldview that imposes an oriented view of history and society. This type of orientation may challenge the reality of our history towards their society and inevitably future societies and cultures. If one looks at past history based on an Americocentric perspective, every aspect of history will be interpreted according to the interest of American politics and culture. This monocentric approach is entirely a pre-directed project.'

This is a profoundly based prejudice. In social psychology there is a principle, that if you have a prejudiced idea and begin to use this idea by means of media, newspaper, Hollywood, and all mediums of propaganda, you can disavow for example, a particular ethnic society as being unable to be politicians or acting as political figures. Gradually you can see that people accept this prejudice-imposed ideology. The propaganda system is attempting to form a particular identity that can be accepted even by the person who is opposing the idea they put forward. We can see this operating now with the operation of Islamophobia in our society. Now we can see that even some Muslims are accepting Islamophobic notions about Muslims – their abilities, aspirations even their nature. Indeed their views of Muslims are phobic, and their behaviour towards Muslims is phobic. The Islamophobic policies of the western politician, the United States in particular, are aiming at three major targets: the first aim is demonization of Muslims from within and the second is changing the public opinion of westerners about Islam and Muslims. Thirdly, in a more ideological interpretation, Islamophobia is a project to be used, if necessary, for legitimization of war against Muslims all over the world.

They have already started criticising Muslim countries. Muslim organisations are surrendering to the western ideology, saying, yes they are right, and we should change our lifestyles. When the idea is brought out in the media, we can see that it influences our own people as well as outsiders.

2. Legitimization: Ideological politics legitimizing a particular political, cultural and economic policy. These types of ideology try to establish a type of social status and political power in which they can influence the masses. To legitimize some idea, culture or politics, it is important to convince public opinion. Public opinion are the views held by members of the public on issues on every day life (Giddens, 2001: 696). Public opinion is created mainly by the media, and it is the dominant view which the mass media express, to exert pressure to conform, to step into line; and the more this view is expressed, the more dominant it appears, the more difficult it becomes to hold a contrary view. In a sense, Noelle Neumann's (1974) model is a spiral within a spiral, one an assertion, the other a withdrawal into a silence as the assertion grows stronger. In relation to others around them, those holding different opinions and attitudes grow more and more isolated. Thus a spiral of silence on the part of individual members of the public reflects the spiral of dominance represented by the media.

3. Elimination Policy: For Willhite (1988: 45-6) elimination of a political context has two very different meanings. First, it refers merely to ending competitors' effective political power. In its second sense, elimination means the use of physical force to imprison or kill competitors, opponents, and enemies, real or imagined. Most people find political imprisonment, torture, and killing to be the grimmest and most depressing features of politics.

Prisoners of Faith or Faith in Prison?

When we talk about prisoners of faith i.e. how people are persecuted for their beliefs, it is important to mention how faith itself is imprisoned by ideological politics. From this perspective western liberalism can be seen as a secular ideology. Liberalism is a social, political and economic philosophy behind democracy, which has legitimized the notion of secularism in society. Liberalism has arisen in Christian Europe and America, so those liberals have often presupposed the Christian values that informed their societies. But as

the movement to protect individual liberties by law has been extended, liberalism has evolved into a political ideology which under the banner of individual rights and freedom has repeatedly collided with religious organizations within modern liberal societies, particularly in such areas as family law, schooling and medicine.

In the secularization of society there are two main interacting constituents. Secularization has two meanings; one is the structural meaning and the other is the subjective meaning. The structural meaning of secularization means that religion should be isolated from all social institutions - politics, family, law, art, education and even language. From this perspective, people are hesitant to even use religious words for fear of being termed 'uncivilized people' in the west.

Structural secularization is politely putting religion and faith 'in prison' in such a way that people do not realise it. When they come to daily life it is for this reason they are not practising their faith. Accordingly one can argue that Christianity became a Sunday religion, and they want Islam to become a Friday religion i.e. praying on Friday and that's it. In fact they are imprisoning faith itself before they are actually putting believers in prison.

Subjective secularism, happens when the mind becomes secular, and when religion becomes meaningless for a person. Subjective secularism is more destructive than structural secularism. Although there is an interaction between these two, subjective secularism is however a stronger force for establishing secular society, secular politics and finally secular religion.

Power and powerlessness

Who is powerful and who is powerless? The powerful are they who are accepted delightedly among masses. Powerful are those who create extensive demands and love among masses. Power is a value which is legitimized and authorized by people within the home society and around the world. The powerless are those who remain hated among masses. America considered itself as the powerful and superpower of the world. In cultural studies they talk about American culture as super-culture. They say that no society can resist whatever we produce is a super-culture, and everybody will accept it because the US is very professional and attractive, very new with a flourishing sort of presentation of values and culture which nobody can resist.

The events of 9/11 and the concept of terrorism is not something welcomed by Muslims - rather the contrary. Muslims basing themselves in Qur'anic values are against any kind of terrorism. The events of 9/11 showed the world that nobody can feel safe in their power and authority and everybody is vulnerable (Wallace, 2002). Nobody is absolutely powerful. The more powerful one become the more vulnerability and fragility potentially exists. Power in its essence creates powerlessness.

Robert Bowman (1998) as a Bishop of the United Catholic Church in Melbourne Beach, stated that: 'the truth is that none of our thousands of nuclear weapons can protect us from these threats. No Star Wars system no matter how technically advanced, no matter how many trillions of dollars are poured into, can protect us from nuclear weapons delivered in a sailboat or a Cessna or a suitcase or a Ryder rental truck. Not one weapon in our vast arsenal, not a penny of the 270 billion dollars a year we spend on so called

defence can defend against a terrorist bomb.' This is a serious challenge for American, militant politics and militant powers talking about freedom. How is it possible for freedom to come together with democracy under militant powers?

\$207 billion were spent by America on its defence system before 9/11. This could instead be used to serve humanity across the world for those dying of hunger and lack of health and provisions e.g. 5 million babies under the age of five are dying globally as a result of deprivation.

Bowman's case is that even with a \$207 billion defence budget America will not be secure unless you stop oppressing people in the world like the people of Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Latin American etc. After this sort of treatment, Bowman contended, how can America expect the world to have a good view of it? Bowman stated that Americans are the target of terrorists because, in much of the world, the American government stands for dictatorship, bondage, and human exploitation. We are the target of terrorist because we are hated, and we are hated because our government has done hateful things in the world.

Some of the political theorists now refer to the theory of 'hegemony to legitimize the aftermath attack of the United States to rest of the world.' William Wallace (2002: 1) suggested that: 'Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', now widely accepted in conventional political discourse, emphasized the combination of coercion and consent which maintains structures of dominance, both within states and within systems of states. Stable structures of power depend on both material resources and ideology – dominant systems of belief. States can secure temporary supremacy over their neighbours through the use of overwhelming force and the utilization of superior technology, underpinned by the expenditure of the necessary economic resources; longer-term supremacy however depends upon at least a degree of acceptance of the legitimacy of the dominant power from those dominated. All formal or informal empires have proclaimed legitimising ideologies, with greater or lesser degrees of success. Islam provided the motivating force and rationale for the Arab conquest of North Africa, Persia, and central Asia, and maintained a succession of regional orders over the centuries that followed. Napoleon Bonaparte's modification of the ideology of the French revolution into a doctrine of popular mobilization and administrative modernization provided the legitimacy which recruited divisions of German, Polish and Dutch troops to march with the Grand Army to Moscow in 1812.'

Last words

One can conclude that those who are considered as powerless such as prisoners of faith, are by definition the powerful. Firstly, they get more self-confidence and create confidence and resistance for other people who are observing such circumstances. Secondly, they make a way into the ideas, values and beliefs of their followers. World history proves that prisoners of faith become role models for future society due to the fact that they were genuine, truthful and honest in their belief. Their faith was not political which according to time and place changes or is demolished.

We are talking today about those imprisoned for their beliefs and why societies feel the need to gaol these men, women and even children. On a final note, it should be remembered that in an Islamic worldview, believers are continuously imprisoned in this

world - *al-dunya sijjal-mumineer*⁴ - and this temporal world is like a prison to the believers. So nobody can actually put the believers in prison. Even by so doing they are in fact subjecting the believers to nothing but freedom. A believer feels free and proud, this is because according to their understanding they have fulfilled their task in contemporary society and they leave everything to their Lord, by hoping that world becomes peaceful for all human beings and justice become accessible and applicable for all human beings. Justice for the believers is the main foundation of value performance in the society. My final words are asaying of Imam Ali: Justice is the source of all of God's laws⁵ (*al-adlu hayato al-ahkam*).

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