

Contemporary Western Political Divisions in Light of the Islamist Revolutions: the Example of Australia.

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Abstract

The spill-out of the global Islamist civil wars and revolutions in the Middle East have also been global. In the Asia-Pacific region the grass roots shift to a more traditionalist Islamist is conspicuous in Indonesia and Malaysia, where democratic elected governments increasingly taper policy to conform to their increasingly self-conscious Islamist social base. But the spill-out has also been of great significance in Western countries. The refugee crisis in Europe, the rise of anti-immigration parties and the dangers of Islamist terrorism are now part of Europe's every-day life, as it is to a much lesser extent in the USA. What is common to all western nations is how reactions to the Islamist revolutions and their overflow in the West tap into domestic social antagonisms that have nothing to do with Islam, but everything to do with the social revolutions that have taken place in these nations since the 1960s and 1970s. In this paper I will take the example of Australia I will explore how discussions surrounding Islam reflect the greater social polarisation between tertiary educated 'progressives' and the defenders of more conservative or traditionalist mores. I will also argue that Australia specifically, but the West generally, is unable to come up with a more unified and ultimately more thoughtful and creative set of responses to what is happening geopolitically through the Islamist civil wars.

Introduction

The matter of which I wish to speak is Islam and the West, more generally. Later in the paper I will provide examples from Australia to illumine the discussion, but ultimately the peculiar

contingencies and circumstances of Australia's geography and demographics only partly distinguish it from what is occurring in Western Europe and the United States of America, which also have geographical and demographic contingencies that are less significant than a greater array of more common internal and external social forces which give shape to a common phenomenon in much of the West in relationship to Islam.

The topic under discussion is so highly charged and morally and politically divisive that no matter what one says on the topic one is bound to be in one enemy camp or the other. Hence I will commence by laying down what I think are the core methodological elements of my analysis. I would hope that what I have to say cannot simply be dismissed by an appeal to a model or consensus without a serious engagement with the methodological elements laid out here.

Some Methodological Points

The first point is that the study of politics should not be confused with general moral claims. The difference amount to this: the study of politics, of the sort being presented here, takes its point of departure from what people do, rather than what they should do. There have been a great many political philosophers, from Plato on, who make the case that it is impossible to speak of politics unless one has an overarching idea of justice and strives to contribute to a more just order. It is true that political actors invariably legitimate the basis of their claims about political action on the basis of some goods. Also invariably, they hold that the goods they pursue are justifiably pursued, and in this loose sense they can be said to appeal to justice and hence are making moral claims. Nevertheless, the problem that neither moral nor political philosophers driven by normative principles have been able to successfully solve is to lay down principles that all think are good and just. The reason for this is simple and it is one that reason itself cannot eliminate: social goods are contingent goods. And contingent goods are socially, historically, (to use a much over and misused term) culturally and institutionally rooted. Disputation is intrinsic to social existence, and the identification of concordances and uniformities that contribute to valuable lives do not help us overcome the discordances and tensions that come from specific circumstance, which is why we know of no community without conflict. Even allowing for the fact that moral philosophers are no more in agreement about the nature, source and scope of moral claims, let alone about what is right or wrong on divisive issues, the idea that if everyone stopped what they were doing and paid attention to

some moral philosopher or other is absurd. And it is absurd because the moral philosopher is no less a social stake-holder, with their own interests in their own daily reproduction, than the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker. Friedrich Nietzsche provided the term 'perspectivism', and as a student of Schopenhauer he accepted that our representations of the world very much depend upon who we are, how we have been cultivated, what stories have gone into our making, and how we respond to certain triggers. It is not that we can never look beyond or understand other stories and other selves, but in any kind of identity, location and transformation different contingencies press upon us in different ways.

A corollary of this, is that whereas morals involves what the philosopher Schelling called the deployment of negative philosophy, a clearing of the positive elements of existence which includes our sentiments, passions, historicity as well as any more general features such as our power of reasoning, students of politics are as interested in reaction as much as the political enforcement of principles. That is to say, someone wanting to do political analysis has to break with a widely held belief, especially amongst tertiary educated people, included professionals working in politics, the media, the law, schools and other sites of social induction and shaping, that the aim of politics is to create a more morally satisfying social world. This moral view of politics consists of (a) knowing what the public good or general will is, (b) discovering a way to gain social, professional, and political power, and (c) making and imposing laws and policies that achieve this end. But the problem with this view of politics is that it fails to account for what happens when people refuse to accept the vision of the public good or general will advanced by different 'interest'.

Now there are numerous ways to define politics, but one element of that the definition which cannot be ignored if we are to take seriously the liberal democratic process is that it is a system designed to enable the representation of contrary and even highly hostile interests. The most important innovation of liberal democracy, and one which no other political system was successfully able to solve, was the peaceful transition of the transfer of power from one or more sets of interests to other(s). I take the word interests in a loose sense to cover 'skin in the game', which emerges from a social, economic and personal stake. It covers the array of dependencies which a person is entangled in within the reproduction of their daily life. Thus, for example, it covers property, work and investments, as well as one's position, and authority, and the narratives one engages in with 'friends' in informal social settings. Inevitably it also covers expectations and hopes. Whereas realist politics theorists of IR make much of states and the interrelationship, the interests within social and political orders which cover classes (more precisely identified by Weber than Marx, whose bipolar capital/ labour model tends to only

consider classes in how they advance the interests that concern his model of social reality), cultures, religions, ages, social role, and status. Interests, understood in this sense are far more concrete and variegated than what now has become a more common break down of sociality into such classifiers as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality – these later characters may also feature as interests, but they are invariably modulated and actualised by other dependencies and ‘stakes’.

The state has always been, *inter alia*, a power complex for the extraction and transfer of resources between persons and groups. Hence that transfer of power inevitably requires giving ground, and potentially giving up either material, social, or some other form of power. When communities share deep consensus that extraction and transference is relatively painless, and the transfer goes relatively smoothly. But when interests are highly polarised, as they are in much of the West today, we who want to undertake a political analysis cannot smooth over these divisions by taking one side or another – for that is not the issue if we are trying to make sense of actions and reactions.

This point will be taken up below when I speak of the actions, reactions, transfers of powers that presently are contained within Western liberal democracies, but which are certainly the of the most polarising sort that have been experienced in democracies since prior to the Second World War.

The second major methodological point I wish to make requires a brief reflection upon two well-known citations about the relationship between history: ‘we walk backward into the future’ and ‘the past is a foreign country.’ The first one I would modify by adding, we are all very short-sighted when looking backwards, and to the second I add: as well as being a foreign country, the past is also expressed in a foreign ‘tongue’, which is not only given to very few to learn, but even those who learn it, know only bits and pieces of it, and those that know the bits and pieces of it frequently vehemently disagree with the meaning of the bits they think they know. This is very pertinent because in looking backwards to make sense of the present, people are frequently looking at different things, happily ignoring (usually by being totally oblivious) to some things, and simply making up things about the past as they go along because it suits the narrative cluster that gives them some sense of their own world and what is happening in it.

Thirdly, interests are held together by narratives, and people who share narratives usually share interests.

Fourthly, we should not assume that all peoples and groups more or less want the same things. Identifying what is common between groups and what are genuine and significant differences about what kind of world one wants to preserve or help create, what kind of world one sees oneself as living in, is a difficult exercise. The more ‘axiomatic’ or ‘rationalistic’ one’s analytic approach the more one will be inclined to discard fundamental differences. Again, this can easily be mistaken for a metaphysical postulate. It is not. Here again, though, we come up against the problem of contingencies operating differently upon different groups. Even the preference for life over death is not one that can just be assumed as intrinsic to a group’s selection of symbols, narratives and appeals.

In the next part of this essay, I want to talk about two polarised narratives and sets of interests in the West as well as the revolutions taking place today in the Islamic world. Only then do I believe does it make any sense at all to have a political discussion of Islam today in the West, and how this has to be understood in light of the revolutions taking place in the Islamic world. Once we realize that we are discussing two very different revolutionary processes, do I think we are in a better sense to discuss the matter of Islam in the West, and, more specifically, the case of Australia.

Two Revolutions

It is important to clarify two distinct ways of understanding revolution. One is simply overthrowing a particular social and political order; the other, one that has been intrinsic to the West’s formation, evolves out of the faith that one can ‘save’ or ‘redeem’ the world by creating a future that has eliminated past institutional wrongs. This desire for future peace evolves out of the messianic aspirations of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The messianic motivation is common to earlier European revolutions such as the revolt of the Papacy against the Emperor (what is sometimes called the Papal Revolution), the Revolt against Rome by what would become Protestant States, the English Revolution, and even the secular French and Russian revolutions, which are ‘messianic’.¹ The social revolution, with its emphasis upon emancipation and equality, of the 1960s and its aftermath falls into this camp, and its intellectual roots goes back to Rousseau, the French revolution. But it also owed much to Marx. Thus, for example, the revolutionary youth who shaped and were shaped by the 1960s were convinced that corrupt institutions are the source of social ills, and that the vast array of Western institutions beginning with family, and extending to its economic, social,

political and religious systems are all rotten. After the convulsions of the Second World War, this reaction is perhaps understandable. The narratives (in spite of Marx's own insistence upon the scientific character of his vision and his animosity to utopians) were fundamentally utopian. They were generally hostile to the Soviet model, and the ideas and images that seized their imaginations were more derived from artists and intellectual groups like the Dadaists and surrealists, which had emerged out of the Great War and whose influence upon artists, provided a visual scape to accompany the sonic transformations of popular music that provided the sound-track of the 60s revolt. For the more philosophically sophisticated there were also such theorists coming out of Germany such as the Frankfurt School, and the poststructuralists in France, whose intellectual heritage owed as much to De Sade and (an anti-fascist reading of) Nietzsche, as to Marx. If there is one term that can best sum up the sweep ideas that would ultimately carry and transform the universities and eventually schools and much else of the rest of society it was: emancipation, or, conversely, anti-domination.

These narratives were not generated in a vacuum. Indeed to appreciate how these ideas have been able to gather such potency it is a matter of no small importance that they are predicated upon the existence of universities. Most Westerners have no idea that the reinvention of universities in the West that occurred with the papal revolution. For it was in that revolution that the universities took on the task of training people in law, medicine and theology. It was also the intellectual movement of the scholastics which would eventually reign within Medieval universities that enabled a rigorous sifting and application of the complicated, and often contradictory and competing church doctrines, coordinated and building bridges with pagan and even Muslim and Jewish philosophers such as Al Farabi and Maimonides. The university has undergone numerous shifts in its social role since its Medieval origin/reinvention, but by the time of the youth revolutions it was the most important social mechanism for preparing people to enter into most of the key professions of society.

The social revolutionaries of the 60s and early 70s were overwhelmingly university students. And while as students they were in social revolt, they were also the professional office holders of the next two or so generations. To the extent that their narratives had institutional support and hence leverage, they would become the educators and social shapers of Western societies. Closely related to this is another part of the West's revolutionary heritage. The French revolution not only helped sweep away the political power of the age old social interests of the crown and the first two estates, it also eventually, through the global spread of its ideas, including most importantly that of the modern nation, enabled the professional social classes to become the political class. In so far as Marxism (of the academic type) has been

enormously influential in shaping our contemporary radical political nomenclature, it is important to distinguish between the agents of capital who frequently disagree among themselves of how society and political policy are best shaped to suit their own capital growth, and the political class, who must accrue wealth (and hence the favour of capital), but who also have their own 'interests' at stake.

In their role as agents of social transformation induction and reproduction, the political class, along with an array of professionals employed within sites of social reflexivity, reproduction, and 'normalization', undertook the crafting, monitoring and legislative control of public narratives. In this respect the university and other agencies of narrative power were no different from what had occurred in Medieval times, where the clergy and the narratives of orthodoxy were protected by what was akin to a vast trade union. In the last fifty or so years – but increasingly so in the last two decades - various normative appeals and narrative tropes of authority such as equality, rights, identity et. al. have played an ever greater part in social reproduction, which has gone hand in hand with new laws, new offices, new standards of professional practice, which in turn fed back into the great network of educational sites, including the media. Expectations about what could and could not be said was as much required by sports professionals (with sporting bodies employing people to 'educate' their players) as by university and school teachers, journalists, politicians and many others. Those hostile to this would react against what they saw as a great dystopia of 'political correctness' – though the term 'politically correct' actually originated from the anti-domination side of politics.

To sum this up: the post-World War 2 youth of the West would become the future ruling class. Their ideas were their main capital. Those of them who became political office holders were in the position to attempt to transform resources according to their interests and sentiments, at least in so far as these interests and sentiments were sufficiently widely held by members of the electorates and political parties. From the 1970s on a vast array of jobs and offices were required to deal with the new political and social reality. It was not only that the welfare state had expanded significantly, but the entire social reality had changed: women were no longer primarily home makers, but most became professionals or workers, single mothers required welfare, along with other groups identified as disadvantaged, which included groups from different cultures, or people with disabilities. Behind this vastly new kind of social world the idea of emancipation/ anti-domination was a key one. Funding this, though, was not easy. And other interests also made demands upon the state. Most simplistically put finance capital, in particular, was in the position to make its own demands – and the most conspicuous demands of finance capital was to have ease of access for international capital flows. What occurred is

invariably labelled neo-liberalism, but this is quite misleading in some respects, not least because (in spite of the withdrawal of the state from certain national and nationalized industries) it went hand in hand with a far greater set of state dependencies than what had been occurring in the earlier part of the twentieth century where there had generally been a national capital/ national labour nexus. There was also the fact that the ease of access of capital flows did not necessarily mean fewer state regulatory bodies. Although the so-called neoliberal 'revolt' often involved privatisation or outsourcing of previously owned state assets/ undertakings, states increased their regulatory powers (this can be verified by the actual number of increase in laws as well as government agencies and ministries) as well as their revenues. State percentage of GDP is larger today in all industrial states today than they were in the 1970s and 1980s. The reasons for this are complex, but I simply want to make the point that in effect a trade-off had taken place between large scale holders of capital and professionals who would either rule, work for the state, or work in reflexive areas of social reproduction. The trade-off was this: capital was internationalised, while the state and hence plethora of new professional opportunities was opened (the privatisation/ sell-offs of state-enterprises were calculated decisions about better profit making efficiencies).

There was another trade-off: as firms could now make unprecedented levels of profits – profits which in turn created favourable lending rates for political parties wanting to win office (by supplying their voters with more of what they wanted) –the state would increasingly pick up the tab for all manner of things, such as education (though due to expansion and revenue strains would be passed back to the 'clients' of education) and welfare. Indeed, keeping people in state employment as social workers, educators, affirmative action or diversity officers, welfare workers etc. for the increasing number of unemployed that accompanied the (albeit not complete) break-down of protectionist trade policies and capital transfers taking place.

In spite of the fact that the political struggle between professionals and capital continued - and that struggle in large part was due to a host of stake-holders in anti-domination narratives in schools and universities, and some state institutions - a largely unstated consensus around a more globalised world was shared by professionals and holders of international capital. Moreover, it mattered little to a media or entertainment proprietor, for example, whether the journalist in employment fought for so called 'left-wing' causes as long as they sold papers or had their television shows or movies watched.

All in all there had been many winners in this new state of affairs, not least being workers in countries such as China, which after Deng's reforms, had opened up to foreign investors. Unskilled workers in the West, though, were not amongst the winners. And, although Marxism

had long been overtaken by social realities, and had an academic role in the crafting of anti-domination narratives taught in universities, there was no real nexus between the professions and what Marx had termed the proletariat. Concomitantly the interests of this group had little genuine representation – trade unions shrank, unskilled industrial labour was increasingly internationally outsourced, and the working classes (especially the increasingly large number non-unionised labourers) drifted away from what had once been parties of industrial labour.

While all this was happening, a variety of other occurrences such as the demographic crisis in Europe, the institutionalisation of multiculturalism, family reunion schemes led to a demographic change in the numbers and types of immigrants coming into the West.

This was the context in which unprecedented numbers of Muslim immigrants entered into the West, and in some locations, particularly Western Europe, for a variety of reasons they found themselves ghetto-ized, and eventually their children and new refugees would be dominant amongst the unemployed.

As all of this was happening a revolution had also been taking place in the Islamic world. Now the original Islamic founding of Islam might also be said to be revolutionary in the sense I described above as in keeping the messianic revolutionary tradition – which, in part is one of its legacies from the Abrahamic tradition - and, of course, the messianic doctrine of the hidden imam amongst the Shia. In the main, though, and this too is true of the Shia, Islam has taken the original caliph as the yardstick for the model of the best social and political order. That is to say, the revolutionary forces in the West push toward an unprecedented better future; this is not true of Islam, in spite of its mission of expansion. Its tendency, especially amongst reformers, is to go *back* to what is seen as a perfect model of community, faith and law. To be sure, one can find important revolutionary examples of this in the West that look similar – the reformation being an obvious one, or the English revolution with its desire to restore its past rights. But a major difference between the earliest caliphate and Christianity is that the Christian faithful were not only directed to build a body of the faithful for a second coming, but, through the Holy Spirit, God's revelations were not 'sealed' as they were by the prophet in Islam (which is a core reason why Sunnis are so hostile to Shia forms of messianism): the future was to be redemptive because in the past God had died on the cross and he would return.

The Christian faith of the West has constantly looked to transforming social conditions and roles, which in turn has spawned unprecedented innovations in the social and political formation. This is also why we have to look at the continuum of European if we are to fathom why the modern nation state arose: i.e. it ingested and re-formed so much of what preceded it, as well as overthrowing prior social roles and relationships. Moreover, through the creation of

the nation state and nationalism (primarily due to the French revolution) this, in conjunction, with its modern technological, economic, and administrative ‘spread’ in the context of the more archaic forms of empire and their break-down, completely reshaped the Islamic world. With the conquests and expansions of European empires (I include the Russians and Soviets in this grouping) Islamic peoples, who often enough had themselves previously been party to imperial conquests and expansions, were embroiled in the machinations and administrative system of European powers. Nationalism which had played such a decisive feature in the explosion of the First World War and continuing in the aftermath of The Second World War, and the drawing upon of national borders in the rump of the ruined Ottoman Empire, was also the vehicle of anti-colonialism. The Islamic world was embroiled in the struggles for new nations and/ or new political powers. These new nations have generally proven to be fragile affairs, and the more typical kind of nation building that took place in the larger geo-political machinations and configurations, often intensified by the Cold War are crumbling. To put it bluntly: the European solution of the nation state has not taken firm root in the Islamic world. And with some exceptions, such as the Kurds and Palestinians, seeking nationalist objectives do not typify the different regions of, and rebellions within the Islamic world. The region is beset by civil wars and revolts against the corrupt regimes that have betrayed Muslim faith and hence ‘Muslim interests’. But unlike the Western intellectual who supports the EU or open borders Islamic revolutionaries are not wanting a new cosmopolitan order free from the traditions of the past (of which nationalism is but one more modality of oppressions). And, in the main, this is no less true for refugees who flee the civil wars of their homelands to live in Europe, North America or Australia – a fact that is amply evident by the de facto operation of sharia law in Muslim communities, as by the more overt calls to apply blasphemy legislation (which had long since laid dormant in the West, and which no one envisaged would be appealed to by Muslims), and even sharia law.

I also wish to emphasize a few salient points about the geo-political circumstances of the Islamic world. First, as is often noted, the trajectories of Islamic ‘development’ are not uniform. For as with every living social body – the history, adaptations and interests et. al. play out in contradictory ways. Thus, while Islam itself is an essential authorising means of appeal in the legitimation of both the ruling group, or groups in conflict, the fact remains that studying Islam, specifically its sacred sources, does not suffice for understanding the configurations in the region. On the other hand, it would be as foolish when studying Europe in the Medieval period or even up until the aftermath of the French Revolution and subsequent institutionalized entrenchment of secularism to ignore the doctrines of Christianity.

In the case of Islam, though, the lack of a distinction between the religious and political community at the foundation of the faith provide a very different context for adaptation and transformation than the renunciative faith of Christianity. Moreover in so far as Jesus' and the early Christians eschewed political power, but in so far as it became, after almost four hundred years the imperial religion, and subsequently, in the West, spread through tribal and warrior societies and traditions, its adaptations were of a very different sort than those of Islam. If, then, Christianity at its most theocratic was so because of realities that had little to do with the kind of realities that the earliest Christians found themselves in, for most of its existence Islam was theo-political (though often enough deals were done which provided a kind of de facto distinction between 'secular' leaders and clerics) and indeed, imperial in aspiration, from the very outset. This did not mean uniformity, apart from the Sunni-Shia split, the typical imperial collisions (so typical of geopolitics in action) were also at work. The imposition of Western political formations, however, compounded the fracturing of the Islamic world. That fracturing is amply evident in the contesting hegemonic aspirants in the region, each of which suffers from a failure of legitimacy, of the theocratic sort which might best serve as a means of unifying disparate Muslim groups. Of the hegemon - the Saudis, who present themselves as traditionalists, have spent billions in trying to spread what on the surface is a traditional form of Islam. The alliance between the House of Saud and the Wahhabi, due to the hatred of many Sunnis for the corrupt behaviour of various members of the House of Saud, and most importantly not only allying itself with USA but allowing, in the Gulf war, US troops on sacred soil (and thereby spawning Al Qaeda), is one that also tarnishes the traditional credentials of the Wahhabists - which is why the use of the term Wahhabi as a synonym for Islamist 'extremism (itself an unhelpful name) is simply wrong.² The wealth and the clientism of the House of Saud has kept Saudi Arabia relatively stable internally, even if the rulers are not overly loved. Another major aspiring hegemon are the Turks, but not being Arabic creates insurmountable problem. The sacred character of the Koran passes over to the sacred character of the language it is expressed in, which is to say any non-Arabic hegemon is always a lesser hegemonic candidate in terms of the support base of legitimacy.³

Another non-Arab hegemonic aspirant is Iran. As with the Turks, in terms of population it is a far larger nation than any of the Arab hegemonic aspirants. But being not only Persian, but also Shia, means that any Iranian led Islamism can only be a great delusion. This is in spite of having managed to court and provide support for Sunni groups such as Hamas. But, for millions of Sunnis, Shia are worse than Jews or Christians: they are apostates, blasphemers and liars. The fact that the Iranians instituted an Islamic revolution did not help ingratiate it with non-

Shia – and, even then, the Khomeini system of governance is even viewed by many Shia as blasphemous. The Iranian bellicosity towards Israel largely derives from the hope that if they could destroy Israel they will be loved by their enemies.

None of these players has more chance than the Egyptians under Nasser or Saddam Hussein, or Colonel Gaddafi, or the Emir of Qatar today with its government run news outlet, Al Jazeera, of successfully unity Muslims into a theo-political unity.

Then there are those who want to create a new order: they vary in tactics, as in regional dominance. Some like the Muslim Brotherhood have favoured electoral means, whereas Al Qaeda works toward and awaits an uprising based upon spectacle like acts of terror as with 9/11, and ISIS have deployed a tactic of ‘The Management of Savagery’ to establish a caliphate and draw in jihadists from around the world. In general, it is just as difficult to imagine any of these as any of the more statist groups completely unifying the Islamic world.

What they do achieve, however, is something else: they throw the entire world into instability by exporting their civil wars and revolutions through recruitment and acts of terrorism.

The competing aspirants for hegemony in the Islamic world are all symptoms of the different historical and hence regional specificities. These specificities have been enormously shaped by territorial, ethnic and tribal, and sectarian identities and circumstances. Moreover the conflict and break-up of empires and the demarcation of national boundaries also spawned regional power struggles which often took either a more typically national and hence (partly) secular character – Ataturk in Turkey, and the Ba’ath party, which had important regional branches in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen. But the region during and in the aftermath of the World Wars was one in which coup and counter-coup and the emergence of an iron and bloody handed ruler emerged was typical, if not uniform. There was also a more common commitment to rapid modernisation. This was also being played out in the context of the machinations of the two great powers of the Cold War. Notably, students of international politics paid little attention to Islam itself being a factor of great significance, and hence the tropes and triggers of analysis largely derived from nationalist realism, liberal narratives. Not surprisingly, in this context and in light of the Israel Arab wars, the Palestinian issue played a central part in Western analyses and continued to do so pretty well up until the end of the twentieth century.

The conflicts of the region in other words were being viewed through filters that seemed firmly ensconced and grounded in the reality under observation, but they had little to do with the kinds of narratives and actions which were becoming increasingly frequent in the Middle East and

which ultimately contributed either to the toppling many of the strong men regimes in the Middle East, and to changing the political topology in such a way that the edifice of the nation state was increasingly precarious in the region. Scholars of international politics today wanting to understand what is now happening in the region have to know something about the backgrounds, missives and, where possible, writings of Bin Laden, Abu Mussab Ab-Zarqawi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and hence they are inevitably drawn to such figures as Sayyid Qutb (1906-1961) who Nasser had executed, pushing further back in time to Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792), extending as far back at least as Ibn Taymiyah (1260-1328), Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (838-933), not to mention the *Koran* and *hadith*. Likewise they cannot understand the deep animosities between Shia and Sunnis unless they become aware of the theological differences which in turn shape the different kinds of communities formed by the two main branches of Islam. Likewise, the difference between Salafism and Wahhabism – so often conflated by journalists – is of deep significance. The reason for this is simple: the chaos in the region, which is one of civil wars, is also a revolution against the West and its legacy and its impositions, which include the nation-state boundaries which cut across ethnic/tribal/religious groups who hate each other. Even as recently as the Arab Spring, Western journalists almost uniformly misunderstood. Although they had generally been opposed to the Bush doctrine of ‘regime change’, which was supposed to inaugurate a wave of democratic revolutions throughout the region, they interpreted what was happening as a struggle of emancipation of a kind that was analogous to what would lead to a democratic order protecting right (that is their narrative ‘filtering’, as opposed to their methods, was identical to the neo-cons). The impact of these revolutions has been to spread even into Islamic regions where the nation state seems reasonably stable. We see this, for example, in Indonesia, for a long time its mosques have been recipient of Saudi largesse for the purpose of advancing Saudi hegemony in the Islamic world: in order to hold power, ostensibly secular parties are increasingly dragged toward more traditionalist Islamist policies and stances

Let me also add some points, which are pertinent for the next section. Nowhere in the Islamic world are there any serious attempt to refashion their world more along the lines of the anti-traditionalist narratives of what, using the nomenclature from the USA, we can identify as ‘liberal progressives, that have become intrinsic to the social and transformation . Nor indeed are their serious mass interventions from Western feminists, gays etc. to do so; in large part because we are speaking of groups living in completely disparate worlds. Western women, gays etc. have no (and take no) real interest in the identities other than those which domestically

define their narratives and livelihoods, in the cases where they hold positions to instrumentalize the objectives of those narratives.

Secondly, the civil wars taking place in the Islamic world only form rather flimsy analogies with the kinds of experiences that beset European nations. The closest analogy is with the religious laws of the sixteenth century that fed into the Thirty Years War – for these were large scale conflicts driven by religious appeals against orders that were seen as ‘damned’ and damnable. Those wars were brought about by the Reformation. But here any comparisons with the Reformation quickly break down. The Reformation itself (a) was against a unified church structure of which there is no analogue in the Muslim world and (b) the liberties the reformers specifically wanted also have no analogue. And then there are the very disparate conditions which govern the respective sacralisations of Christianity and Islam. Muslims may well claim Jesus as a prophet – but their Jesus did not die on the cross, which is to say their entire sacrificial order cannot be rendered seriously compatible with Christianity, something also evident in the deeds and different characters of Jesus and Mohammad.

Finally, the civil wars have also created what has now become a flood of refugees, particularly in Europe.

The Contemporary Western Revolution and Counter Revolution, and where Islam fits: with some examples from Australia.

Early I suggested that we as we walk forward we squint to make sense of the past. This is especially pertinent for the following discussion. Let me add another important point to frame the discussion. We never know precisely what future we are making until it is too late to change the event we now see with sufficient clarity to try and change.

I have spoken of the social revolution that has transpired to completely change the kind of world we live in. The difference between the world of the 1950s and early 60s and now is evident in everyday events such as gay people marrying and adopting children. In some cases, such as Australia, adoption by gays is legal but marriage not (yet). I take this example because it is an occurrence, if not uniformly protected by law in Western states, one which very much divides more liberal/ libertarian people from more traditionalists. It is precisely the kind of issue that is not an issue in the Islamic world as is amply evident by the treatment of sexual

‘minorities’ in states identifying them as Islamic. It is also the kind of issue that traditional Muslims see as a symptom of the degeneracy of the West.

The political polarization that has been brewing for almost two decades in the West but now with Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, the increasing support for Le Front National in France, Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party in Europe, and One Nation in Australia the social revolution and the narratives that sustain finds itself seriously challenged. Not surprisingly, the ‘political elites’ have fought back by drawing upon the tropes and narratives upon which their interests have been formed and ‘taken flesh’. For the purposes of this essay, I will use this term ‘political elites’ because irrespective of the polemical thrust behind the term, it does have substance. On the other hand, the ‘political elites’ designate their opponents as uneducated (which is not completely inappropriate, though not entirely accurate), and as racists and fascists, which is polemical rather than accurately descriptive. I will take the later epithet first, with some qualifications – it is true that on the fringes of what are uniformly nationalist movements, there are ethnic –nationalists, among them, and even neo-fascists. But neo-fascist groups do not have mass social or electoral support, which is, one reason why Marie le Pen threw her anti-Semitic father out of the party which he created, and which she has reinvented. Secondly, much of the thinking of these groups – particularly its emphasis upon forging a national capital-national labour alliance (which the fascists also did) - was also part of the consensus by working class and business parties until the so called neoliberal revolution. Thirdly, none of these parties is trying to create a militaristic style state, which was a sine qua non of fascist governments and parties. Fourthly, very often, members of these parties are socially liberal – Wilders’ entire *raison d’être* which he broadly took over from his friend, the assassinated, Pim Fortuyn, is to defend liberal freedoms. And Donald Trump has always been socially liberal, even if, politically he finds in the case of transgender bathrooms, that the states rather than the supreme court should be the place to make legislation on such issues. It is fair to say that the counter revolutionaries (as I will call them) are an amalgam of traditionalist and largely libertarian views on all sorts of social issues. Where they bond is in their hostility to an array of institutions which they see as leading to their nation’s suicide. This point cannot be stressed enough, whether they are right or wrong, members of this group feel deeply that the consensus of political elites is one that will lead not only to the elimination of their own national and cultural traditions and democratic constitutional structures (in their view already seriously damaged), but possibly to their own extermination. Critics will say these fears of alarm are insane. The problem we all face as we enter the future is that we can only work

with hunches and symptoms. But it is not only a matter of identifying whose diagnostics are correct, there is also the matter of identifying which symptoms are even seen as symptoms of something socially cancerous.

Turning now specifically to Australia, the first point I wish to emphasize is that the kinds of social and political divides that can be witnessed in Australia are identical to what is happening within Western Europe and the USA. As in the US and Western Europe ‘anti-domination narratives’ not only form the main consensus of the media (the exceptions being Sky News and the Australian newspaper – both of which have ‘progressive’ as well as predominantly ‘conservative’ commentators), universities and schools, but similar forms of appeals to ‘identity politics’, and the exercise of narrative ‘control or policing’ and ‘shaming’ are now common practice. Likewise, as in the US (at least prior to the election of Donald Trump, and in much of Western Europe) the predominance of a particular style of narrative of anti-domination and ‘identity’ within the professions which educate future professionals, as well as other professions which shape the character of the public sphere has impacted upon the government. What has been very conspicuous about the process is the intensity and acceleration that certain progressive issues have undertaken. One indicator of this acceleration and intensification is the change that has taken place on the debate of gay marriage. The present (conservative) government (the Australian Liberal Party) in Australia has wanted a plebiscite on the issue, whereas the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has argued that this would be to pander to populism and want to government to legislate in favour gay marriage - neither of the major parties expressing outright opposition to the issue. Only five years previously, the former ALP Prime Minister, Julia Gillard had said she did not support gay marriage. (The shift in this issue in the alp is identical to what has occurred amongst the Democrats in the US.) Another example that is illustrative of the shifts that have taken place within Australian society whose roots lie in the anti-domination/ identity model is the Safe Schools Coalition programme, which (in 2016) involved 500 schools in Australia, whilst being mandatory in the state of Victoria.⁴ One activity of the programme required role playing same sex and transgender experience. Another example that illustrates the transformation that has taken place is that of the Australian feminist Germaine Greer who expressed her opinion that transgender ‘women’ are not ‘women.’ A petition to de-platform her from speaking at the University of Cardiff (though the talk did go ahead) was supported in a number of forums in Australia. A typical justification for ‘de-platforming’ Greer came from Tim Lauri in the New Matilda, who wrote:

Germaine Greer's attacks on transgender women are deplorable because of the high incidents of hate crime already directed at the transgender community. But universities have other good reasons for denying her a platform. In pursuing the cultural fiction of "real women", Greer also attacks the discipline of feminism, and she attacks the university itself. If Germaine Greer wants to speak about "real women" in an academic context, she needs to revise and resubmit her recent work on a pass/fail basis.⁵

Outside of the 'narratives' and practices of anti-domination 'politics' the establishment of bonds of solidarity between same sex and transgender policy and legislation and Islam make no sense.

That there is absolutely no such narrative fusing taking place in Islamic countries is not a matter of discussion within the anti-domination narratives. Again as is identical in the US and Europe, in Australia Islam is folded into the category of oppressed minority and, within this framework, those who question the contradictory values of Western and Islamic culture and/ or who criticize what they see as the dangers of expansion of Islamic culture within Australia are shamed as racist. One example of this is the recently deceased cartoonist, Bill Leak. Bill Leak had for most of his career been a critic of conservatism. However, by the time he died of a heart attack, his cartoons increasingly ridiculed what he saw as the totalitarian characteristic of progressive narratives. Perhaps his most infamous cartoon drew attention to the plight of indigenous Australian children whose alcoholic fathers took no responsibility in rearing them. That there is widespread alcohol 'abuse' and domestic neglect and violence among indigenous people in Australia is an open secret, and is the source of a seemingly never ending series of government funded reports and studies. But Leak was reported to the Human rights commission for racism. Leak had also ridiculed the 'safe spaces' school program. Leak had also received death threat, from Islamists for his support of the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons as well as for his own cartoons against Islamists and those who accuse critics of Islamism for being Islamophobic. The response by a number of 'progressives' to Leak's death, was one of unmitigated hostility to what he was seen as representing.⁶ Though none of the attacks upon Leak's character and politics mentioned the death threats from Islamists.

Shortly after Leak's death, Hirsi Ali had cancelled a forthcoming speaking tour of Australia. Apart from the threat of large demonstrations being marshalled to interrupt her talks, the press reported that:

A petition organised by a group of Australian Muslim women garnered around 400 signatures online, condemning the tour and saying Ms Hirsi-Ali's "divisive rhetoric simply serves to increase hostility and hatred towards Muslims". It was organised in part by community activist and restaurateur Hana Assafiri and Sherene Hassan, a board director of the Islamic Museum of Australia. Ms Assafiri was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women early last month for her contribution to her local community.⁷

Hirsi Ali had, of course, appeared in the film *Submission*, about the suppression of women under Islam, made by the Dutch director about , Theo Van Gogh, who was assassinated by a second generation Moroccan man, Mohammad Bouyeri, shortly after making the movie. Ali herself, an apostate, a victim of gender mutilation, and an outspoken critic of Islam has also been the recipient of death threats and denunciations by various groups and individuals who see her as fanning the flames of Islamophobia. It goes without saying that had a film been about the suppression of women under Christianity or had she written books in the same polemical vein about Christianity, her visit would have not led to such antipathy. That is, of course, not only because 'progressives' narratives largely continue the anti-Christian narratives of the *philosophes*, but also because the dwindling numbers of Christians in the West also house strong pockets of traditionalism about the nature of marriage, abortion and so on. To point to the contradictions within the narratives of anti-domination ultimately serves little purpose: for interests are never logically coherent, and the contradictions within any narrative consensus are themselves but the symptoms and ciphers of the nature of the interested stakeholders who form the narratives.

It should, nevertheless, not be surprising that stakeholders of narratives exert social powder ignore or downplay the contradictions. Though it is also reasonable to assume that overlapping narrative stakeholders are frequently not very well educated in matters outside of their own immediate concerns. But when it is the class whose livelihood depends upon narrative production and surveillance, this ignorance (or silence) is safe-guarded because those who identify it are themselves portrayed as driven by political motives deemed to be oppressive. However, not to address the very areas which facilitate dialogical divide renders dialogue about serious differences impossible. And this is precisely what occurs when the divergency of ultimate appeals dividing post-Christian nations and Islamic peoples occurs. Moreover, in Australia it occurs (which is no different in this respect to what occurs in the US and Europe political 'mainstream') by masking the deep differences with the assumption that because there are 'liberal/ progressive' Muslim celebrities who are employed

by the media and politically feted by the mainstream political parties (such as Waheed Aly, his Muslim convert wife Susan Cartland, and Yassmin Abdel-Magied) that they speak for Muslims. That this will backfire politically is inevitable. Thus, much to his embarrassment, the Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull held a multi-faith dinner celebrating Ramadan, which included at his table, Sheik Shady Al-Suleiman, who had been on the public record as saying that ‘AIDS is a “divine punishment” for gays’ and adulterers should be stoned to death.⁸ However, Sheik Shady Al-Suleiman’s position has nothing to do with progressive politics, and everything to do with the hadith in which the prophet decrees stoning of adulterers⁹, or the condemnation and call for punishment for homosexuals.¹⁰

Australians in the main, whether progressive or traditionalist, have no genuine idea of what, to use a completely brainless phrase, ‘the average Australian Muslim’ thinks. We do know from a global study of Muslim moral values, that in the Muslim world generally attitudes toward belief in God, drinking alcohol, suicide, abortion, sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, honor killings are extremely traditionalist.¹¹

This traditionalist sensibility is as common in Muslim states –something reflected in another Pew study of 2013 – where the numbers favouring stoning for adultery in the 20 Muslim countries surveyed varied from Bosnia Herzegovina, which had the smallest percentage in favour (21%) to Pakistan which was supported by 89% of respondents, followed by Afghanistan (84%) (Saudi Arabia did not feature in the study). A similar pattern is visible in support for the death penalty for apostates. Of the countries that featured in the survey, nine out of twenty had more than 40% approve it – the highest support was from Egypt (86%), Jordan (82%), Afghanistan (79%) and Pakistan (76%). Malaysia which many would be considered one of the most liberal Muslim countries came in at 62%.¹² In terms of the state, blasphemy laws, which, in no small part due to political pressure from Islamic groups, have been making a come-back in much of Western Europe, alongside the rise of hate speech legislation) ‘laws restricting apostasy and blasphemy are most common in the Middle East and North Africa, where 18 of the region’s 20 countries (90%) criminalize blasphemy and 14 (70%) criminalize apostasy.’¹³

The contrast between traditional Muslim values and ‘progressive’ Western ones are vast. And the difference in values also reflects completely different socio-historical experiences. Likewise, the social and institutional divergence between Muslim and Western countries is evident in policy and offices. No Muslim country has adopted multiculturalism, let alone gay marriage. Twelve Muslim countries threaten homosexuals with the death penalty (though this does not mean that they actively pursue the law).¹⁴ Seventeen Muslim countries require that the

Head of state must be a Muslim.¹⁵ While in the West ‘freedom of religion’ is a right that seems utterly archaic, religious persecution of Christians in Islamic countries is commonplace,¹⁶ while Jews were (with some exceptions such as Iraq) exiled *en masse* from Arab countries after the founding of Israel. Sixteen Muslim countries do not even allow holders of Israeli passports into them. In sum, no Muslim country has been transformed itself in a manner remotely resembling the manner in which Western nations now reflect the social revolution of the sixties and seventies.

There is nothing politically unusual about antagonistic forces allying with each other to rid themselves of a common enemy before turning upon each other. That there is an alliance between ‘progressive’ liberals and ‘Muslims’ is conspicuous in such common tactics as: extending the scope of legislation prohibiting speech that is racist, hateful, or offensive; calling critics of Muslim values ‘racist’ and ‘Islamophobic;’ calling for bans of speakers who are critical of Islam in its political and social practice and history; calling for bans on speakers from Israeli universities; responding to Islamist terrorist attacks by emphasizing that the attackers do not represent Islam, and to immediately warn the larger populace about succumbing to Islamophobia, and the dangers of alienating ‘moderate’ Muslims, who are already alienated in western societies. This last response has become fairly standard among Western governments and defenders of national security. Thus, for example, it was reported in December 2015 that ‘Australia’s top spy chief Duncan Lewis has warned that fuelling a backlash against Muslims is a “dangerous” threat to national security and weakens his organisation’s ability to stop terrorist attacks,’¹⁷ and that the Australian foreign minister, Julie Bishop had endorsed his position.¹⁸

The numbers of terrorist attacks by Islamists in Europe, and the United States, as well as a far smaller number of incidents in Australia has left a relatively large number of Australians unconvinced by surveys such as one conducted in Sydney in 2007 where more than 92% of the 282 people surveyed agreed (84% strongly agreed) that being a good Muslim and a good Australian were compatible, while only 4 % disagreed.¹⁹ Thus one polling organization called ‘Essential Report’, conducted an online survey, between July 27-August 1 2016, of 1000 respondents reported that 49% of those polled ‘supported a ban on Muslim immigration.’²⁰

One response to the survey of those wanting a ban on Muslims is to claim that Australia is still very much a racist society. Thus it is possible, for example, to point to the fact that in 1996, when Pauline Hanson, the founder of One Nation first entered the parliament, an AGB McNair

telephone poll found 53% of respondents agreed that Asian immigration “should be reduced”.²¹ The question this raises, though, is whether it is usual or not for people, regardless of region in the globe, to want their community to perpetuate their cultural values. While cultural values are invariably ‘evolving’, critics of multiculturalism point out that the dominant cultural values are invariably the ones that are singled out as the ones that need to change because they are dominant, but being dominant does not mean unworthy – for where is the standard of value to be found that can be irrefutably demonstrated to be worthy?

The most recent statistical information about the number of Muslims comes from the census of 2011, which identifies Muslims as being 2.2 % of the population, of these 46.1 % live in New South Wales and 32.1 % in Victoria.²² A report based on the census also reports that: ‘Certain areas such as Auburn, Bankstown, Lakemba, Granville and Fairfield in New South Wales and Broadmeadows, Dandenong and Thomastown in Victoria are becoming Muslim enclaves.’

However, while the comparisons between Muslims and immigrants from China can be interpreted as a fear of ethnic demographic change generally, other factors also play an important role. One is the crime rate. Muslims in NSW and Victoria make up 9.3% and 8% respectively of the states’ prison population.²³ That prisons routinely are environments of ‘radicalisation’ makes this figure difficult to ignore. I will just list a number of news reports that create the kind of alarm that helps explain the relatively high numbers of Australians fearful of Muslim immigration.

In April 16 2015 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that 61 (with 47 from Sydney) Australian Muslims had gone to fight for ISIS.²⁴ An earlier report from *Business Insider* had claimed that: Australia reported on June 24, 2014 that an estimated 150 to 300 Australian citizens and residents have left the country to join radical militant groups in the Middle East.²⁵ While a report from the Lowry Institute in 2015 wrote:

ASIO has estimated that, as of February 2015, around 90 Australians were fighting for jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, that up to 30 have returned, and that over 20 have died. Several have appeared in propaganda videos for Jabhat al-Nusra and IS, three are believed to have carried out suicide bombings, and some Australians are occupying leadership positions. Some have also boasted of war crimes, and explicitly threatened Australia.²⁶

In December 23, 2016, *News.com.au* reported:

The country has survived four terror attacks — three in New South Wales and one in Victoria — and narrowly escaped 11 since September 2014.

The terror attacks that police were unable to prevent include the Lindt Cafe siege in Sydney in which manager Tori Johnson and mother-of-three Katrina Dawson lost their lives; the killing of police accountant Curtis Cheng by 15-year-old schoolboy Farhad Khalil Mohammed Jabar in Parramatta and the non-fatal stabbing of Wayne Greenhalgh in Minto last month. In Victoria, Numan Haider, 18, attacked two police officers with a knife outside the Endeavour Hills police station before being shot dead in September 2014.

Twenty three people have been convicted of terrorism offences in Australia in the last four years, according to Australian National Security.²⁷

While on April 19 2015 *The Herald Sun* also reported that ‘the Federal Government has revealed Queenslanders have been among 249 suspected jihadists prevented from leaving the country since August.’²⁸

Such reports as the above raise a problem that is, to be sure, is caused by a very small percentage of Muslims, whose disaffection with Australian society is such that they are willing to ally themselves with Islamist groups which see western society generally as not only oppressive, but at war spiritually with Islam. Moreover, the disaffected Muslims ready to undertake acts of terror or to become jihadists outside of Australia is not in anyone’s control. Having loving ‘moderate’ Muslim parents, ‘loyal to Australian values’ is no guarantee that the existential attractions of a more violent Islamic engagement will not carry a far greater appeal than the routinized life-way that their parents are offering.²⁹ It also should be said, in response to the true point that far more people die in traffic accidents than are killed by terrorists, that this is a growing problem, and that no state can afford to simply ignore symptoms of such potential violence grow. And the fact that terrorist networks are global networks, even if often loose and quasi-anarchic, and tap into larger geo-political alignments and contexts only compounds the danger.

The issues that have the potential to tear immigrant Muslim families apart are genuinely tragic. To deny that there are ‘theological’ components to the tragedy, which is essentially what the dominant narratives of media outlets and governments emphasize is, at the very least, disingenuous. Anyone who reads such documents as *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through which the Umma Will Pass* or *The Al Qaeda Handbook* or *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion and Society* (to

take three Islamist representative texts of groups as hostile to the West as they are with each other) cannot deny how theologically driven these works are. The idea that western journalists and politicians, who are not Muslim can ‘intervene’ in what is essentially a civil war about the nature of Islam is absurd. This is also why such seemingly innocuous pedagogical strategies as can be found in Abdullah Saeed’s *Islam in Australia* or, at a more populist level, at the ABC’s online ‘history’ of Islam³⁰ are deeply unhelpful in educating people about the very deep divisions not only within Islam, but between the ‘peoples’ of the books – for while the Jews find ‘the New Testament’ an outrage, the social conditions and imperatives informing the Christian bible and the Quran are implicated in vastly different acts of founding. Apart from the vast difference in founding are the historical trajectories of these different ways of world-making. To think that in a generation or two peoples with such vastly different historicities, with such different senses of the sacred, such different historical memories, and such different values can simply conform to the same narratives as those advocated by post(and invariably anti-) Christians, whose livelihoods are narrative inculcation, advancement and monitoring is a delusion fraught with catastrophic potential. And to take up my earlier point: this is largely because politics, unlike morals, must take account of the reaction to a dominant consensus and set of narratives and policies. The reactions that matter politically are those which have the potential to radically intensify and extend the Islamist view of life globally, and those which become increasingly drawn away from the stabilising consensus of liberalism into more ultra-nationalist groups out of a sense of betrayal as they watch their world in decline.

Conclusion

In closing I would like to make a few observations about what I see as the deep deficiencies I see with the kind of liberal narrative and policies that are attempting to steer the contemporary narratives of social solidarity. The first is that these narratives, although having roots in liberal and social narratives of the late 18th and 19th and 20th centuries, have only a very short history of empowerment. I think there is a very good reason that they have never held sway before. That is because there is a fundamental mismatch between the normative and the ‘actual’ built into the narrative. The ideas are all built up out of polarities of domination –so one group functions as dominant and another as dominated. Men dominant/ women dominated, whites dominant/ black dominated etc. etc. To make this work one ignores the exceptions. In this sense the narrative is a pseudo-scientific narrative dealing in structural generalities. But no one lives their lives as simply a ‘member’ of structured generality. Births and deaths and inventions and

the experiences that most matter in a life are invariably contingent. There is something deeply hostile to life about all ways of thinking which want to classify in such a way that the classified are not given room to breathe or to live, but are mere statistics or types within narrative and professional advancement and formation. The static nature of the generalised units of the narratives, which provide the benchmark of moral evaluation are themselves, however, based around a further static dichotomy – oppressor and oppressed. To see history and societies almost exclusively –even predominantly - in these terms is to engage in a fantastical understanding of history, where right and wrong are very clear cut – so clear cut that any fifteen year old can learn everything they need to know about history in no time at all. Indeed this is a timeless way of understanding life, that happens to ignore the very trajectory of the development of the narrative itself.

The unreality of this kind of narrative is such that it is inevitable that the various members of the units of oppression will fail to gather into the unities prepared for them – and even those that do will turn against other members. The backlash against white homosexual men and white feminists on campuses in North America about their own privilege are symptoms of the narrative strain.

Another all-important point that is as pertinent to Muslims as to the beneficiaries of the narratives of identity is that all encountering provides a condition for new forms of life. All groups who encounter each other become something more and something different (not necessarily better or more enriched, though possible so) than the original groupings to which their members are a party. The early multiculturalist defenders understood this, but, unfortunately, they have generally overly valorised the past of some groups at the expense of others. All groups have their shame to bear. But since Rousseau, or even earlier Montaigne, the West has become so preoccupied with its own sense of shame, much of which it compensates for by an excessive sense of its own purity and faith in its idealised ideas of justice, that it readily idealises other peoples/ cultures as it seeks to wipe away its own bloody history. Unfortunately, histories are bloody – everywhere.

For modern secularised peoples to truly engage with Muslims drawn more to their traditional base out of an understandable fear that the powers of modernity unleash upon their traditional sense of the sacred and the institutions that have arisen out of that sense and practice is going to take a great deal of hard work from all sides. Far more hard work than simply repeating narratives about emancipation and how racist anyone is who doesn't understand that Islam is just another oppressed group. Finally, it was Augustine who appreciated that social bodies exist because there must be something lovable about them. I think all societies can teach each

other something, but one can only learn if one sees what the Other is, and that means disengaging from one's own obsessions and interests.