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The phenomenal spread of Islam in its early history has often been attributed to its role as a liberation movement, which successfully fought tyranny and injustice, and restored human rights and dignity to the people as it toppled one after another oppressive regime.

But what happens when a people choose Islam in the twentieth century through the democratic process? Who opposes it and why? What if the people seeking rule by Islam are in a minority? And how do the Muslims share power if in a majority?

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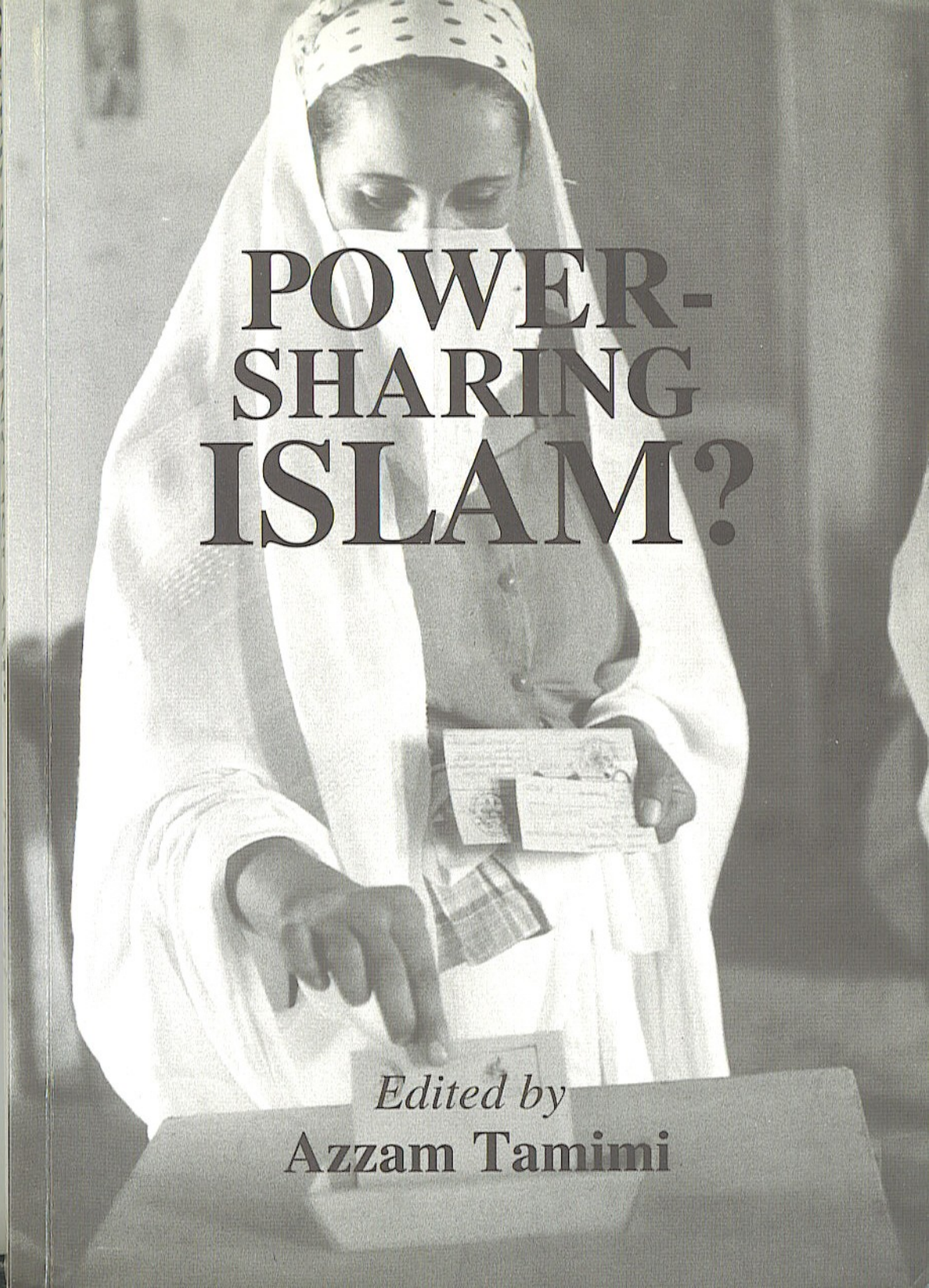

POWER-SHARING ISLAM?

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Azzam Tamimi

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Power-sharing Islam?
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John Keane

Although the collapse of the Soviet Union and super-power rivalry has produced new patterns of disorder and uncertainty in the field of international relations, one trend is strikingly clear: the global demise of communism is producing a new bogey, the demon of Islam, against which there are growing calls for a new political crusade. The trend dates from the Iranian Revolution of 1979. In that year, in an extraordinary feat of insurrectionary radicalism, Khomeyni and his supporters demonstrated the immense power of a minority tradition of Shi'ite thinking. This current of Islamic thinking rejected Sunni contractual theories and condemned as corrupt any government not ruled by the Imam, the Caliph Ali or his representatives. To the surprise of most observers Islam did the unthinkable. It showed that a late twentieth century tyrant, armed to the teeth and backed by western investors and governments, could be toppled by popular pressure, and that the new Islamic regime installed by such pressure could stand politically between the two superpowers without being committed to either.

The Western reaction was frosty and it led to the invention of a new epithet called "Islamic fundamentalism". This term was a child of the Western media, which since that time has normally given Islam bad coverage — thanks to language problems, the absence of developed news agencies with international networks, and inadequate or biased reporting by some of its reporters and analysts. Since the Iranian Revolution the epithet has been deployed not only to refer to the

militant resistance of those Islamic groups and parties, especially the Shi'a, who strictly oppose the interventionist policies of the West in their lands, but as a catch-all term to refer to any and every believer in Islam. Admittedly, some governments and politicians ruling in the name of Islam are treated more politely. For example, the Saudi government, who are nominally Sunni Wahhabies, are usually not called 'fundamentalists' in the Western media, presumably because their strategic importance to the West in military and trade and investment terms qualifies them as 'moderates'. Convenient blindspots of this kind are nevertheless exceptional. Everywhere in the West there are strong indications that Islam is becoming a synonym for fundamentalism. To speak of fundamentalism is to speak of Islam; to mention Islam is to talk of fundamentalism. Islam becomes a threatening OTHER: intolerant, gun-wielding, hijacking, fanatical, veiled, patriarchal, wife-beating, moralising on such subjects as alcohol, gambling and blasphemy. The threat of the Other is seen to be real and growing — a deadly conspiracy against the civilised world confirmed by such events as the occupation of the American embassy by students in Tehran, the angry squads of Islamic vigilantes that currently roam its streets in search of offenders against the *Shari'ah*, by Saddam Hussain's bullying of tiny Kuwait, and Imam Khomeyni's sentence of death against Salman Rushdie.

Some have suggested that this imagery of Islam as a new global threat is traceable to the Israeli lobby in Western politics. I do not accept this counter-conspiracy theory, although it is of some significance that Israeli foreign policy is currently abandoning its old strategy of forging alliances with countries like Turkey and Iran and neighbouring non-Arab minorities like the Kurds, in favour of policies based on the strategic assumption, outlined recently by Israeli President Chaim Herzog, that Islamic fundamentalism is 'the greatest single danger to the free world today'. The fictionalising of 'Islamic fundamentalism' has other and deeper roots.

In the West the whole of modern political thought, with few exceptions, has been hostile to Islam. Let me mention Voltaire, the renowned eighteenth-century French champion of enlightened

compromise among conflicting religions and sects. In his *Traité sur la tolerance* (1762) Voltaire launched a witty attack on intolerance and its 'law of persecution' ('the law of *tygers*: nay, it is even still more savage, for *tygers* destroy only for the sake of food, whereas we have butchered one another on account of a sentence or a paragraph'). And yet Voltaire's plea for tolerance was never extended to Islam. He considered Turks a curse on the earth and, especially towards the end of his life, he spoke only in favour of their extermination. He confessed to Catherine the Great that the sacking of the Ottoman Empire would enable him to die content, adding his one regret: *"Je voudrais avoir du moins contribué a vous tuer quelques Turcs."*

The European tradition of intellectual hostility to Islam is alive and well, and during the past decade it has undoubtedly fed the new ideology of Islam-as-Fundamentalism. According to Elie Kedourie, who until his recent death was Britain's most prominent scholar of contemporary Islamic politics, the political history of the Muslim states in North Africa and the Middle East during the past two centuries has been the unhappy story of endless power struggles rooted ultimately in historical Islam, which, influenced by the Byzantine and ancient Iranian traditions in the territories it conquered, made passive obedience to those who exercised power a religious duty. The result was oriental despotism — a type of regime in which the monopoly of state power effectively determines who enjoys the fruits of labour, a system where economic power, properly speaking, is non-existent and property is permanently insecure. Kedourie was certain: 'democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam'.

The current Western claustrophobia about 'Islamic fundamentalism' has been heightened by such conclusions. But there are in addition three related developments which arguably harden the sense of Islam as 'invasive' of the West. First is the post-World War Two transformation of Western European countries into multi-national and multi-faith societies by the largest single recorded wave of migration in human history. In Western Europe alone more than 20 million people have settled permanently during the past several decades. A

significant proportion of them are Muslims and this is producing anxiety in some quarters that Islam resembles a cancer in our body politic. Pierre Lelouche, key adviser to Jacques Chirac, subtly adds to these anxieties in his new book *Le nouveau monde.* He warns France — a country in which three and a half million Muslims live — of the growing dangers of Islamic fundamentalism and dictatorship and North-South confrontation. Sometimes concern about Muslim immigration is expressed in language as blunt as that of the former Belgian interior minister and member of the European Parliament, Joseph Michel: "We run the risk of becoming like the Roman people, invaded by barbarian peoples such as Arabs, Moroccans, Yugoslavs and Turks, people who come from far afield and have nothing in common with our civilisation". It is probable that that kind of language oils street-level violence against Muslims — Turkish Germans are murdered in Moelln and Soligen, Moroccans beaten up in the back streets of Marseille, and (as Fred Halliday's *Arabs in Exile* documents) during the Kuwaiti crisis and subsequent war in the Gulf, British Yemenis were physically attacked, their cafés harassed, their community associations threatened.

The Gulf War has added to this sentiment of an 'invasion' of the West by Islam. Live, on television screens, millions witnessed the spectacle of military confrontation with a dictatorship speaking the language of Islam. It appeared as if the Islamic enemy were in the next room, grabbing oil wells, plotting their next move, firing off medium-range missiles in the direction of our friendly neighbours. I am aware of the hypocrisy of these images on both sides — the Iraqi regime is most certainly not modelled on the *Shari'ah* and before the war it was treated as a key ally of the West — but the net consequence of the globalised Western media account of the war was to reinforce the sense of the Other as bearing down upon us.

Finally, and most recently, there is the story of Bosnia-Herzegovina. There, in south-central Europe, a civilised parliamentary democratic government presided over by a Muslim has been crippled by armed gunmen hungry for territory. Europe and the world currently stands by twiddling its thumbs, appeasing genocide,

reinforcing the suspicion that Western policy has something to do with the fact that the Muslims of Bosnia are viewed as uncivilised non-Europeans, as worthless invaders. Although their roots in the region are five centuries deep, these European Muslims are shot at, herded at gunpoint from their burning homes, summarily executed in nearby houses or marched in columns to railway sidings, past rotting corpses to concentration camps, where they are raped or castrated, then made to wait — like the Jews before them — with bulging eyes and lanternous faces, for the arrival of their own death. Then, for posterity's sake, many newspaper and television reports of the genocidal war offer their audiences a most curious sub-text: war and butchery of this kind is what we expect from the Balkans, which is not genuinely European, if only because Islam is at work there, right on our doorstep.

In the face of these overlapping trends some Islamists have attempted to combat the ideology of Islam-as-Fundamentalism by demonstrating Islam's capacity for power-sharing and, thus, its compatibility with the modern democratic West. There are those — the Egyptian writer Ahmad Shawqui al-Fanjari is among the boldest and most influential — who deduce every conceivable democratic right and duty from the Qur'an, the Traditions of the Prophet, and the practice of the first four Caliphs. Fanjari, following the example of Tahtawi, the famous pioneer of cultural westernisation in Egypt, says that every age adopts a different terminology to convey the concepts of democracy and freedom. What is called freedom in Europe is exactly what in Islam is called justice (*'adl*), truth (*haqq*), consultation (*Shura*) and equality (*Musawat*). Fanjari says " the equivalent of freedom in Islam is kindness or mercy (*rahmah*) and that of democracy is mutual kindness (*tarahum*)". He goes on to remind his readers that in the Qur'an the Prophet is instructed to show leniency and forgiveness in the very same verse as he is ordered to consult the believers in the affairs of the community. The Prophet is reported to have said in turn that God "has laid down consultation as a mercy for His community". It follows from this interpretation that, contrary to Kedourie and others, Islam is indeed compatible with democracy

because there is no place in it for arbitrary rule by one man or group of men. The basis of all decisions and actions of an Islamic state should be not individual whim and caprice, but the *Shari'ah* - the body of regulations drawn from the Qur'an and the Traditions. Moreover, it is said that Islam passes another test of democracy, viz., the requirement that any government should reckon in all its decisions with the wishes of the ruled. In listing the qualities of a good believer the Qur'an mentions *shura* (consultation) and *ijima'* (consensus) on the same footing as compliance with God's order, saying the prayers and payment of the alms-tax.

This type of argument about the democratic potential of Islam, so eloquently formulated by Ahmad Shawqui al-Fanjari, deserves widespread attention. Both within the Islamic and Western worlds cosmopolitan Islam, as I would call it, is a potential force for mutual understanding and power-sharing, exactly because it challenges the dogma that the teachings of Islam are essentially fundamentalist. Many Western intellectuals and a large majority of Western citizens are simply unaware of the existence of cosmopolitan Islam. That is a pity because such ignorance serves to underpin the foundations of the ideology of anti-Islam, thereby making life more difficult for Islamists living in the West and Islamists making politics within states on the margins of the West.

Are we then to summarise the current impasse in relations between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds in terms of an unfortunate misunderstanding? Is the priority in both worlds that of helping Islam escape the prison cell to which it has been assigned by Western journalists and politicians and Shi'ite fundamentalism? Yes. But in my view there are two other related issues that require urgent attention if Islam is to be seen widely as a force for power-sharing.

Especially in countries in which Islam is potentially a dominant social force, Islamic politics is faced by a strategic difficulty that I would call **the transition to democracy dilemma**. Any Islamic movement that attempts to transform a non-Islamic into an Islamic state is forced to choose between two incompatibles — principles and power. Islamic parties that are dedicated to parliamentary democracy

do so on the assumption that their enemies are reasonable human beings, and this in turn limits their range of political tactics. They embrace public discussion, press conferences, vote-getting, and parliamentary numbers, rather than terrorism, street violence, and dreams of a revolutionary putsch. When elected to office it follows that those Islamic parties eschew dictatorship as a means of staying in office. If voted out of office, they then leave peacefully, to prepare for future electoral battles.

Of course an Islamic movement that remains faithful to its own principles and to these democratic procedures may never achieve governmental power. Especially in contexts where its opponents do not abide by the power-sharing rules of democracy, Islamists may find themselves outwitted, censored, beaten up, arrested, executed, or forced into exile. Under such circumstances, which are today the norm for most followers of Islam, does this mean that the vision of a democratic Islamic state is impossible? Or can an Islamic state be achieved only if Islamists are prepared to abandon the democratic method temporarily to attain power by violence in the pious hope that an Islamic government so formed will return to parliamentarism once Islam has assumed control? Needless to say, this second alternative contains tragic possibilities: a movement for democracy that resorts to despotic methods to achieve its goals will not remain a democratic movement for long. Its chosen means will devour its chosen ends. And yet — here is the painful dilemma — the first alternative, that of clinging to parliamentary democratic procedures under all circumstances, may well doom Islam to a permanent political wilderness.

The transition to democracy dilemma is real. A case in point is the current brutal treatment of Islamists by the military-dominated High Committee of State in Algeria, in whose first multi-party general elections in December 1991 the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) won an absolute majority of votes. However, in the long run I do not think it is necessarily a cause for pessimism. While by definition a dilemma is insoluble, its force can in practice be attenuated, and I would therefore hope that Islamic political thinkers and actors will set their

imaginations loose on the problem of how to maximise the chances of securing a democratic Islamic state in contexts where its bully opponents don't play by the rules of the democratic game. I cannot here provide detailed recommendations, but three points should be clear.

First, an Islamic party or government which comes to power and rules by terror, force, and intrigue is a contradiction in terms. It is (to resort to the arguments of Ahmad Shawqui al-Fanjari) anti-Islamic and therefore anti-democratic. Second, it should always be remembered that in the struggle for more democracy the methods used strongly condition the tactics and methods of its opponents. The latter are never simply given, and they should not be thought to be so. Successful transitions to democracy are always a learning process in which — the recent 'velvet revolutions' of central and eastern Europe are striking cases in point — opponents of democracy can sometimes be convinced to minimise their acts of sabotage and to relinquish at least some of their power democratically. The Jordanian government of King Hussein might be an example. The point is that terror breeds fear and armed *jihad* breeds military crackdown, while peaceful democratic methods can be infectious, if only because even their opponents can see that they enable everybody to sleep peacefully in their beds at night.

Finally, the political dilemma confronting contemporary Islamists who pursue the parliamentary road can be further weakened by their refusal to make a fetish of sovereign state power. For a variety of reasons we are witnessing a global decline of nation-state sovereignty. Our world is beginning to resemble the form of the mediaeval world, in which monarchs were forced to share power and authority with a variety of subordinate and higher powers. The trend has profound implications for the struggle for an Islamic state. It renders implausible the revolutionary strategy of seizing state power, if need be through the use of force, precisely because the 'centres' of state power are tending to become more dispersed and, hence, immune from 'capture' by a single party or government. Not only that, but insofar as 'the state' ceases to be in one place to be 'seized' the

struggle by Islamists to monopolise state is rendered unnecessary. The often poorly coordinated and dispersed character of state power, whether in Egypt, Morocco, or Malaysia, makes it ever more susceptible to the initiatives of social organisations and movements which mobilise traditional 'folk' Islam and cultivate its 'grass-roots' networks, above all in local mosques, clinics and schools, to practise the art of divide-and-rule from below. In other words, Islam, the most socially conscious of world religions, can partly overcome the transition-to-democracy dilemma by concentrating the considerable sum of its energies on the nooks and crannies of civil society. There, in areas of life underneath and outside of the state, it can empower its followers by stimulating their awareness that large-scale organisations, such as state bureaucracies and trans-national firms, ultimately rest upon the molecular networks of power of civil society — and that the strengthening and transformation of these micro-power relations necessarily effects the operations of those large scale organisations.

The strategy of supplementing 'the parliamentary road to Islam' with the creation 'from below' of an Islamic movement rooted in civil society offers not only a practical way of moderating the transition-to-democracy dilemma. It clearly offers the hope of greater dignity to people who have been pauperised materially and spiritually by western or Soviet modernisation — people such as the poor of Cairo and the young people from quarters in Algiers like Bab al-Oued, where talk is now mainly about elusive visas and emigration, and memories of friends killed on the streets by the crack of army gun-fire. The strategy is however two-edged, for it contains another fundamental dilemma facing those who want to shatter the ideology of Islam-as-fundamentalism and who yearn for an Islamic state in which power is shared peacefully. I am referring to **the dilemma of pluralism**.

Nearly a third of the world's believers in Islam live in countries in which they can never hope to become a numerical majority of the population. In those countries, India for example, Islamists have no alternative but to espouse the cause of toleration and civil and political

liberties for all. If they do not, then they weaken their own social and political credibility, especially in the eyes of a potentially threatening and threatened non-Islamic majority concerned about 'Islamic fundamentalism'. The point here is that the toleration of differences is not divisible. Those Islamists who claim recognition of their particular identity have a *tu quoque* obligation to recognise the particular identity of others. That recognition of heterogeneity in turn implies support for non-religious institutions — such as an independent judiciary and a pluralistic media — capable of protecting not only Hindus and Parsees, Jains and Sikhs, Christians and Jews, believers and non-believers, but also Islam itself. Living as a minority in the midst of a majority, Islam, paradoxically, is forced to acknowledge the limits of Islam as a religion claiming to be universal.

The same dilemma of pluralism is evident in countries, Pakistan and Iran for example, where Islam is a majority or near-majority religion and where the principles of Islam have been encoded in the dominant legal, political and social institutions. In such countries the toleration of non-Islamic ways of life 'outside' the Islamic community remains an important priority. Yet precisely because Islam is dominant there emerges the additional problem of whether and to what extent Islam tolerates forms of life and expression that are anathema to Islam. A different question — one that is always present but usually latent in non-Islamic countries — constantly surfaces within the community of Islamic believers itself: To what extent can and should Islam, if only for the sake of its power-sharing image, sanction the birth of pluralism within its own body politic by tolerating competing interpretations of Islam by Islamists themselves, especially interpretations which say the unsayable or announce to their fellow-Muslims things that are either incomprehensible or inconceivable or objectionable?

The history of world religions suggests that no religion can painlessly tolerate heretics within its own ranks, and it is therefore not surprising that contemporary Islamic regimes have reacted in various and conflicting ways to pluralising trends. Two contrary examples — from Pakistan and Iran — spring to mind.

The fate of the Urdu writer Mumtaz Mufti's *Labbaik,* a satirical account of his pilgrimage to Mecca, serves as a reminder that Islam contains rich traditions of internal dissent — and that the ideology of Islam-as-Fundamentalism is itself a concocted dogma. First published in Pakistan in 1975, *Labbaik* is written as a pilgrimage (*hajj*) narrative riddled with irony, disjunction, and daring similes. On the PIA flight from Karachi to Jeddah, Mufti sits in economy class, among the pious and solemn-faced pilgrims, telling their beads. In first class, the Pakistan hockey team, off to a match, periodically explodes in rollicking laughter. The hockey players, Mufti suggests, are hijackers whose laughter expresses their power over the hijacked, the pilgrims. In Jeddah Mufti lodges in an absurdly luxurious hotel with every Western-style amenity, fantasising his room as a 'honeymoon suite'. He again chooses five-star luxury in Mecca, imagining himself among relics of the Raj, including the old mem of the hotel, who sits on his lap and says (in English), 'Darling, don't be so superstitious.' Within the sanctuary in Mecca he more or less sees Allah, before whom he confesses himself to be merely a self-centred Hindu idol. Throughout his stay he carefully observes how his fellow pilgrims treat the *hajj* as a dry-cleaning factory in the business of removing sins or as a booking-office for journeys to paradise. Mufti also shows up the impracticalities of their other-worldliness: 'My sincere advice when you go on *hajj* is that you take along a good pair of scissors'.

Coming from the hand of one of the most prominent Urdu novelists, *Labbaik* generated considerable controversy in Pakistan. The author made it clear that his contempt for the clerics of Islam was linked to his attempt to locate himself personally within the Islamic tradition into which he was born. Displaying a Sufi skepticism towards formal religion and a healthy mockery of his own imitation of the West, Mufti held firm to a conclusion in which generations of Westernised Muslims have sought refuge: that at the very least Mecca belongs even to those whose faith is halting and occasional and that despite their doubts they respect the Prophet Muhammad as 'a great man'. *Labbaik* was frequently condemned as blasphemous, and there were certainly attempts to ban it. Yet there were those,

up-ending the meaning of the term, who insisted that it would be *kufr*, or infidelity, to condemn a book of such great artistic merit. The matter was resolved when the then Minister of Religious Affairs, himself a sometime member of the Jama'at party and also a literary figure, wrote a preface for the second edition in which he predicted that the pilgrimage account would earn the author a place in paradise.

Such official courting of pluralist dissent within Islam contrasts strikingly with the repressive anti-secularism of the Iranian regime. During the past year sixty Iranian intellectuals, including writers and journalists, have signed a petition condemning the continuing *fatwa* against British novelist Salman Rushdie. The petition has been dealt a harsh blow by the Iranian government, which has officially banned the works of all the signatories, including the poets Esmail Kho'i and Nader Naderpour. This reaction ought to be of interest not because it highlights the continuing despotism of the Iranian regime but because it demonstrates a different — ideological — way of dealing with the dilemma of pluralism confronting the Islamic tradition. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* has indeed caused widespread offence to many followers of Islam — most of whom have never read it — and this has prompted widespread calls for its banning and burning and, especially in Iranian government circles, Rushdie's death. The anti-secularists in that country have particularly emphasised Rushdie's doubting of the authenticity of the revelations recorded in the Qur'an. In two complex chapters reporting a dream of one of the central characters of *The Satanic Verses,* Rushdie explores the birth and triumph of Islam. In its attempts to outmanoeuvre the old pre-Islamic world, Rushdie writes, Islam was inevitably faced with numerous dilemmas and compromises, which he highlights, Mahound (that is, Muhammed) is described as a 'Businessman' constantly doing deals with the archangel and God, who is also 'really a Businessman' who offers the Prophet good deals and bargains and helps in sticky situations. Muhammed is also called a 'smart bastard' who lays down rules that suit him. He is pictured as a lustful philanderer who slept with so many women within a year after his wife's death that his beard turned 'half-white'. And the Qur'an is mocked as a book

'spouting' rules about how to 'clean one's behind', 'fart' and to engage in sexual intercourse, including sodomy.

Islamist critics of profanity have attacked these literary similes in several ways. Some have objected to their 'scurrilous' and 'abusive' transgression of *hodud* (the ethical limits of decency) and to their reinforcement of the ideology of Islam-as-Fundamentalism; others to their wholly 'untruthful' historical account of the rise of Islam; and still others have insisted that Rushdie is guilty of *ridda* (apostasy), in the sense that he has violated solemn commitments and treacherously 'turned back' on Islam, forsaking it for unbelief or another religion. Considered together, these accusations of perfidy are not *per se* inconsistent with democratic power-sharing. After all, democracies are systems of power in which opinions are sometimes publicly criticised as perfidious and things are called scandalous and in need of restriction or outright banning. Democracies require rules governing libel, defamation, and abuse. Yet — the qualification is important — the long-term political designs lurking behind the calls for censorship and punishment of the author of *The Satanic Verses* are different in kind, exactly because their anti-pluralism is inconsistent with democracy, minimally defined.

In contrast to all forms of authoritarian government, democracy comprises procedures for arriving at collective decisions through public controversies and compromises based on the fullest possible participation of citizens. At a minimum, democratic procedures include equal and universal adult suffrage within constituencies of various scope and size; and majority rule and guarantees of minority rights, which ensure that collective decisions are approved by a substantial number of those expected to make them. Democratic procedures also include freedom from arbitrary arrest and respect for the rule of law among citizens and their representatives; constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly and expression and other civil and political liberties, which help guarantee that those expected to decide, or to elect those who decide, can choose from among real alternatives; and various social policies (in fields such as health, education, child care and basic income provision) which prevent market exchanges

from becoming dominant and thereby ensure that citizens can live as free equals by enjoying basic political and civil entitlements. Expressed differently, democracy requires the institutional division between a certain form of state and civil society. A democracy is a system of open-ended institutions in which the exercise of power is flexibly controlled. It is a multi-layered political and social mosaic in which political decision-makers at the local, regional, national and supranational levels are assigned the job of serving the *res publica*, while, for their part, citizens living within the nooks and crannies of civil society are obliged to exercise vigilance in preventing each other and their rulers from abusing their powers and violating the spirit of the commonwealth.

Elsewhere (in *Democracy and Civil Society* [1988] and *The Media and Democracy* [1991]) I have argued at length that this minimum definition of democratic procedures is not wedded to any particular form of life and that, indeed, it is a basic precondition of the peaceful cohabitation of different forms of life in any given geographic area. So understood, democracy is not another ideology — by which I mean a moralising and power-hungry way of life claiming to be universal — but a condition of freedom from ideology. It is, in other words, the means by which a plurality of groups with different and often conflicting beliefs can live their differences and get along without murdering or dominating each other. Democracy institutionalises the right to be different. Democrats are not afraid that the intermingling of different groups and institutions will inevitably weaken or ruin democracy. Like Thomas Jefferson, who once remarked that 'it does me no injury for my neighbour to say that there are twenty Gods or no God', democrats champion tolerance and diversity. They are for freedom of religion as much as for freedom from religion. Democrats are pluralists. They celebrate hybridity and intermingling, and welcome the transformations that result from the combination of the new and the unexpected with the old and predictable. Democracy rejoices in hotchpotch, melange, and controversy, for that is how novelty enters the world. Democracy loves indeterminacy and change-by-conflict-and-compromise. It fears and resists the absolutism of the Pure, the Grand Ideology.

Defined in an ideological way, Islam potentially clashes with this basic feature of democracy because Islam itself is a special type of religion. Every religion is a system of beliefs based upon a minimum core of immutable and unquestionable tenets, which are held and practised on the strength of received conventions and traditional authority. Religion by definition has a dogmatic core and it is therefore on tense terms with democracy, which encourages ceaseless debate and self-questioning and, thus, public spaces for citizens to challenge and to reject many a sacred axiom. Democracy promotes secularism. Yet — it might be observed — Christianity and democracy proved to be compatible inasmuch as Western representative democracy as we know it has some Christian roots; various Christian sects previously at war with each other have also managed through the past several centuries to compromise peacefully, to agree the need for secular institutions, and to provide support for democracy. It may also be true, as Ali Kazancigil has suggested recently, that the present renaissance of Islam as a proselytising religion will be comparatively short-lived after it is forced to deal with the practical matters of economic development, social policy and government administration, that is, that in government Islam will lose its political aura and pave the way for its own 'secularisation', just as Christianity and other religions have done before it.

That is speculation. For the moment there remains a profound tension between democratic pluralism and dogmatic forms of Islam because Islam is a special form of religion that presents itself as a totality or complete way of life, not separable into the components to which we are accustomed in modern Western thought. The division of the world into sacred and profane, religious and secular, priesthood and laity does not exist in Islam. The separation of politics and ethics, politics and economics, church and state, state and civil society do not come naturally to it. Islam is a total life system — the Islamic *ummah,* the community of the faithful who serve their sovereign God, provides guidance for the whole conduct of any individual or group. That is why, according to many Islamists, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is pernicious. It casts doubt upon the authenticity of the revelations recorded in the Qur'an and hence strikes at the heart of

the whole Islamic code. Its circulation must therefore be prevented. Power-sharing with apostate secularists is wicked.

For genunie democrats this reasoning smacks of 'fundamentalism'. For them, not only does it fail to appreciate the ways in which *The Satanic Verses* is a deliberately polysemic work of literary fantasy. It also ignores the rights of the faithless and those who subscribe to non-Islamic faiths in a multi-faith era. It tacitly privileges Islam, doing so through the spurious argument that since people's beliefs, particularly their religious beliefs, are essential to their self-identity, any attack on their beliefs is equivalent to assaulting persons. That conclusion, democrats say, is absurd. It amounts to the dogmatic principle that each individual, group, or religion is entitled to veto public criticism of whatever beliefs they deem central to their own particular identity.

The bitter disagreements displayed in the Rushdie affair highlight the dilemma of pluralism facing Islamists of all descriptions. Like the transition-to-democracy dilemma, it is probably insoluble, but that does not mean that ways cannot be found to effect ongoing working compromises. Democracies, ideally, are systems of complex liberty in which clashing entitlements and jurisdictional disputes are a permanent and legitimate feature of social and political life. Such openness is all too rare in relations between the West and Islam and it is obvious that the ideology of Islam-as-Fundamentalism is making things much more difficult than they need be.

There are certainly misunderstandings on both sides. I began by highlighting the Western media view that Islam is a religion of intolerance, misogyny, cruelty and political anarchy. But there are also profound suspicions on the Islamic side. Sometimes the contradictions of the West are grist to the mill of Islamists openly hostile to the West. Western double-standards are their favourite target. 'The West talks much about human rights, democracy and the need to protect minorities, but look at the reality of Western policy towards the Palestinians or the Bosnians or Tajikistan', it is said. 'We see hypocrisy rooted in a promiscuous and permissive society, a society marked by the decline of ethics, their replacement by money,

weapons sales, hotel complexes, decadent consumerism and speeches by the Pope excusing rape'. I am trying hard not to exaggerate. Listen to the recent conclusion drawn by the 30-year old commander-in-chief of the Bosnian armed forces, Commander Zulfikar, himself a Muslim: "If you ask me the whole of the Western international community are bastards. Nobody is helping us. What's more, they have sold out and are accomplices to the extermination of our people and their own European culture."

The bitterness expressed by Zulfikar is warranted. It should disturb the dreams of all Western democrats. The violent destruction of the short-lived Bosnian experiment is a tragedy for many reasons, including the fact that it has deprived the world of a badly needed working model of an Islamic political community which practices democratic power-sharing. Arguably, the existence of such models would make the world a safer place by helping to undermine the ideology of Islam-as-Fundamentalism and to discharge the international and domestic tensions it is currently inciting. For the time being the friends of power-sharing must resort to chipping away at hypocrisy and power-mongering wherever it appears, buoyed by the thought that more democracy in both the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds might greatly help their mutual understanding and reconciliation — not because democracy is a panacea, which it is not, but because democracy is the enemy of enforced stereotyping, the most effective human weapon yet invented for dealing with arrogant armies, pompous politicians and power-hungry groups armed with ideologies.