Part IV

The Topicality: Islam and the West between Inter-Civilisational Dialogue and Political Antagonisation

Introductory remarks

For a host of reasons there is an increasing awareness in the West of the fact that Islam is becoming more meaningful for the people of Western civilisation. In contrast to this novelty, for Muslims the West has always been a centre of gravity, be it for good or bad. In the new millennium the oscillation in Islam between culture and politics is no longer an inner-Islamic concern. In the age of migration Islam geographically is no longer only located beyond the borders of Europe in that it already exists in the West. As a religion and as a culture Islam can – if reformed – without any doubt be incorporated into a religious and cultural pluralism in Western societies. This potential does not apply to the claims of political Islam as related to a neo-absolutism. In this sense Islamism is a threat, both to the West and to the Muslims living in its societies. It makes no sense to abide by the rules of political correctness and to refrain from this frankness. The enquiry pursued in the preceding chapters sheds light on the predicament at issue and it makes the available options clear. My analysis took as its starting point the definition of religion as a cultural system. Culture is local, but my scope is global. What is the issue?

The present book combines the cultural-anthropological study of religion with international studies. The impact of Geertzian cultural anthropology on my thoughts is clear. I have already set the record straight in the introduction. I have borrowed from Geertz the cultural understanding of religion, but have limited his impact on my thoughts to this determination of religion as a cultural system which provides meaning. I share the determining of culture in terms of a locally constrained social production of meaning, but attempt to go beyond the confines of this Geertzian approach in considering our world time and thus the international environment pertinent to all local cultures in our age of globalisation. Geertz is not only a cultural relativist, but also – along with his school – regrettably overlooks the important global context pertinent to cultural analysis. Under present conditions, it is indispensable for any cultural analysis to address these issues. Being a student of International Relations, inclined to cross the boundaries of our discipline, I continue to learn from anthropology how to look at Islam as one of the major sources for the production of meaning in the respective local cultures. I nevertheless do not fail to consider the embedding of these local cultures into a global set-up. In other words, I am inclined to relate the local to the global.

In studying the contemporary world as an emerging international society under the conditions of globalising socio-economic and politi-

cal structures, I come across conflicting worldviews, norms and values and fail to see the assumed homogenising impact of globalisation. I maintain that the globalisation of structures is not matched by a universalisation of values, norms and worldviews. Thus, I believe that the alleged impact of what is termed McCulture is not leading to a presumed standardisation. This insight leads to reviewing my thoughts on the simultaneity of structural globalisation and cultural fragmentation as addressed in Chapter 4 of this book, and further developed in this concluding part.

The underlying argument is based on the dual character of the process of globalisation. The latter takes place in the world economy and the international state system and covers modern transport and communication networks. Globalisation contributes to the embedding of all local cultures in a given structural framework of interaction. Nevertheless, the related processes fail to mitigate the tensions between the local and the global. On the contrary, globalisation intensifies the gap between both by simultaneously producing more cultural fragmentation. Here lies the assumed duality of globalisation, which I address in terms of a simultaneity of two processes developing in adverse directions – globalisation and fragmentation go hand in hand.

In addition to questioning established 'wisdoms' about global impact we need to distinguish between globalisation and universalisation. At issue are two distinctly different phenomena with equally different meanings. Structures could become global, but in contrast, norms and values pertain to local cultures and they, therefore, could hardly become universal. Only the insight that the globalisation of structures is not matched by a parallel universalisation of values can help to understand the gap. It follows that we need to be wary of confusing both terms because it is utterly wrong and misleading to equate globalisation with universalisation. Certainly, this judgement sounds too general and might thus be open to severe misunderstanding. Therefore, it needs to be specified. This task is painstakingly pursued in different steps and on various levels in the following chapters. It is true, I doubt that universalisation could be wholesale, but nevertheless believe in an inter-civilisational morality covering human rights and democracy. I present my case on the example of Islam and its place in the interplay between cultural and socio-economic as well as political changes on global grounds. I shall carry out my enquiry while asking related questions. The search for proper answers is my goal.

Based on my analysis of the simultaneity of structural globalisation and cultural fragmentation, I develop the hypothesis that Islamism (that is, political Islam) is a defensive-cultural phenomenon directed

against the West in that it envisages a de-Westernisation. In our age of migration, the revolt against the West and the religio-political challenge to secularity are exported to Western societies themselves. Therefore, developments in the world of Islam do matter to the West. As a mediator between Islam and the West, I am attempting to place my thoughts into the disputed debate on what has been termed the 'Clash of Civilizations'. I wish to join the former President of Germany, Roman Herzog, in committing myself to *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations*. This formula is the title of Herzog's book to which I have contributed.

While I concede a need for commonalities and simultaneously see value-related conflicts, I take a stand against Huntington by arguing as follows: in order to prevent something, we first need to understand the constraint underlying the phenomenon at issue. Huntington fails to understand the difference between Islam as a cultural system and its politicisation and in addition looks at Islam in a monolithic manner. Despite this differentiation, we need to look at cultural and civilisational differences, however, without essentialising them as Huntington seemingly does. In short, *Preventing the Clash of Civilizations* requires an analysis of the value-based conflict among civilisations. I venture into this endeavour in my final Chapter 10 with a full awareness of the risks. I see no contradiction between dissociating myself from Huntington and simultaneously giving him credit. He brought the study of civilisation into international affairs, but his approach is wanting. This kind of study runs against the rules of political correctness, but after all, we need to acknowledge that without freedom of thought no reasoning could flourish! I refuse to demonise Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations', even though I have my own approach and do not share his.