

Individual, Family, People, Nation and State from the perspective of Muslim intellectual tradition

Mehmedalija Hadžić

Sarajevo

Summary

Any type of a modern speech uses such keywords from the title. They appear to be clear to everyone, so one mostly does not notice differences in their use in journalism and philosophy, politics and religion. Since our age is almost entirely absorbed by various ideological images of the man and world, overwhelming use of the aforementioned terms is ideological, and ideology and tradition are two completely different images of the world, and, subsequently, two different languages. That is why these terms have almost completely different meanings within them. If one wants to understand these terms in those two languages, then it is necessary to consider what the levels of the being are in both those images and how the languages that describe them can be translated from one to another.

Key words: tradition, individual, family, people, nation, state.

BEFORE WE DISCUSS THE MEANING of the terms: *individual, family, people, nation and state* from the perspective of Muslim intellectual tradition, it is necessary to determine the meaning of the very phrase “Muslim intellectual tradition”.¹

The terms from the title above have entered all forms of speech. They seem perfectly clear to everybody, hence differences between their usage in journalism and philosophy, politics and religion are not observed. It has been written about some of these notions in Bosnian with different authors basing their interpretations of these notions on different grounds.²

On the basis of a phenomenological insight into these writings, it is easy to determine that these notions, independent of determinations ascribed to them by different authors, covered different semiotic fields. Their usages are “the amoeba words”: their shape changes from one author to another. That is why it is very difficult to have confidence

¹The content of Muslim intellectual tradition is highly diverse and fertile. It originates from several Islamic disciplines: law (*usulul-fikh* and *fikh*), theology (*kelam*), philosophy (*felsefah*) and sufisms (*tesavvuf*). However, it is an astonishing fact, as M. A. Muqtedar Khan noted, that the central position in it belongs to the legal thought, studies of which are favoured even today, while “the area of political philosophy”, which studies and develops the idea of social order in the light of the Islamic studies, remains underdeveloped. The reason for that is the fact that the area of political philosophy in Muslim opinion was neglected at a very early stage. Thus, as the number of Islamic jurists throughout the Muslim world exceeds the number of several hundreds of thousands, the number of Islamic political theoreticians and philosophers is almost negligible. That is why literature in the field of (Islamic) political theory and philosophy in the Muslim world is scarce.

The situation is even worse in our case. Not many of our scholars openly and meritorily wrote about meanings of some of these notions in the light of Islam, keeping in mind the general social and political context. Some of the more prominent are, for example, the Grand Mufti Džemaludin Čaušević (*Nation and Faith*), Muhamed E. Dž. Hadžijahić (*Patriotism*), Abdullah Škaljić (*The Significance of Our Religious and State Holidays and the Manifestation of Religious and National Awareness of Muslims*), Hamzija Memić (*Love of a Muslim for His Homeland*) and Husein Đozo (*The Issue of Interreligious and International Relations*). However, the number of authors problematizing these issues in a more open and determinant manner has reasonably increased today.

²Rarely does one have in mind the fact while discussing those notions that different peoples may have qualitatively different images of the world, its social organization and essential values. Cultural differences are deeply rooted in the different human worlds which contain that they take different values as ultimate facts.

in the comprehensibility of public discourse concerning phenomena determined by the notions mentioned above.

That is why it has become a necessity to discuss these issues in the Bosnian public discourse and to clarify and shed light on the darkness brought on by these ambiguities.

In that sense, what does the notion tradition relate to?³

The notion *philosophia* originally means “love of wisdom”. That wisdom is the relationship of man and God. Man is wise for he received wisdom from God and lives in accordance with it. He received it from God as Wise. That wisdom is, principally, one and the same, offered as a gift to man since he was created. However, wisdom changes in expression and shape from one age to another, from one revelation to another. Since God announces His wisdom through his messengers, then his messengers and everything that was revealed to them are carriers of wisdom of the One and the Same God to different people, in different eras and in different languages. The real tradition connects the man with that revelation of wisdom.

There is an essential difference between tradition and heritage. Every tradition connects the man with his Creator, God, the One, the Only. Heritage is like that in exceptional cases only. Its primary authority can be anything in history. Heritage has never been anti-historical, while tradition always is.

Keeping in mind that the modern age is almost completely permeated by different ideological images of man and the world, the overwhelming usage of the aforementioned notions is ideological. Ideology and tradition are two completely different images of the world and, consequently, two different languages as well. That is why within them, some of these notions bear completely different meanings.

If one wants to understand these notions in these two languages, then it is necessary to consider the levels of being in both these images and in what way can languages describing them be translated from one language into another.

³ “Tradition... it means God’s faith together with all theoretical and practical teachings sent to people by God, transferred from one generation to another... Tradition is Divine heritage given to people through God’s messengers. Through tradition, man can get closer to God...” *William C. Chittick*, interviewed by Mohammad Ali Niazi, *Znakovi vremena*, Vol. 9, No. 32, p. 40 – 61. The Ibn Sina Scientific and Research Center, Sarajevo, Summer 2006. Translated from Persian: Muamer Kodrić.

Individual (man as such)

What does being a man mean?

This is the fundamental question in tradition and philosophy. In the traditional image of the world, man comes from God and he returns to God. Since man can never be the same as his Creator, his existence is always on a lower ontological level in relation to his origination. Man's origin is God, hence his return is to God. That beginning is not a dark and low matter.⁴

In every ideological image of the world, man starts from below and is constantly moving up to the next level. His position is at the highest level. That is why the world as its subject is always below him and he can fix it, in accordance to that. Such man can set his image of the world and its realization as the goal of his existence. The contents of that image of the world is measurable and never moves beyond a single ontological level, which is the man's consciousness whose greatest potential is the instrumental mind. What man does is the source and confirmation of his dignity.

The source of man's dignity in the traditional image of the world is God. That dignity is inviolable because every man is God's creature "in which He breathed some of His Spirit" and "whom He taught all names". That is why it is the responsibility of man to realize or to reveal his dignity. That dignity cannot *a priori* depend on anything that man does not possess in his original nature (*fitra*). To reveal means to reveal that original nature or to return to God. That return cannot be determined by the world or locked inside it. The eschatological or the otherworldly reality – Jannah (Heaven) and Jahannam (Hell) – are not in the visible world, although everything that man experiences in this

⁴ "Many philosophical, theological and mystical discussions were led with regards this issue through Islamic history. However, one principal element with which all schools of Islamic thought and worshipers agreed is that God is our creator, or, in philosophical terms, the ontological cause of our existence. That is why we owe everything to Him, and our rights are carried out from the fulfilment of our obligations towards Him and from obedience to His Will... However, we are responsible not only to God but also to His creation... Then there is responsibility we have towards ourselves... The following in the hierarchy is the responsibility that begins with our family..." - Seyyed Hossien Nasr, *Human Responsibilities and Human Rights*, Glasnik Rijaseta IZ, Vol. LXIV/2002., 7-8, pp. 773-798. Translated from English: Nevad Kahteran.

world bears traces of the experience that will be given to him in the other world, Jannah or Jehennem.

In the ideological image of the world, the eschatological or the otherworldly nature of Jannah or Jahannam is reduced to the measurable world and locked inside it. Man is deemed capable of determining his goal in this world and to achieve it by means he chooses. In that way, he closes human drama into history and determines its end within it.⁵

Family

Man's understanding of the source of law originates from the image of the world to which he belongs willingly or unwillingly, with or without knowledge. In every ideological image, law is constructed on the basis of a set objective. In the traditional image, law is based on God's revelation. If this is so, then the understanding of family is different in these two images. In the ideological image of the world, family is either a principle or an obstacle. In the traditional image, family is only a part of the frame in which human individuality is situated.

An individual's responsibility towards his community begins with family. Every individual is expected to unconditionally do good unto others, but also to unconditionally refuse to admit to anyone the underlying significance of determining the Path and Rules of the man's revelation. Not a single man will or can carry the burden of another in the eschatological outcome. Nobody can save anyone from people, regardless of their position in the relationship towards God.

⁵ In the modern image of the world, the otherworldliness (eschatological image) is reduced to a measurable world in which man is deemed capable of setting his objective and achieving it by means of his choosing. "An individual is the highest value in our culture" wrote Louis Dumont (*Essai sur l'individualisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1983). The present doctrine of individualism serves as a foundation for full individuality and self-sufficiency of a person with intrinsic rights, be it good or evil. This concept argues that essentially nothing is safe or true.

People

Every individual is born in his people⁶, which means in a certain age and language. Not a single people may be favoured *a priori* over another. Every people, regardless of the country it inhabits and the language it speaks, may be diachronically or synchronically gathered around the authority of the Book (*Khitab*), revealed by God through His Messengers. None of these books are available to man as a complete and finished (final) interpretation. Its complete interpretation remains with God forever. Man's desire to improve his interpretation, which means to participate in the community of interpretation, is also a way of returning to God. No one among "the people of the Book" can ever take over the place of the highest authority. That is why, both symbolically and in essence, it is crucial for every people to make the centre accessible to every individual.

Nation

The notion which corresponds to "the people of the Book" in the Muslim intellectual tradition is defined as "nation" or as people awoken around an imposed authority.

In the ideological image of the world, the centre of the people or society belongs to the authority of the ideological elite which determines the goal and the ways of its achievement. Even the most democratic ideological elite can never agree to the openness of the centre and the authority occupying it to interpretation by all those directed towards such authority.

⁶ "Who makes the people? Families or individuals? In general, the answer to that in the West will be individuals, for individualism is a very important value in those societies. In the Islamic world, reality is completely different, for, in those societies, more precisely, communities, family is a unit whose members are closely connected and solidary. Of course, the society will attempt to remove or weaken those tight family relations, if this idea comes to life in those countries. However, that is a long and quite painful process, and of course it is not likely that it will ever be accepted" - Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *The Paranoia of Globalisation, Islam and the World after September 11*, page 141 on. Sejtarija, Sarajevo, 2002. Translated from Norwegian: Rasim Muratović.

State

In all his states, man needs protection of his position in family and society. That protection is the rule of law. In the contemporary world, political order or *polis*, which means order in relation to some inviolable centre, is nation-state. People demonstrate their attained awareness with the ability to establish and maintain order by which it protects the dignity and rights of individuals. That organization or order is the state. Even for the “people of the Book”, the state is a means for ensuring individual or collective rights, but, as the past and present time has clearly shown, it can be simply transformed into a goal, including tyranny and violence against the individual. The state is, and this should be emphasized at all times, a means for ensuring conditions in which man’s dignity will be protected.

Today, the most desirable state is named “secular”. That should mean that the desirable state is not “perennial”. And that is completely clear. All forms of state organization are subject to change in accordance with the interests of its people. But that does not mean that secularity (“changeability”) of the state can bring into question the perennality (“continuity”) of the source of the man’s individual or collective dignity. God as the Creator of man, as the Just Creator and ruler of everything that exists cannot be left out of as the source of man’s freedom and dignity, human rights and duties, so that some other authority (form of government: republic, monarchy; nation, elite, religious community, etc.) could be established instead.

As it is known, Islam is the relationship of man towards God, and not only man. All in existence is existence in peace (*silm-islam*).

Since the state is secular, then all its changes, as ways of adjusting and harmonizing with the needs of its people, its citizens who may be Muslim and non-Muslim, Christians and non-Christians, gnostic and agnostic, theists and atheists, are such that they never bring into question the perennial (permanent) sources of man’s duties towards other people, towards the world and God, duties from which the man’s rights to return to God in perfection originates.

Replacing those perennial duties and rights of Muslims which cannot be changed by any state order, any ideological imagination regardless of how it is named, is seen today, and has been like that for centuries, as a way of avoiding the responsibility for the unbearable breach of the perennial rights of Muslims in every corner of the world

and for the unbearable silence of the people who are responsible for protecting those rights.

Secularity of the state is undeniable. But that does not mean that every secularity is also good and that it protects to a sufficient extent and on equal grounds the perennial wisdom, perennial dignity, undeniable freedom of will, the right to plurality of interpretation of the Book, etc.

In fact, the problem with the state arises when it is proclaimed the absolute sovereign. That dogma of its sovereignty over a territory, people that inhabit it, over their lives, activities, achievements, values, all the way to their ideas, is at work even today in many corners of the planet.

There is an increasing number of people who consider that the concept of the secular state which originated in a protestant-catholic conflict and its resolution by the Peace of Westphalia peace (1648) cannot be universally applied because of the fact that experiences from different countries are different.⁷

All those experiences need to be studied responsibly to ensure a better future for man.

⁷Those who today say that such a concept of state is the main source of the existing global crisis which increasingly threatens to destroy Human Kind, the World and Life in general are rare. The wise are worried with good reason and that is why they are looking for a possible way out.

“Perhaps this entire inter-period – the time of world wars, the Cold War and the great time of the nation states – needs to be forgotten before a constructive political theory is developed in the near future?”

In that case, the Western theoreticians are not much ahead of Muslims in political reasoning. Is there something we can learn from Muslim thought and practice in this context? This is an outrageous prospect for many who are used to think about the Muslim society as reactionary and antimodern by definition. Still, perhaps they can explain to us that a dignified human community can be built with the values of the middle path and that there are higher values than the individual, untrammelled liberty? Perhaps not? In a future dialogue agenda, both giving and taking will be obligatory. As a first step towards that, the Westerners may begin by acknowledging their historical mistakes and present shortcomings. When the two fight, it counts as a good tact and the signal for the stronger to come out victorious with the greatest recognitions” - Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ibid*, p. 162.