

# Editorial

Placing „Islam“ as such into the context of the totalitarian movements of the 20th century is very popular among those uttering alarmist warnings of an “Islamisation” of Europe. They present themselves as belonging to the tradition of Enlightenment, however their hardly differentiating black-and-white painting and hate speech full of resentment are blatant violations of the values of Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is legitimate and necessary to check the various forms of Islamic extremism for their content of totalitarianism. For quite some time this has been done in a differentiated way. For example, the Iranian expatriate Mehdi Mozaffari, who for a long time was the head of the Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation of the University of Aarhus/Denmark, has pointed out to the mutual relation of Bolshevism and Fascism on the one hand and forms of Islamism on the other. He places the development of the pan-movements (Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism, Pan-Islamism) into the context of the fall of the empires (the Tsarist Empire, the German Empire, the Habsburg Empire, the Osman Empire) and the striving for new ones – under different ideological signs.<sup>2</sup>

After September 11th, 2001, the “new totalitarianism” formula spread rapidly. On the one hand, it was an expression of the extent of the threat to the “free world” seemingly posed by the “jihadist” forms of political Islam. On the other hand, it pointed out to the structural common grounds suggested by a comparison to the two totalitarian predecessors of the 20th century. The Göttingen-based political scientist Bassam Tibi went as far as to stating that Islamism meets all the “criteria” Hannah Arendt had “formulated for [such] a movement”.<sup>3</sup> And New York columnist Paul Berman in his best-selling book “Terror and Liberalism” presented the thesis: much of that what the generation of early interpreters of totalitarianism, after having overcome their fixation on the danger of the extreme right, had discovered with Stalin’s Communism and had subsumed under the term “totalitarian” was also to be recognized with those ideologies and strands which had intellectually motivated the attack on the towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.<sup>4</sup> Since then the debate on the totalitarian features of Islamism and its attempts to establish regimes has not come to an end.

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1 For a critical discussion of such positions see in particular *Jahrbuch für Islamophobieforschung*, since 2010 edited by Farid Hafez, recently: the same (Ed.), *Jahrbuch für Islamophobieforschung 2016*, Vienna 2016.

2 See Mehdi Mozaffari, *Aufkommen und Entwicklung des Islamismus – im Licht des europäischen Totalitarismus*. In: *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 11 (2014), pp. 15–28. See currently: the same, *Islamism. A New Totalitarianism*, Tübingen 2017.

3 Bassam Tibi, *Der neue Totalitarismus. „Heiliger Krieg“ und westliche Sicherheit*, Darmstadt 2004, p. 74.

4 Vgl. Paul Berman, *Terror und Liberalismus*, Hamburg 2004, p. 42.

In the here presented special issue, the “Islamic State” (IS) is checked for its totalitarianism content. The relevance of the question is obvious. Already after the first larger territorial gains and the conquest of the city of Mossul in Iraq Volker Perthes, director of the German think-tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, pointed out to the totalitarian features of this “terror militia”: to the fact that it is driven by ideology, to the persecution of dissenters, to the rejection of “national borders and the international order”.<sup>5</sup> Ideologically motivated genocidal tendencies became obvious in August, 2014, in the context of the IS’s military advance and most of all by the massacre of the Yazidi at Sinjar/North Iraq, and these were confirmed by the United Nations’ Human Rights Commissioner, after extensive taking of evidence.<sup>6</sup>

However, the analytical potential of the totalitarianism approach has hardly been systematically applied to the IS regime. A first attempt was made by the political scientists *Erik Fritzsche* and *Sebastian Lange* who collected the current knowledge of the IS organisation, its ideology and rule. In this context they at first answered the question about the nature of the IS state and emphasized the bureaucratic structure of its organisation. By a second step they assessed if totalitarian-specific features can be identified and, if yes, how distinct they are. Doing so, they took the dynamics of change into consideration, which is partly due to inner conflicts, partly to external pressure.

Apart from the attempt to extinct social and cultural diversity, the tendency towards iconoclasm, which has attracted much attention by the public, may be considered another evidence for the IS’s claim to totalitarianism. As shown by the social scientists *Tom Bioly* and *Christoph Günther*, a great number of cultural goods have been destroyed as a consequence of the military conflicts in North Iraq and Syria. For the IS, however, this way of proceeding is an essential part of its attempt to “cleanse” a social-cultural space from alien and “harmful” elements. The IS gives a Manichean justification for this systematic destruction: the permanent struggle between monotheism and its antipodes. The destruction of architectural monuments and places of religious practice, they say, serves for strengthening the IS’s regulative authority and for preventing deviant behaviour. For, they say, via the cultural objects the practice of iconoclasm aims at eliminating the identities of local communities.

The IS’s monopoly claim does not even allow the slightest deviation from the “true religion”. However, it is not even accepted by all Sunni jihadists. This becomes obvious from the inner-jihadist criticism of the IS, whose narratives and ways of arguing are systematically dealt with by Hamburg scholar of Islamic sciences, *Behnam T. Said*. Among others, the IS is accused of endangering the

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5 Volker Perthes, Mehr als Terror. In: Handelsblatt, 12.12.2014; the same, Islamic State. A totalitarian, expansive and hegemonic project: <https://en.qantara.de/content/islamic-state-is-a-totalitarian-expansive-and-hegemonic-project>; 6.10.2014.

6 Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups, A/HRC/28/18, 13.3.2015.

unity of Muslims, by mercilessly fighting other Islamist groups instead of working as an integrating and counterpoising force among them. By his contribution the author wants to stimulate the development of counter-narratives putting the IS's claim to exclusivity into question and perhaps serving as a strategic means of de-radicalization.

*Rüdiger Lohlker*, a Viennese scholar of Islamic studies, places jihadism into another religion- and cultural-historic context, in order of appropriately locating the phenomenon of a kind of Islam which is considered "extremist". He thinks that one crucial problem is to come to an appropriate understanding of the difference between Islamic thought and practice in different periods of history. Modern Islam, he says, must be clearly distinguished from older Islamic thought and practice. Furthermore, he states, a comparison of Salafism, Wahhabism, jihadism and political Islam shows structural similarities as well as overlappings in practice. On the whole, all these modern forms form a milieu which may be called exclusivist.

The extremism researcher *Michael Logvinov* in his contribution tries to come to a differentiated understanding of Salafism. The latter's orthopraxy in Europe, he says, has too much become a topic of "securitised" discourses. Many scientific and security experts assume a nexus between Salafism and Islamist terrorism – for which there is hardly any evidence, for the time being – which is why the members of this milieu, who themselves believe to follow the path of the "pious ancestors", are considered a danger and their worldviews are considered an "intellectual breeding ground for terrorism". In contrast to this, the author presents the following thesis: indeed, the phenomena of Salafism and jihadism or jihadist terrorism are connected by a common "historical matrix" – the paradigm of an ancient-Islamic community as a reference authority – as well as by a similar way of understanding normative Islam. Very different, on the other hand, are the rationalities and logics of the action-legitimizing frame-script selections of the two strands. A realistic danger analysis, he says, requires taking these differences more into consideration.

The topical focus of the here presented issue is complemented by an autocracy-comparative contribution by Chemnitz political scientist *Tom Thieme*. He deals with the somewhat neglected type of the monarchic regime which these days is predominant only in Near and Middle East. Yet still, he presents a broad comparison which covers all 27 of the currently existing monarchic states. Despite fundamental differences of the types of rule (most of all between constitutional and absolute monarchies), there are common grounds. The monarchy as a consensus institution creates social integration and supports political compromise – this way, in a variety of ways it contributes to a consensual settling of conflicts. However, cause and effect may not be confused. The longevity of many monarchies is not a result of the system of government. Rather the following is true: as they remain stable for a number of reasons (resources, little potential for social conflict), the institution of the monarchy has been able to survive still today.

*Uwe Backes*

