



## Western Civilization in Crisis

Capitalism is in crisis the world over. Developmental models based on free market principles linked with political liberalization programs for the third world were always contested in terms of their viability in actually helping developing countries improve political, social and economic lives of their citizens. However this time the legitimacy of capitalism is under question from within the Western World, where large sections of Western populations and a significant number of Western intellectuals are questioning some fundamental aspects of Western economic and political thinking and structures. This challenge is unlike the one presented by Marxist-Leninism. Inspired by the radicalism of the French Revolution, Marxism presented a critique of capitalism, which captured the political emotion of the nineteenth century, where the European masses were fed up with an elite which sought its legitimacy through historical institutions of monarchy and as protectors of various Christian Churches.

Napoleon's stunning rise and conquest of Europe, although reversed, initiated a set of disruptive revolutionary fervor which gripped Europe for decades to come. This was compounded by the radical social upheaval which industrialization brought to European societies. Marx captured the revolutionary mood of Europe and attempted to present an intellectual justification for it. History he argued, progresses, not based on ideas rather based on a perpetual elite versus non-elite conflict. The elite structures he argued are rooted in the control of economic means of production, if the economic means of production were collectively owned or socialized, this will permanently dismantle the elite, non-elite divide and lead towards an equal society. Marx's political radicalism never appealed to the European elite which saw it as a threat to its existence. Europe had emerged from a fierce struggle between the Church and anti-religious forces. This was an animated debate which tore Europe apart which eventually led to the birth of secular liberalism as an ideology. European elite were thus quick to reject Marx's theory of historical progression. How could liberal Europe accept that ideas and human agency have no role in progression of human societies when it recently went through a fierce ideological struggle, the wounds of which were still fresh in European psyche? Marx's economic ideas, however, had an impact on European elite which gave rise to the social democratic politics of the twentieth century in many of the Western countries. If anything Marxism helped unite the capitalist world.

With the help of Marxism, capitalism was clearly able to define itself as what it stood for and what it did not stand for, what its foundational principles were and what its absence would entail, a Marxist experiment with devastating social, political and economic consequences. It was this obsessive rivalry and how each ideology contrasted itself against the other which led to the triumphalist declaration by Francis Fukuyama, when he famously asked the question whether history has ended with the fall of communism and whether liberal democracy and capitalism is the ultimate model for human governance.

The crisis which capitalism and liberal democracy faces today is a crisis of legitimacy, which has created a crisis of confidence within the Western elites. Some of the foundational ideas which form the basis of the Western civilization are being questioned today by the elites and a significant portion of Western societies. The twenty years between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the financial crisis of 2008 saw the massive expansion of economic globalization manifested through institutional arrangements like the World Trade Organization, the European Union and Euro Zone which aimed to ensure free movement of goods, services, people and capital. It was argued that this will usher in an era of global prosperity for all. However the financial crash of 2008 and the following meltdown of the global financial system strongly challenged the faith in the principle of free markets efficiently allocating resources in the economy. The massive government bailouts of private sector principal actors of the free market economy raised questions about the relationship between the economy and the State which still remain unanswered. Moreover the wealth generated during this era of economic globalization since the fall of the Berlin Wall has

disproportionately flowed to capital owning elites creating vast amounts of wealth inequality in Western societies.

At the heart of capitalist economic thinking is the idea of unlimited needs chasing scarce resources. This thinking placed wealth generation, economic growth and increasing the resources and the size of the pie as the driving force for managing the economy. A good economy, capitalism argues, is the one which is efficient because this reduces the wastage of resources. Productivity growth has thus been seen as a virtuous progression of an economy which is able to generate wealth with minimum resources. With advancements in technology and the advent of big-tech companies, the last three decades saw capitalism give birth to huge corporations which relied on minimum resources to generate massive amount of wealth in the economy. This further contributed to inequality and has since given rise to another problem. The highly productive tech economy highlighted the inhumane nature of capitalist economic management. Is an economy which is highly productive, with minimum labor participation. A better economy or an economy which is less productive but with more labor participation? Should an economy be built to be productive to generate massive wealth, which flows to a handful of individuals or is a less efficient economy but with more labor participation which includes a much broader pool of the society a better way of running the economy? Is productivity the goal of an economy or full employment? Is productivity an end unto itself? Capitalism's obsession with growth and wealth creation, as the central organizing idea of the economy, has damaged the ecological system of the planet. This insane drive at wealth generation through perpetual growth is unnatural and unsustainable and it has adversely affected the regenerative resources of the planet's ecological system. This in turn has led to fears about permanent damage to the planet's climate and its adverse impact on human societies. Why would an economy which is managed purely through materialistic motivations and individual incentives for profit be considerate towards the human race? Will it ever be? Can economic principles which do not recognize humanitarian, spiritual or moral values generate an economy which protects these vital aspects of human society?

The rise of identity politics in the West has challenged the self-image of Western elites as torchbearers of a universal civilization. Are the Western communities so fragile that they cannot tolerate different cultures, which the immigrants bring with them to these societies? If the Western societies need to close themselves to immigrants from different backgrounds in general, particularly the Islamic background, what does it say about the universality of Western ideals? What about the claims of liberal, pluralistic societies being the ultimate human governance models? Does the rise of white nationalism and right wing populism represent a much deeper and emotional assertion of the Christian tradition and aspect of Western civilization which effectively renders this civilization as primarily a civilization of Christian nations living across the Atlantic? French President Emmanuel Macron's veto of North Macedonia's accession to the European Union and Trump's America first foreign policy is openly putting geographical limits to the Western civilization exposing its claims of universality as a farce.

The rise of identity politics has also challenged the fundamental conception of Western thinkers about their view of human motivations and how they shape the society. Western elites primarily view human beings as motivated by materialistic concerns. Rationality is thus often described or interpreted by different faculties in the West as human beings acting in their economic or self-interest. The rise of identity politics in the West has however laid bare a much deeper struggle taking place in Western societies, namely, a search for meaning in life. After centuries of relegating religion to the private domain, the hollowness of a materialistic civilization, which denied spirituality and religion its proper place in the public domain, has given way to a populist political current which exhibits a desire to search for meaning in collective life, through a culture centered politics, which aims to define what the West is. This powerful political current which has swept Western societies has forced Western thinkers in to questioning whether their earlier viewpoint about human motivations was correct. What if human beings are not motivated by materialistic concerns alone, what if spiritual, humanitarian or moral concerns sometimes trump materialistic concerns, in a

manner which may seem totally irrational to a thinker who defines irrationality as acting against material concerns.

These and some other concerns about fundamental ideas underpinning the Western civilization have created a sense of crisis in the West, because these ideas form the basis of Western civilization. The loss of confidence of Western societies in these ideas has serious consequences for the survival of Western civilization, as the dominant civilization of the globe.

As the West grapples with its internal struggles, the Muslim World is undergoing a transformational change. Since the destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, the Islamic Ummah has been going through an existential intellectual and political struggle, a struggle which colonialism imposed upon it. Does it stick to its historic roots, as the torchbearer of the great Islamic civilization, and hence return to its original status as a single Ummah organized under a single State governed by Islamic law, led by a Khaleefah, who manages her affairs? Or does the Muslim World embrace the Western civilization and its culture and accept the division of Muslim people into new nation states, organized by secular laws and constitutions and ruled by governance principles derived from the Western civilization?

This struggle has defined the internal politics and intellectual trajectory of the Muslim World, since the destruction of the Ottoman Caliphate. And it's a struggle which is now culminating in an Islamic revival, which is disputed only by the most unaware. This has been a painful struggle for the Muslim World for during this period the Ummah lost agency over its affairs and was subjected to direct and indirect colonial rule. However, this period gave the Muslim people an advantage over other nations, because the Muslim World was able to measure intellectually the difference between the Islamic civilization which they loved and admired but had weakened in connection to and understanding of, and a Western civilization which was imposed upon them by Western colonialists. This process refined the Ummah's own understanding of Islamic as well as Western civilization and, through a very deep and intense ideological struggle, the Ummah rejected the Western civilization and has returned to its conviction of adopting the Islamic civilization as the only source of organizing its affairs. This puts the Islamic Ummah in the unique position of providing an alternative to the Western civilization, which is in serious crisis not just in the Western World but around the globe, as the Islamic Ummah has consciously walked the path of choosing between the better of the two civilizations.

The Ummah now struggles for and awaits the return of its state, the Khilafah on the method of the Prophethood (saw). The return of the Islamic State will bring the Islamic civilization back to life, thus providing the world an alternative to the declining Western civilization which is increasingly losing confidence back home and around the globe.

﴿يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ كَثِيرًا مِمَّا كُنْتُمْ تُخْفُونَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ \* يَهْدِي بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾

**“O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger making clear to you much of what you used to conceal of the Scripture and overlooking much. There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book. By which Allah guides those who pursue His pleasure to the ways of peace and brings them out from darkneses into the light, by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.”** [Surah al-Maida 5:15-16]

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by  
Engineer Moez – Pakistan**