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The Sorcerer's Apprentice:

Liberalism, Ideology and Religion in World Politics

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Abstract

Despite repeated announcements of the end of ideology and the demise of religion during the 20th century, both play a crucial role in world politics today. This disjuncture between theoretical expectations and historical developments has its roots in conventional conceptions of ideology. While the latter grasp the *representative* nature of ideology as an expression of historical forces and political interests, they miss its *constitutive* role for modern politics. Based on an analysis of its historical origins and political implications, this article develops a new conception of ideology which accounts for the resilience and historical dynamics of ideological struggle. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, I show, liberalism has called ideology into being but lost control of its own creation.

Keywords: ideology, religion, liberalism, world order, 20th century

Herr, die Not ist groß! Die ich rief, die Geister, werd ich nun nicht los.¹

Johann Wolfgang Goethe

In Goethe's famous poem, the sorcerer's apprentice summons spirits he cannot control - and each attempt to stop them multiplies their powers. And so it appears to be with ideology and religion. Every pronouncement of the end of ideology or the demise of religion seems to breathe new life into ideological or religious struggle.

In 1960, Daniel Bell declared 'the end of ideology'.² In developed Western societies, he argued, social democracy had resolved the problems generated by the industrial revolution which had given rise to the great 19th century ideologies - liberalism, Marxism, conservatism - and thus removed the basis for ideological struggles. But as soon as Bell made this announcement, the 1960s erupted into intensive ideological struggles: the civil rights movement in America, the student revolution in Europe, the Prague Spring in the Eastern Bloc, and a communist turn in national liberation movements and newly independent states in the Third World.

Despite this sobering experience, in 1998 Francis Fukuyama once more proclaimed 'the end of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government'.³ Like Bell, Fukuyama argued that liberalism had triumphed over its fascist and communist competitors because it was

capable of resolving all 'fundamental contradictions' within society - including religion.⁴ Again, however, this proclamation was quickly followed by the rise of explicitly antiliberal movements on the left and on the right all over the world and revealed deep divisions - 'fundamental contradictions' - within core liberal states themselves.

Religion, too, defied similar predictions. While the widely influential secularization thesis held that the modernization of society would lead to the gradual demise of religion, today its revival in all parts of the world has given rise to debates about a postsecular society.⁵ This liberal conception of ideology and religion as a reflection of social and political tensions destined to be resolved in the course of historical development thus repeatedly misjudged their resilience.

But realists did not fare much better. Seton-Watson held 50 years ago that world politics was driven by 'conventional state interest' and the intense ideological struggles of the interwar period were simply the result of the democratization of politics, and hence the need of professional politicians 'to explain politics in terms of simple moral issues', in a 'language easily intelligible' to the masses.⁶ State interest defined in terms of power was used to explain both the Cold War and its end, with ideology playing a secondary role.⁷ And yet, radical changes in the professed state interests of Britain and the United States (US) today seem to have been triggered by shifts in the dominant ideology - rather than the other way around.

In both cases, ideology and religion are thus understood as reflections or expressions of underlying historical forces and political interests. These conceptions appear to miss, however, their role in constituting state interests and misjudge the dynamic rise, fall and revival of their historical development. Addressing these shortcomings in two steps, I will first provide an historical account of the role of ideology and religion in world politics between 1919 and 2019. It shows that while reflecting historical developments and political interests, ideology and religion also systematically constitute these forces and interests. In order to recover this constitutive dimension, I will then provide an analysis of the origins of the concept of ideology and its theoretical and political implications. Designed to justify the power of liberal forces, the concept of ideology provided a new epistemological basis for modern politics - forcing political struggle onto the ideological battlefield and (re)constituting political actors, principles, practices, and institutions, including religion. Unlike conventional approaches, the article concludes, this conception of ideology does account for its historical dynamics.

Ideological politics 1919 - 2019

Ideology and religion have played a pervasive and varied role in world politics over the past 100 years. Tracing this role confirms the conventional claims that ideology and religion reflect social and political developments and serve to justify state interests. But it also

shows that those developments and interests were themselves systematically constituted by ideologies and religions.

The end of the First World War ushered in a period of intense ideological struggles, reflecting, as liberals hold, tensions and contradictions within and between societies: economic and social instability, political fragmentation, tensions between colonial powers and colonized populations as well as between the winners and the losers of the war. Yet while these tensions were indeed reflected in ideological fragmentation and struggle, they were also squarely attributed to liberal domestic and international policies. And it was the opposition to liberalism that constituted, shaped and strengthened competing political ideologies.

Even before the war ended, revolution broke out in Russia and revolutionary movements and upheavals followed all over Europe as well as in Latin America, India, Indonesia, Turkey and China.⁸ The rise of communist and socialist parties reflected the economic hardships following the war. But their political aim was to replace the liberal capitalist order which was held responsible for both with a communist one.

Similarly, conservative and religious forces reflected concerns about political instability and fragmentation. Blaming liberalism for these developments, they pursued the resurrection of traditional political

institutions and religious moral and social values instead. Fascism, too, reflected the concerns of demobilized soldiers who saw little chance of reintegration into an economically and politically unstable society. Fiercely antiliberal and anticommunist, fascism sought to replace the fragmented liberal political order with a strong populist - often xenophobic and racist - nation.⁹

Concerned with the loss of religious moral and social values, in Europe religious forces worked largely in and through conservative movements and parties. In the colonies, the suppression of these values was blamed on the liberal colonizers and religious forces contributed to broad based anti-imperialist movements seeking to establish political independence and self-determination.

While each of these political movements responded to a different problem and offered different solutions, all of them were shaped by their opposition to liberalism. And this common ground also provided the basis for temporary cooperations between otherwise radically different ideologies: between communism and fascism in Germany, between conservatism, religious forces and fascism in Spain, and between communism, conservatism, and religion in anti-imperialist movements.

These ideologies, as realists correctly argue, were used to justify particular state interests and policies. In addition, however, their

models of social and political organization were based on universalist claims about the nature of society which translated into transnational and international cooperation and conflict. Communists expected the world revolution and established the Comintern in order to collaborate with (and dictate the strategies of) communist parties and movements around the world. Anti-imperialist movements, including formally independent states like China and many Latin American countries as well as African Americans, organized regular pan-African and pan-Asian conferences.¹⁰ The right wing in the Spanish civil war received massive support from conservative and fascist movements, just as the left did from communist and socialist ones. Liberals cooperated in establishing the League of Nations, opposed communism through intervention in the Russian civil war and the propagation of national self-determination in Europe, and fought anti-imperialism in the colonies themselves as well as through the mandate system of the League of Nations.

Moreover, in many cases ideological loyalty trumped loyalty to the nation. Communist parties followed Comintern policies even if they were not in the national interest; fascists found sympathizers and (later) collaborators in other countries; 'members of each people fought on both sides';¹¹ liberals refused to enter an alliance with communist Russia against Nazi Germany on ideological, not national, grounds; and even in colonies threatened by Japanese imperialism, the latter found support on account of its anti-Western nature.¹²

If national interest nevertheless seemed to play a tremendously important role in these ideological struggles throughout the interwar period, it was because none of these ideologies was able to establish its hegemony beyond particular states: communists came to power in Russia, conservatives in Spain, fascists in Italy and later in Germany; liberals remained in power in Britain and France and the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonies gained strength but without yet leading to independence.

These ideologies were thus forced to realize their model of society within particular national contexts: from the abolition of private property and the establishment of Soviet councils in the Soviet Union (USSR) through the Hitler Youth and the introduction of racist laws in Nazi Germany, the (re)establishment of village councils and handspinning in India, the organization of populist working classes in Latin America, to the introduction of democracy and welfare in Britain. And by remodeling particular societies, these ideologies also reconstituted national interests. Hence, the Stalinist doctrine of 'socialism in one country' was only developed in response to the failure of communist revolutions elsewhere - for the purpose of defending communism. Similarly, when the Nazis attempted to establish a racially pure Third Reich, first at home and then in occupied territories abroad, they were not realizing a German national interest but rather their fascist ideology through the power of the

German state. And when liberal states introduced welfare policies and democracy or propagated the principle of national self-determination - policies not previously associated with their national interests - they were defending a weakened liberalism against the threat of communism and anti-imperialism. Though such policies served national interests, those interests were themselves the product of ideology.

Once particular ideologies had consolidated their power in different states, an uneasy settlement between nation states as well as between colonial powers and colonies characterized world politics in the 1920s. Yet again, it was the failure of the liberal capitalist world economy in the form of the Great Depression that strengthened competing ideologies and brought the Nazis to power in Germany. They first remodeled domestic society and then expanded through annexation and military aggression, implementing their ideological vision abroad. This exercise of power, however, fuelled resistance among liberals and communists who, eventually, bracketed their enmity and fought the axis powers together. Thus, it was the attempt to realize the fascist ideology internationally that led to its comprehensive defeat in the Second World War and strengthened liberalism, communism and anti-imperialism.

Ideology and religion thus pervaded world politics between 1919 and 1945. Yet, while these ideologies certainly reflected existing tensions

and were used to justify state policies, such conceptions fail to account for the fact that these tensions and interests were themselves ideologically constituted. It was the liberal ideology that was held responsible for the war and its consequences and against which all other ideologies mobilized. Wherever an ideology came to power, it transformed society and the state in its own image - and thus constituted the very state interests that were subsequently justified in ideological terms. Moreover, none of these ideologies was restricted to a particular national context; all of them shaped transnational and international cooperation and conflict. This productive role of ideology and religion continues throughout the Cold and post-Cold War periods. Tracing this development, moreover, provides valuable insights into the historical dynamics of their change, rise and fall.

The ideologies that survived, strengthened by the Second World War, shaped the very structure of world politics during the Cold War: a liberal First World, a communist Second World, and an anti-imperialist Third World. And in each case, it was the exercise of ideological power that generated resistance, constituted new ideologies and ultimately led to the dissolution of the Third World, the implosion of the Second World and the constitution of a liberal world order.

While the defeat of fascism deprived liberalism and communism of their common enemy and revived the struggle between them, both had experienced an existential threat which was reflected in post-War

ideological adjustments. Liberals recognized that their laissez-faire economic policies had played a crucial role in creating inequality and thus directly strengthened their communist and fascist competitors. At the same time, welfare policies, the New Deal and wartime economics had all demonstrated the success of government regulation of the economy. Liberalism thus adopted social democratic forms of redistribution, the welfare state, and Keynesian economics.¹³

Communists, meanwhile, recognized that revolutions in developed states were not imminent and that their temporary collaboration with fascism had put their survival at risk. Hence, communists now argued that the revolution could not be exported but had to wait until capitalism in the West broke down under its own contradictions and non-European societies had reached the necessary level of economic and political development. Until that time, the USSR had to defend socialism in one state.

These revised ideologies were then systematically translated into domestic and international policies - shaping the societies in their respective sphere of influence. This involved the consolidation of liberal capitalist democracies in the West - through the Marshall plan and the drafting of liberal constitutions for Germany and Japan as well as the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions designed to institutionalize a liberal capitalist world economy. Confronting this liberal First World in the West, the USSR established a communist

Second World in the East. It socialized the economy and installed governments led by communist parties. It countered the Bretton Woods institutions with the establishment of Comecon. The public sphere in both camps was fed with anti-communist and anti-capitalist propaganda respectively. And both sides integrated and strengthened their respective sphere of influence with military alliances - the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact.

Both, moreover, understood themselves as competing concepts of a universally valid modernity which needed to be extended to the Third World 'to save the natives from ignorance, filth and the consequences of their own actions'.¹⁴ The Third World thus became the most important battlefield in this ideological stand-off with ideological conceptions shaping the Third World policies of the US and the USSR.

On the liberal side, modernization theories and policies were designed to integrate newly independent states into the liberal camp through economic aid and, where necessary, military intervention.¹⁵ But fearing the spread of communism, the US consistently misinterpreted any deviation of Third World policies from its own model of modernization as an advance of communist influence - triggering a spate of US interventions: in Korea, China, Cuba, Lebanon, Congo, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Iran and eventually Vietnam. This record of interventions in conjunction with the failure of US economic policies to lift Third World states out of poverty

eventually undermined liberal influence, provided the motivation for Third World cooperation, and pushed even anti-communist regimes to ask for military aid from the USSR.¹⁶

Ironically, the ideological approach of the USSR did not fare much better. Convinced that no country outside Europe was developed enough to undergo a socialist revolution, it failed to provide support for communist movements in the Third World and thus squandered the initial sympathies of independence movements. By the time of Stalin's death, the USSR had almost entirely lost its standing in the Third World.¹⁷

In the Third World, meanwhile, anti-imperialist movements largely fighting against liberal colonial powers - Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and the USA - initially either tended towards the left or drew on native histories and religions. Both communists and nationalists, however, were interested in modernization and economic and technological advance along Western lines. Almost all their leaders were Western educated modernizers¹⁸ trying to establish a modern nation state. Yet, in pursuit of this goal Third World leaders had to contend with the legacies of colonialism: warped domestic economies, an international economic order designed to serve the interests of the former colonial powers, rigid stratification and racism as well as borders that cut across ethnic and religious lines.

In this context, religion often played a crucial role in nation- and statebuilding policies. In some cases, like Sri Lanka, Buddhism provided the basis for nationbuilding, thus marginalizing the Hindu minority and eventually leading to a brutal 30 year civil war. In other cases, like India, it led to separation and the constitution of two independent states and ongoing conflicts between India and Pakistan. In yet other cases like Turkey, China, or Guinea, modernizing elites viciously suppressed religion as a barrier to national integration and a modern secular state.¹⁹ That Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist and Prime Minister Bandaranaike by a Buddhist monk was thus no accident.

The consolidation of the Third World as a meaningful political concept reflected these common challenges and was fuelled by a string of US interventions that smacked of a continuation of imperialism. Third World solidarity and cooperation developed. At the Bandung conference, principles of non-alignment were formulated and laid the foundations for economic cooperation that would later lead to the establishment of OPEC.²⁰

Just as during the interwar period, each of these ideologies reflected particular social and political interests and were used to justify policies. But all of them also shaped domestic and international policies thus constituting political actors from states and international organizations to the First, Second, and Third Worlds - and hence the

very structure of the international system. Moreover, all of them defined themselves in opposition to other ideologies underpinning the struggle between them. Crucially, however, their demise in the course of the 1960s was not triggered by competing ideologies from without but rather by internal resistance. In the Third World, internal oppression, the failure of economic and technological development, ongoing imperialism and the Sino-Indian war undermined the modernizing ideologies of the first generation of Third World leaders and the solidarity of the non-aligned movement.²¹ In the liberal camp, it was racism, the suppression of communist and socialist political movements (McCarthyism), and the power politics of the Vietnam war that led to the civil rights movement in the US; ongoing British rule in Northern Ireland that led to the Troubles; the continuing influence of Nazis and the suppression of communist parties in West Germany that fed the student revolution of 1968. And in Eastern Europe, dissatisfaction with the Soviet model generated competing movements in the Prague Spring, Poland and Yugoslavia. Contra Bell, then, the consolidation of ideological power did not indicate the end of ideology but triggered a revival of ideological struggle in all three cases.

These challenges were again reflected in ideological shifts. Inspired by the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions, anti-imperialist movements in Southern Africa moved towards the left and Third World solidarity now focused on economic issues like the New International Economic Order (NIEO).²² After the death of Stalin, the Soviet ideology shifted

away from its rigid refusal to support Third World independence movements and began to provide training, weapons and supplies.²³ And in the West itself, 1968 led to a cultural revolution highly critical of liberalism's paternalist domestic and international policies.

Yet, while the Soviets now accepted the possibility of socialist development in the Third World, they nevertheless assumed that it had to follow the Soviet trajectory. Their advisers thus rigidly tried to impose their own vision in radically different circumstances - and were in response regularly ignored by their local allies: in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Yemen, Afghanistan.²⁴ Unable to conceive left-leaning movements in the Third World as the expression of local political forces and misinterpreting Soviet support as an aggressive export of communism, the US now distinguished between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. While the former were seen as capable of internal reform, the latter required outside intervention.²⁵ Reagan thus launched a new counter-offensive against Soviet influence in the Third World which, however, following the Vietnam disaster, took the form of supporting local, often brutal, counter-revolutionary movements and dictators: in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Grenada, Afghanistan.

By the end of the 1970s, both communist and capitalist modernization programs in the Third World had largely failed and American interventions as well as Soviet military aggression in

Afghanistan undermined the standing of liberalism and communism. These failures in conjunction with the often brutal suppression of religion on the part of modernizing elites led to a revival of religious forces - most prominently in the Iranian Revolution. This ascendance of religion, however, did not indicate a return to the traditional clergy which Khomeini fought as backward, stupid, pretentious, and reactionary.²⁶ Instead, religion provided an alternative Third World centered basis for development.

This revival of religion was neither restricted to Islam nor to the Third World. It found expression in the Afghan mujaheddin and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, as well as Hindu nationalism in India, the Yugoslav wars in Europe and is today reflected in the Turkish government, the brutal Buddhist assault on Muslims in Myanmar and the pursuit of a 'Christian democracy' in Hungary.²⁷

In the West, meanwhile, the embedded liberalism of the post-war period was dismantled and the Bretton Woods institutions reoriented along monetarist and market ideology lines. These neoliberal economic policies led to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and conditionality in the Third World and the end of the social democratic version of liberalism in the West. In the East, the Soviet economic system imploded and undermined the standing of the communist ideology for some time to come. 'By the end of the 1980s the Third World had ceased to exist as a meaningful political or economic

concept²⁸ and the Second World all but disappeared - leaving behind a globalized liberal world order.

Yet again, liberalism's largely uncontested power did not prove, as Fukuyama argued, that its 'theoretical truth is absolute and could not be improved upon'.²⁹ On the contrary, it was precisely the exercise of this liberal power that generated resistance and strengthened competing ideologies. The belief that now at last the liberal vision could be realized worldwide³⁰ underpinned foreign policies designed to export liberal principles, practices and institutions. Capitalism was rolled out to the former communist countries in East Central Europe and Russia, as well as being imposed, via conditionality, on Third World countries. The welfare state was further dismantled in the Western world and the WTO established to further the liberalization of the capitalist world economy. Democracy was promoted through aid, diplomatic and economic pressure and, in extreme cases, military intervention. It also formed a crucial part of peacebuilding operations.³¹ Respect for human rights was pursued through the development of humanitarian law and the establishment of the ICC as well as through humanitarian interventions.³² The European Union (EU) and NATO expanded eastward - eventually right up to the Russian border.

But instead of delivering general economic prosperity, the introduction of market economies in the East and the global South led to

increasing inequality. The dismantling of the welfare state had the same result in Western societies. And the liberalization of the world economy eventually culminated in the global financial crisis of 2008. Democracy promotion most commonly led to the emergence of 'illiberal' or 'authoritarian' democracies.³³ Instead of appeasing domestic conflict, the introduction of democracy in civil war situations often exacerbated it.³⁴ And humanitarian interventions failed to prevent massive human rights violations - for example in Somalia, Bosnia, Libya.³⁵ Liberal assumptions, in short, were not confirmed by these developments.³⁶

Crucially, however, it was the liberal belief that still-existing ideological competitors were destined for the dustbin of history and one therefore did not have to pay attention to any remaining 'crackpot messiahs'³⁷ - whether in Russia or the global South - that underpinned the pursuit of these liberal foreign policies with arrogance and hubris.³⁸ It blinded liberal forces to the fact that the exercise of power as such - represented in open propagation of a new imperialism during the 1990s³⁹ - would generate resistance and fuel old as well as constitute new competing ideologies.

For the first time in a long while, Third World states - led by the economically successful BRICs - cooperated in their resistance to further economic globalisation in the Doha Round. African states began to withdraw their support from the ICC, citing racist bias.

Russia pursued openly antiliberal domestic and international policies. Antiliberal populist forces - of the right and the left - came to power in Venezuela, India and Turkey. Older religious ideologies were transformed into transnational activist groups⁴⁰ - explicitly fighting liberal interference in Middle Eastern politics - and taking this fight successfully into the heart of liberal, African and Asian states, from New York through Madrid and Mali to Indonesia. And in liberal states themselves, antiliberal populist forces on the right and on the left gradually increased their influence and eventually gained power in America and dictating British domestic and foreign policies since the Brexit referendum. These forces are also on the rise in other liberal states and constitute a serious threat to the future of the EU. For the time being, therefore, this revival of ideological struggle has put an end to the liberal world order.

Taking stock of the role of ideology and religion in world politics over the past 100 years highlights that conventional conceptions tend to overlook their productive role: ideologies and religion produce the very tensions and contradictions they subsequently come to reflect, and they constitute the very actors, interests, and policies they subsequently justify. Most importantly, however, this failure to recognize the constitutive role of ideology and religion underpins systematic misjudgements of their historical dynamics. A more accurate assessment of the role of ideology and religion in world

politics thus requires a reconceptualization that accounts not just for their representative but also for their productive functions.

Origins and logic of ideology

The concept of ideology provides an ideal starting point for the analysis of its productive functions because (unlike religion, for example) we can pinpoint its historical origins. This section thus investigates the historical origins of the concept of ideology and provides an analysis of its theoretical and political implications.

The term ideology was invented by a group of liberal thinkers who, in the context of the French Revolution, were fighting against the power of the Church on the one hand and the terror of the revolutionary mob on the other. They argued that ideas were ultimately rooted in material foundations. This epistemological claim allowed the *idéologues*, scholars of the *logic* or science of *ideas*, to expose religious thought as prejudice and superstition serving the particular interests of a corrupt clergy - in contrast to liberal principles like individual freedom, private property, constitutional government and free markets that were derived from a proper empirical grasp of the nature of society and thus provided the basis for a universally valid political order.⁴¹

The epistemological claim that ideas are ultimately rooted in physical nature and not derived from God or authoritative scriptures was in

itself not new but drew on prior arguments developed, for example, by Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, and Descartes.⁴² But when liberal forces won this struggle and ended up in political power, they did not just replace particular political actors and projects in power. They replaced the epistemic basis of political power itself - which was not any longer justified with reference to God's law but rather by an accurate representation and realization of the nature of society - with radical implications.

For once political power is justified with reference to a correct grasp of the nature of society itself, it can only be contested by driving a wedge between this model of society and the reigning political principles, practices, institutions, and actors. Political discontents, in other words, have to show that the dominant political organization does not 'fit' the needs and interests of society, and must propagate an alternative conception of society and political order with a better 'fit' - that is, an alternative ideology. By justifying their power with reference to the epistemological claim embedded within ideology, liberals redefined the 'playing field' upon which all politics operates - including liberal politics itself.

The theoretical implications of this epistemological shift are borne out by the subsequent development of the term ideology itself. Turning the concept of ideology against its liberal progenitors, Marx argued that the liberal model of society was not universally valid but served the

particular interests of the bourgeoisie in capitalist relations of production.⁴³ Challenging this liberal power thus required the development of an alternative, in this case communist, model of society. Instead of describing the study of ideas, ideology now denoted a set of ideas - a world view - designed to justify a particular social and political order.

In this pejorative sense, ideology was subsequently widely used as a political weapon and characterized political discourse. This diffusion led to the point, as Karl Mannheim argued, where it was 'no longer possible for one point of view and interpretation to assail all others as ideological without itself being placed in the position of having to meet that challenge'.⁴⁴ Marxist, socialist, or communist positions were just as ideological as their liberal, conservative, or fascist counterparts.

The claim that ideas are rooted in material contexts ultimately implied that all ideas have such roots and could be attacked on those grounds. Consequently, as Žižek argues, claims to the end of ideology express the height of ideological fantasy - regarding other positions as ideological and one's own as beyond politics.⁴⁵ The epistemological claim underpinning the concept of ideology thus implies that there can be no non-ideological politics. It turns politics per se into ideological struggle.

Politically, this epistemological shift had four crucial implications.

First, ideological power shapes political practices and institutions. The justification of power with reference to an empirically correct model of society drives the dominant forces to realize that model, to establish that 'fit' between their claims about society and the conditions on the ground. Hence, where liberal forces moved into the centre of politics in the course of the 19th century, they established constitutional government, the rule of law, protection of private property, voting rights for property owners, universal primary education, modern research Universities - in short, the modern nation state and with it that state's national interest. And, as we have seen in the previous section, 20th century ideologies followed the same logic wherever they came to power: protecting private property or socializing it, suppressing religion or introducing religious laws, expanding citizenship rights or excluding races, sexes, religions, ethnicities. The very states whose interests Seton-Watson juxtaposed to ideology were thus themselves the product of ideology.⁴⁶

Secondly, the ideological justification of power transforms traditional political forces into ideologies and constitutes new ideologies. While political power during the *ancien regime* was justified with reference to the grace of God, conservatives now argued that authority and hierarchy were in line with the organic nature of society and thus called for the *conservation* of traditional institutions like monarchy, religion, parliamentary government and property rights. And these goals were now pursued through conservative political parties.⁴⁷

Religion, too, was fundamentally transformed in this process. By replacing religious thought as the epistemological basis of social and political power, liberal ideology separated 'lived religion as practiced by everyday individuals and groups'⁴⁸ from religion as the basis of political power. Prior to the 19th century, the term religion was barely used in European discourses. Instead, 'the broad idea of moral values, traditional customs, and spiritual sensibility' underpinning the social and political order were captured by terms like 'tradition', 'community', and 'faith' while the distinction between 'religion' and 'secularity' described different kinds of clergy within the Church. This relative absence of the term 'religion' indicates its pervasive and foundational role in society while the *modern* concept of religion in the narrow sense of religious institutions and beliefs *in contrast* to secular social values is the result of the separation of religious thought from political power.⁴⁹

But this expulsion of religion from political power did not, as the secularization thesis holds, lead to a clear separation of secularism and religion. Instead, by replacing faith as the epistemological basis of political power, ideologies took on decidedly religious functions. The French revolutionaries propagated the 'religion of reason' and designed appropriate rituals. Ideologies provide the social and political order with its *raison d'être* and, just like religion, offer 'doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experience, and social organization'.⁵⁰ Religion,

meanwhile, was now forced to pursue political power like other ideologies - by offering a competing model of society. The shifting power relations between liberal ideology and religion thus transformed the former into political theology and the latter into theological politics.⁵¹

In Europe during the 19th century, this *modern* form of religion fought liberal power largely through conservative political parties. 'Christian' parties were active in many countries throughout the 20th century and today the Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban explicitly aims to establish 'an old-school Christian democracy' despite the fact that Hungary is one of the least religious countries in Europe.⁵² In the colonies, religious forces contributed to anti-imperialist independence movements and subsequently often played a crucial role in nationbuilding: from Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka and Wahhabism in Saudi Arabi to the current rise of Hindu nationalism in India, Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar, and the Islamic State. And with the ascent of transnational forms of power in the context of globalization, religious ideologies, too, take on transnational forms of organization and operation - prominently in the case of Al Qaeda. Like other ideologies, then, in the modern context religious forces constitute political parties, states, militias, terrorist groups and shape domestic and international policies. And like other ideologies, they do not only reflect the existence of religious populations but often aim to produce them - whether in Khomeini's Iran or Orban's Hungary. While

the lived religion practiced by individuals and groups is thus not necessarily linked to political projects, understanding religious political forces as ideologies accounts for the weaknesses of the secularization thesis: the continuing public role of religion even in utterly modern states like America and the dynamics of its historical rise and fall in response to other ideologies.

The ideological justification of power, however, does not just transform traditional political forces into ideologies, it also constitutes new ones. The liberal pursuit of industrialization and its protection of private property led to mass migration from the countryside into towns, ruthless exploitation and poverty that resulted in widespread social and political upheaval culminating in the revolutions of 1848. This was the context in which Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* - highlighting the disjuncture between liberal rule and the conditions on the ground, and developing an alternative communist ideology with the aim to mobilize, integrate and guide political action against the bourgeoisie. Communism was thus a direct product of the dominant liberal ideology and developed throughout the 20th century in response to the rise and fall of liberalism.

Third, ideological justification of power is based on a universally valid model of society and therefore generates expansionist tendencies. Theoretically, the liberal model of society was based on empirical 'evidence' about the state of nature derived from indigenous societies

in the context of the colonization of America.⁵³ And politically, these epistemological claims were used to justify liberal colonialism. Political rule, James Mill argued, had to be based on 'the most profound knowledge of the laws of human nature' and 'the most perfect comprehension of the principles of human society' - and since such knowledge was held by the British and violated by Hinduism, it was the British who had to exercise political rule in India.⁵⁴ Throughout the 19th century European imperialism was justified largely in liberal terms⁵⁵ and in the process stimulated alternative anti-imperialist ideologies in the colonies.⁵⁶ Similar arguments underpinned the justification of the mandate system, modernization policies and the entire gamut of interventions - economic (conditionality), political (peacebuilding, statebuilding), normative (humanitarian) - in the global South after 1989.

Finally, and crucially, once unleashed, ideological politics takes on a life of its own. While political power may be justified in terms of its alignment with the nature of society as such, the exercise of this power immediately contradicts that claim: where that power has to be imposed, it highlights a gap between the natural development of society and political rule. The exercise of ideologically constituted power thus feeds resistance and strengthens competing ideologies, breathing new life into ideological struggle. It led, in the 19th century, to the constitution of communism, conservatism, anti-imperialism and religious ideologies designed to fight liberalism - followed in the

20th century by fascism. Similarly, the exercise of communist power during the Cold War led to the Prague Spring, that of secular anti-imperialists to the revival of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic nationalism, and the exercise of liberal power today to the revival of communism, fascism and religious ideologies. In direct contradiction to conventional assumptions, the exercise of ideological power does not signify its alignment with historical forces and the end of ideological struggle⁵⁷ but serves to invigorate it.

By the end of the 19th century, liberal forces had managed to establish themselves in power in most European states. Capitalist interests were prominently represented in government and had created a world market in which Britain enforced free trade. Almost all non-European territories had been integrated into liberal empires. And liberal values like distrust of dictatorship, a commitment to constitutional government, the rule of law and citizenship rights as well as the belief in reason, public debate, education, science were widely taken for granted. ⁵⁸ Economic interdependence and international cooperation appeared to be so successful that Norman Angell argued war had become irrational.⁵⁹ But it was precisely that power and its worldwide exercise that made war seem attractive to those who did not wield it, bringing down the first liberal world order in the trenches of the First World War. And it is the second liberal world order, arising from the end of the Cold War, that has generated the revival of communist, conservative, religious, and fascist ideologies

today.

Conclusion

Ideology, in sum, plays such a pervasive role because it provides the universal grammar of politics in a liberal epoch. Ever since liberal forces invented the concept of ideology and used its epistemological claim to justify their exercise of power, politics itself has taken the form of ideological struggle - turning traditional belief systems, including religion, into competing political programs, most obviously in the form of party politics.⁶⁰ Communism, conservatism, anti-imperialism, fascism and religious ideologies were all formulated in response and opposition to liberal power. And all of them attempt to realize their model of society once in power: constituting political actors, interests, institutions and policies. Yet this very act of implementing ideological programs generates resistance and strengthens competing ideologies. Ideological politics thus reproduces itself.

This constitutive dimension of ideology for modern politics explains the dynamics of the rise, fall, and revival of ideological struggle. And it is the failure to grasp this dimension that underpins the frequent misinterpretations by liberal and realist writers. The 'end of ideology' thesis can be substantiated by historical developments only if those developments are not themselves the product of ideological politics. And state (or other) interests can be contrasted with ideological

justifications only if they are not themselves the product of ideological politics. In fact, however, the revival of antiliberal ideologies today is the product of the liberal world order.

Liberalism is thus quite literally the mother of all ideologies. But having unleashed the spirit of ideological politics, the latter develops in accordance with its own internal logic. Not only has liberalism, like the sorcerer's apprentice, lost control of its own creation; every attempt to stop it provides fuel for competing ideologies.

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