

## The Rockets that Explode History

Editorial Collective<sup>1</sup>

*“We are all in sacrifice for Quds, death is beautiful for the sake of Quds. Yes, wallah, alhamdulillah, and if all my children died for the sake of Quds it won’t be a problem for me. This is Quds, not something easy. It’s not a house, a house can be replaced. But Quds is the place where the Prophet (SAWS) came on a journey to it, from where can [we] replace it? We Palestinians are always like this [...] And, if there comes a hundred million wars, it will not break our determination or will. We will continue to stand firm and this land is ours and still the price of what we face is nothing, and we are ready to pay more! Alhamdulillah rabbi-l-amin.” - a Palestinian mother*

*“Indeed our words will remain lifeless, barren, devoid of any passion, until we die as a result of these words, whereupon our words will suddenly spring to life and live amongst the hearts that are dead, bringing them to life as well.” - [Sayyid Qutb](#)*

Palestinians have once again made a historic stand against the renewed attack by [Israeli colonial settlers](#) and their occupation security forces. The heavily armed settler army attacking praying worshippers inside al-Aqsa were met by Palestinians creating makeshift barricades to keep the military out of the holy mosque. These initial scenes of several hundred Palestinians trapped inside al-Aqsa, building obstacles (with chairs and tables from the mosque against one of the best armed militaries in the world), while hosting Quran study circles and children completing their schoolwork, have been met with expanding waves of resistance from the rest of Palestine. Palestinians in the larger occupied West Bank and Gaza have been joined by Palestinians living inside Israel (Historic Palestine ‘48) who have launched protests unprecedented since the 1947-48 War. In the process they have unified not only the Palestinians separated across colonially demarcated borders inside the occupied whole of Palestine but also its diaspora, as well as the Muslim *umma*, and peoples across the world to struggle in a renewed uprising. Palestinians chanting *Allahu Akbar*, rushing to

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Jordan and Lebanon's borders, and tearing down barbed wire to enter Palestine have demonstrated a material process of undoing borders in realtime that challenges sovereign symbolic authority, as well as calls into question the very articulation of secular nation-statehood while manifesting the promise of Palestinian Return. The Israelis and the Biden Administration have been on the [defensive](#) in the global media, as Israeli police, Zionist mobs of the [Jewish Power](#) (Otzma Yehudit) organization, settler litigation in the courts, and IDF jets rain down destruction on Palestinians once again. Inside Israel proper, Israeli mobs have attacked Palestinians indiscriminately, carrying out lynchings caught on national television. The eruption of racist attacks and brutal beatings by Israeli youth has become an increasingly alarming spectacle, not to mention the weekly massacre of Gazans at the protests of the Israeli blockade of Gaza, beginning on March 30, 2018, called the [Great March of Return](#), which continued until December of 2019, with 266 Palestinians killed, including 46 children, with 36,100 injuries, including 8800 children wounded.

The Israelis provoked this most recent wave of uprising by attempting another round of [displacing Palestinians](#) from their homes. Israeli District Court rulings approved the [confiscation](#) of the homes of 13 families (70 people) in the [Sheikh Jarrah](#) neighborhood (a Palestinian neighborhood since at least 1865). The audacious campaign by settlers to evict Palestinians from this area since 2001, as well as racist processions in the [Muslim quarter](#) of the Old City in previous weeks, ignited a mass rebellion among thousands of residents there, culminating in huge crowds at al-Aqsa Masjid, where Israeli police attacked worshippers with weapons from May 7 to May 11. These attacks by Israel occurred during the holy month of Ramadan, in one of the holiest sites of Islam, where unarmed, kneeling, praying worshippers

were attacked as enemy combatants. Police entered the mosque and fired flash bang grenades and shot tear gas at Muslims at prayer and those who confronted the police.<sup>2</sup>

[Hamas](#)  began firing rockets into Israel on May 10 in response to the attack on al-Aqsa.

Israeli attacks on Gaza have continued through May 19. Over [248 Palestinians](#) (with more than 100 women and children) have been killed, as well as 12 Israelis in the ongoing colonial violence. 132 Palestinian buildings have been destroyed and 631 Palestinian commercial and housing units have been rendered uninhabitable. 6000 Palestinians have been wounded and 60,000 more have been displaced. Despite the combined military assault of United States backed Israeli weapons, the principled resistance from Gaza forced the United States, the United Nations Security Council, the Arab League, and European states to pressure Israel to agree to a cease fire. That ceasefire was violated by Israel very shortly after in a new attack on al-Aqsa on May 21, when Palestinians celebrating the victory of the ceasefire with sweets in the mosque were again attacked by the Zionist forces. In much of the Islamic world and particularly in Gaza the ceasefire has been accepted as a relative [victory for Hamas](#) and the Palestinian people with full understanding that no lasting "peace" or "ceasefire" of hostility can be achieved on stolen land and until the full dismantling of Israel. The Palestinian resistance has demonstrated that the struggle will continue until the complete overhaul of the colonial apparatus and the absolute [substitution of one species by another](#).

Simultaneously the limits of international negotiations and interventions in holding Israel "accountable" were made apparent for all to see.<sup>3</sup> Statements made by the political and military leaders of Hamas indicate preparedness for further retaliation if needed. Yehyieh

Sinwar most recently expressed [“optimism about reaching a prisoner exchange with Israel.”](#) which many analysts consider a diplomatic victory for the Islamists.

This latest manifestation of [colonial violence](#) has been ignited by Israeli settlers' legal claims and District Court rulings approving the forced displacement of Palestinian residents in areas in the Shimon HaTzadik neighborhood within Sheikh Jarrah.<sup>4</sup> After the 1947-48 War, in 1954-56, twenty-eight Palestinian refugee families from Jaffa and Haifa were allowed by the Jordanian Government and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to live in houses in the formerly Jewish area (the Karm al-Jaouni) around the tomb of [Shimon HaTzadik](#) (a 3rd century BCE Jewish rabbi and political leader). During the war, Jordanian forces of the Arab Legion, backed by King Abdullah I of Jordan and the forces of the British Mandate, occupied East Jerusalem and Jewish residents of the area fled or were forced out. The new Palestinian families signed legal documents, now held by the Jordanian Government, to allow their residence in these homes and others built during the ensuing sixty-five years. In 1968, the Israeli Knesset issued a decree, signed by the Finance Minister, that Israel was legally bound to respect the Jordanian/UN agreements. The Israeli settler organization, Lavat Shimon claims it possesses Ottoman deeds to the properties dating to 1875, purchased from Ottoman era property owners. Palestinian cartographer Khalil Toufakji claims he has secured Ottoman deeds possessed by Palestinian residents during the same era, but these were rejected by the Israeli District Court.<sup>5</sup>

In 2001, Israeli courts allowed the eviction of the al-Kurd family from Sheikh Jarrah and in recent months, 22 year old Muhammad al-Kurd has become a well-known activist gathering

international support, including 81 British MPs, for the Palestinians to remain in Sheikh Jarrah. The Israeli Supreme Court delayed its May, 2021 decision on the District Court's ruling, which would allow the further eviction of 13 more families (and 70 people). Protests of these decisions and legal machinations erupted in the Old City in late April and May, which then provoked Jewish Power marches through the Old City's Muslim Quarter. These conflicts led to the protests and clashes inside al-Aqsa on May 7-11, 2021.

Legal decisions<sup>6</sup> by Israeli courts about Palestinians rights to live in Jerusalem neighborhoods now also threaten dozens of Palestinian families of the al-Bustan neighborhood of Silwan, south of the Old City, as well as 84 homes in Wadi Yusul, where the Israeli Government wants to establish a national Park, and 700 Palestinians also face eviction from the al-Batan al-Hawa neighborhood, through the legal actions initiated by the Ateret Cohanim settler organization. All of these actions are part of an Israel plan for "Greater Jerusalem" (since 1973), which has altered the city's municipal boundaries to include the Gilo and Ramat Shlomo settlement complexes, exclude several Palestinian areas, and evict Palestinians from the Old City and Sheikh Jarrah to effect a 70% Jewish population. Today, Palestinians constitute almost 40% of the city's 1 million population, so we can expect that many more such evictions are in the works.

When Palestinians resist the colonial process by non-violence at the Gaza border fences, they are shot down in front of international media. When they use civil disobedience in the Old City or in Sheikh Jarrah to protest their forced displacement from their homes, they are attacked, jailed, and humiliated. When Hamas decides to attack Israelis with bombs and

rockets, they are [condemned as terrorists](#) and are killed in their hundreds in aerial attacks, along with hundreds or thousands of other Gazans they are defending. Against the disproportionately more lethal and devastating Israeli attacks that level everything from Gaza's high-rise buildings to Palestinian homes to media offices, Palestinian response with make-shift rockets is what is condemned in secular civil society in a complete inversion of the ordinary cause of violence.

The conversation on violence, however, requires a tracing beyond basic identification of the ordinary cause. Israel is a colonial state, and therefore, as a formation it is the first violator—the aggressor. Concerns around the question of violence arise specifically with regards to the contingencies of Palestinian response, particularly, when Islamists engage in militant action. Most pro-Palestinian commentators list a chronological history of peaceful actions before discussing why the Palestinians may use violence, as if there is a logical necessity to first exhaust all other nonviolent means. Such a flowchart-like deductive structure of the discourse on violence naturalizes liberalism as its political-epistemic ground. Muslims and Arabs connected to civil society engage in such sequential discourse to cajole their coalition partners into understanding the “humane” and “rational” basis of the Palestinian response. The rockets from Gaza, for example, are represented as the lender of last resort, desperate attempts by hyper-victims eager to receive liberal humanitarian attention and relief. Consider this remark by Noam Chomsky: “You take my water, burn my olive trees, destroy my house, take my job, steal my land, imprison my father, kill my mother, bombard my country, starve us all, humiliate us all, but I am to blame: I shot a rocket back.” It has the same exact chronological structure based in liberal humanitarianism. What if the rockets from Gaza

were a consequence of a well thought-out, strategically principled and tactically sound political-military analysis?

The situation in the actual Islamic world is concrete, historical, and complex. There is not a necessarily chronological sequence or build up towards violence. Rather, the *optimum use* of various tactics, including armed resistance is what is at stake.<sup>7</sup> Guerrillas, militants, and organizers, instead of a moral conversation on the violence/nonviolence binary, discuss the applicability, scope, and range of permissible actions within the ethical and legal rubric of the discursive tradition of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Palestine's special status in Islamic heritage helps in this regard.<sup>9</sup> Even Islamic scholars who are open to models of compatibility between Islam and democracy, for instance, have at different points justified "martyrdom operations" in the case of Palestine.<sup>10</sup> From a strictly utilitarian position then, it is militarily absurd to not think of Palestine via the theologico-political prism of Islam.

In Western political contexts, as well as in broader human rights based mobilizations and minoritarian efforts of self-determination Islamic concerns are framed within multiculturalism, and Islamic militancy—even in its interventionist rhetoric of the *jihad by speech*—is policed, disciplined, sidelined, and expelled. In the post-911 era, the contours of speech are determined by the material powers of the War on Terror, and therefore, it is unsurprising that "freedom of expression" comes with the impossibility of Islamist speech (read: terrorist speech). Mainstream grassroots organizations in the West have mobilized demonstrations in important metropolitan centers. While Palestinians in Palestine have been raising the chants of "Allahu Akbar," at several demonstrations in the West protestors have

been discouraged from Arabic chants, especially if of an Islamic orientation, revealing how the question of Palestine is being strategically secularized in the public sphere as mainly a nationalist cause in the West and in civil society in general. Several info-graphics circulating on social media platform that provide brief slides on “how to understand Palestine 101” emphasize that “this is not a religious issue.” To emphasize Zionism’s secularity, the Israeli state’s Islamophobia and the centrality of Islam to Palestinians is erased. While it is encouraging to see thousands and thousands of people march for Palestine in Western metropolitan centers particularly those with no memory of previous intifadas, “solidarity” as a framework itself falls apart when conditioned by multiculturalism as it devalues the decisive force of Islam. This is particularly troubling because Israel’s concrete antagonism towards Islam caused the recent escalation of routine settler colonialism into an all-out war.

Worshippers were intentionally targeted and attacked during the holiest final nights (*Laylatul Qadr*) of the holiest month (*Ramadan*), at the third holiest site of Islam. Israel—from a military standpoint—could not have chosen a more precise time or location to engage in the desecration of Islam. Moreover, the urgency with which Hamas fired rockets in response, cannot be grasped in the register of anticolonialism alone without referring to the political theology of Islam.

While the question of Islam is central to both address Israel’s violence and in the struggle<sup>11</sup> to dismantle it, in popular liberal-leftist discourse Islam is at best seen as part of a myriad other possibilities or at worst a form of “[feudal-religious](#)” reaction.<sup>12</sup> This discourse also points to Israel’s mistreatment of non-Muslim populations. Israel no doubt targets Palestinian Christians, and Ethiopian Jews in Israel have faced violent [antiblackness](#) in the



form of forced sterilizations. To bring attention to Islam's centrality is not to deflect from those facts, but to understand the basis of Israel's physical location in Palestine,<sup>13</sup> its security infrastructure, and direct engagement in the War on Terror, its material and ideological function as Europe and America's "moderating presence in the Middle East," and its economic role in structuring world [capitalism](#) in the region. More importantly, placing Islam centrally in our understanding of the occupation of Palestine is not to engage in an identity politics, but rather doing so while remaining attentive to the targeting of Palestinian Christians and Ethiopian Jews puts in relief the specificities of what it means to be truly [Human](#) (the "chosen people" within the structure of modernity), revealing the historical and paradigmatic interplay between [the religious and the racial](#) in the matrix of antiblackness and secular humanism. Marginalizing the question of Islam obfuscates the entanglements in the modern exercise of power and betrays a naïvety with regard to the scope of religious freedom and tolerance under secularism.<sup>14</sup>

Israeli confrontation with Islam can also be observed in its archaeological excavations around al-Aqsa. According to an [article](#) published in the Middle East Eye, "Israel claims the excavations below Silwan and the Old City of Jerusalem are aimed at unearthing traces of the three-millennia-old First and Second Jewish Temples, which Jews believe to have been built where the Al-Aqsa Mosque now stands." In other words, Israel uses [archaeology](#) as a technique to construct a biblical basis of authenticity against the Islamic heritage of the theologico-political geography of [Jerusalem](#). These archeological projects are structurally designed to continue the cultural and religious genocide of Palestinians. The critique of this process, i.e. the critique of Judaization is often met with false charges of antisemitism.

Muslims often respond to charges of antisemitism in a defensive manner to the detriment of their own theological imperatives. While the textual critique of Judaism and the political-sociological critique of zionism are foundational to the discursive and political tradition of Islam, modern antisemitism itself is a European disease, and Muslims and Arabs are somehow expected to carry the burden of constantly proving to liberals that they are not antisemitic. For a subset of Western Muslim and Arab civil society, this particular insistence to claim European antisemitism is indicative of a larger historical and political perversion of aspirational whiteness, what Frantz Fanon would identify as an immersion in [“hallucinatory whitening.”](#) Moreover, it is not sufficient to point out that Arabs too are [semitic](#) peoples and thereby incapable of anti-semitism. Such an identification, instead of critically engaging, takes up the very discourse through which ethno-linguistic, ethno-religious and ethno-racial categories and their implied valuation and valorization emerge and cohere against the standard of White, Western, Judeo-Christian, European Man.

Anti-Islam<sup>15</sup> is the DNA of Israel. This is not simply a matter of epistemology or knowledge production. It is a concrete, material, political and military problem. And, because Islam is not a mere identity, keeping its name within a secular [multiculturalism](#) along with other names is not only repressive, it is a violent disarticulation of Islam itself and the future of Palestine. [Secularism](#)'s power derives from being the [transcendent mediation](#) for all other categories. The aim of Islamism is to shatter that function. But one must be careful in not reducing the problem of Anti-Islam to secularism. Anti-Islam precedes and exceeds secularity. While secularism functions as a strategy of regulation, discipline, and construction of modern polities, the effects of which are broad, anti-Islam is a specific ontological,

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psycho-affective, political, legal, and theological violence and subversion of the discursive and embodied orthodox traditions of Islam. In other words, anti-Islam is as old as Islam itself. While it is essential to capture the break between modern secularity and earlier epochs, it would be wise to not naturalize it as a permanently necessary condition for the preservation of anti-Islam. In fact, militant acts by Islamists—whether in Palestine, Kashmir, Somalia, or Afghanistan—show precisely this vulnerability of modern secularism.

What we have learned from the fightback against Israeli forces in al-Aqsa, and the militant actions from Gaza is not the importance of liberal solidarity but rather, the dynamic drive of an internal revolutionary unity throughout Palestine regardless of contestations and disagreements. Because Hamas' military wing concretely took the lead in the fight, all the major actors in the anticolonial struggle throughout Palestine, regardless of tactical and ideological differences united within that horizon of the *jihad* opened by the rockets from Gaza.<sup>16</sup>

The worldwide recognition<sup>17</sup> of the Palestinian struggle through protests, strikes, and mobilizations in the hundreds of thousands points to an emergence of a *new totality* standing up against the totalitarianism of Western political geography. To call such a groundbreaking phenomenon a case of solidarity is not only simplification, it is a mistaken reading of history itself and its unfolding. At the base of Islamism there is a disorderly disposition—a generative yet violent shaking of what is given in modern politics: sovereignty. The question of Palestine and contestations over who authentically represents the struggle for it are fundamentally about assumptions of sovereignty. Should one call into question the entire

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metaphysical architecture of Israel as a state form—its ontological stability based in sovereignty and freedom (which paradoxically requires the unfreedom of its others), and its rigid theology that mythologizes a people, a nation, and a destiny (i.e. a theology of “the chosen people”) which in turn requires secular power to conduct itself and to discipline its subjects? Or, should one assume, the struggle for Palestine is simply about freedom of the colonized, and a proper upheaval that would achieve such a goal—without questioning freedom itself? Whether the emerging *new totality* is going to be signified and mediated by the organizing forces of Islam—in the actual sense—depends on the material answers to the aforementioned political-historical questions. But one thing is clear: in the last four decades Islamists have played the most advanced role in countering Western hegemony. And, when forced to choose between dishonor and death, they have consistently embraced martyrdom. Is religion responsible for such militancy of the will? (Is Islam the name of a new world-making desire outside of bourgeois freedom?) One would have to be deeply ideological to think otherwise.

We will end with [the striking revolutionary chants of Palestinian militant youth as they console](#) the mother of the 17-year old martyr Muhammad Kiwan murdered by Zionist forces, demonstrating the popular foundation of *shahadat* and the centrality of Islam—not just as political form but as the content of anticolonial life—in the struggle for Palestine:

*“O Mother of Muhammad, how lucky you are. I wish it were my mother instead.”*

And:

*“O mother of martyr, we are all your sons.”*

<sup>1</sup> Tanzeen R. Doha thanks Hasan al-Tufi, the man of many names. Doha also thanks Hamza Mikael. Editorial Collective thanks Ibn Yunan.

<sup>2</sup> These events are reminiscent of the attack on al-Aqsa in September of 2000, on behalf of Ariel Sharon and his supporters who entered the Haram al-Sharif, which ignited the second Intifada.

<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that international sanctions led by the US, UK, and UN on Iraq and Iran have been of a markedly more devastating and punitive nature than the lukewarm chastisements of Israel without any material consequences, revealing the colonial foundation of international law rather than its “hypocrisy.”

<sup>4</sup> While paying close attention to these legal fights in Sheikh Jarrah is important, readers should be careful in not thinking of these incidents as the driving force or cause behind colonial violence. That kind of reading de-Islamizes the cause of the War on Gaza. Having said that, Sheikh Jarrah certainly became a global multi media event and at the level of spectacle and representation negatively impacted Israel’s reputation to a mass audience.

<sup>5</sup> This empirical legal history shows how lawfulness itself is determined by the structure of colonialism.

<sup>6</sup> See Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford University Press, 2012) for theorization on the relationship between humanity and the law. As foundational the role of law is within the structure of coloniality, we find it necessary to provide some empirical information on specific legal battles in Israeli courts in order to sociologically frame the most recent violence in al-Aqsa and then the war on Gaza.

<sup>7</sup> Qur’an, 1:193, “Keep on fighting against them until mischief ends and the way prescribed by Allah prevails. But if they desist, then know that hostility is directed only against the wrong-doers.”

<sup>8</sup> A clear refutation of this liberal-secular sequence is expressed within this tradition narrated by Ibn Majah in his Sunan, Kitab al-Iman wa Shara’i’hi, Bab Tafadul Ahl al-Iman, from the companion Abu Sa’id (RA), the Final Prophet (SAWS) says, “Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart- and that is the weakest of Faith.”

<sup>9</sup> Narrated by Imam Ahl al-Sunna Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (RH) in al-Awsaṭ from the companion Abu Umama al-Bahili (RA), the final Prophet (SAWS) says, “A group of my Umma remains prevalently committed to the truth: defeating their enemy, not harmed by those who disagree with them, nor those who let them down, nor the adversity that befalls them, until Allah’s will and support comes to them while they are in that situation. They said: O Messenger of Allah, where are they? He said: In Bayt al-Maqdis and the vicinity of Bayt al-Maqdis.”

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/12/palestinian-fatwa-suicide-operations-israel.html>; accessed 5/29/2021; 3 am, PT.

<sup>11</sup> The great Hanbali jurist and theologian Abd al-Rahman b. al-Jawzi (RH) penned ‘The Virtues of Bayt al-Maqdis’ (فضائل بيت المقدس) articulating the centrality of Sacred Honor (*hurma*) the land of Quds holds dear to. Its foundational intervention necessarily determines the ontology of action for subscribers of the Islamic confessional system.

<sup>12</sup> While Marxists in the West continue to engage in anti-Islamist analysis where religion is represented as “reactionary,” recent reports show that Hamas worked in close collaboration with PFLP in the recent struggle. Hamas continues to maintain its own Islamist ideology, while showing military flexibility. They have provided the PFLP, for example, with [low-range mortars](#). This is important information at the level of guerrilla warfare and distribution of armed struggle.

<sup>13</sup> We must recall that other sites were discussed as potential homeland by the Zionists Uganda, Madagascar, Guyana, being some of them—all racialized landscapes imagined by colonial policy as uninhabited (*terra nullius*). One might also note that Zionism aligned neatly with the anti-semitic European ideology that Jews do not belong in Europe and hence should be given a “solution” outside of it (a logic Hannah Arendt, herself a Holocaust survivor, famously opposed). But such immanent opposition by some Jewish quarters was ignored as Palestine was selected out of the other proposed landscapes, when clearly there was no “natural” connection of Zionism to settle in Palestine, inextricably connected to European colonial powers’ desire to “moderate” the force of Islam in the region.

<sup>14</sup> Roy Cherian, “The European, the Moor, and the Negro: Secular Sovereignty, Race, and the Biocentric” (unpublished manuscript); Tanzeen Doha, “The End of Whiteness” (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>15</sup> See Tanzeen R. Doha, “Specters of Islam: Anti-Islamist (Re)Presentations in Secular Media and Feminism (1979-2012),” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (2018). In that article, Doha thinks through anti-Islamism, focusing specifically on how Islamism is disarticulated. Doha is now working on a theorization of anti-Islam—a kind of negativity that is more totalizing than the attacks on Islamist politics. Doha is currently writing about antiIslam-ism (which he differentiates from anti-Islamism) through an engagement with and foundational critique of phenomenology, ontology, and psychodynamic ethnography.

<sup>16</sup> The explicit case of this horizon is documented by Thomas Hegghammer in *The Caravan* (Cambridge University Press, 2020, 44), a text on one of the most prominent figures of the Palestinian Struggle, “[...] Azzam found a number of other ways to celebrate Qutb. In 1969, for example, when he was fighting with the Fedayin in northern Jordan, he and his companions wrote Qutb’s name on missiles they fired against Israeli targets. In August 1970 they marked the four year anniversary of Qutb’s execution by launching what they called “the Sayyid Qutb operation” against an Israeli tank patrol.”

<sup>17</sup> Here, recognition is not the same as having inclusion in liberalism. The struggle for Palestine reveals itself as an example of “concrete universality” (Hegel’s term), and therefore, the world recognizes it as such. It is an immanent recognition achieved through decisive movements of history from within itself.