
MUSLIMS AS THE EUROPEAN
"OTHER": BETWEEN
SELF-AWARENESS AND
FUNDAMENTALISM

O s k a r O p a s s i

Secularisation

In his seminal work *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Peter Berger declares secularisation to be an empirical fact, though geographically and historically restricted to the modern history of Western Europe.¹ He defines secularisation as "(...) the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols."² By this, he means the separation of church and state, the expropriation of church lands, and the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority.³

Both Berger's and other theories of secularisation have come under scrutiny. Alongside the critique, there remains the fact that the individuals living in the Western world have a much greater variety of religious beliefs at their disposal.

As the potential to choose a belief grows, so does the "crisis of credibility" of religions which, after the process of secularisation, can no longer claim to possess valid explanations of reality. Hence, a "market" of possible explanations of reality forms, because there is no obligation for an individual to adhere to the dominant religion as they are now granted the freedom of choice. Before, there was only one possible explanation of the world, which had been integrated into the common sense. Now, the monopoly a religion had over a certain area has disin-

¹ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor books, 1967), 107.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

tegrated. Berger labels this process as “pluralisation” and deems it an inevitable consequence of secularisation.⁴

Religion loses its classical function to give meaning to all aspects of social life. It influences only a limited number of people, who may also retreat from the secular world and live in seclusion according to their religious beliefs. It can be said, according to Berger, that religion has been relegated into the private domain. To illustrate his claims, he uses the example of how a religious explanation can fall on fertile ground only in a segregated community: a nuclear family.⁵

In a market society, religious explanations compete for “customers” and, therefore, act as economic subjects: “The pluralistic situation is, above all, a market situation.”⁶ Under such circumstances, a religion behaves as a commodity. As such, it is subjected not only to the competition for “customers” but also to the laws of the market. Since this is the case, it is no longer true that only the leading scholars shape the religious explanations because the adherents contribute as well. The adherent penetrates the religious sphere as a consumer and replaces the “static” explanations with “dynamic” ones.⁷

The processes I have just described do not only pertain to the realm of culture, but also to social psychology: religion is no longer able to legitimise the world as a whole, however, it can legitimise the whole world of a particular part of the society. Such a situation was named by Berger as a “subworld.”⁸ The world as such is not given but is rather the world of an individual’s subjective consciousness. Berger envisions two possible reactions to this: adaptation to the pluralistic situation or insistence on the old models of explaining the world.

The “Visibility” of Religion

Thomas Luckmann develops the concept of *invisible religion* in his appropriately named work *The Invisible Religion*. According to him, an

⁴ *Ibid.*, 127 and 135.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

individual may construct their own mode of living as transcending the biological nature of the human being, because of which they may experience tensions with their surroundings. Such an individual may adopt an elevated position and deem their own truth as the universal truth. However, Luckmann's definition of religion is not unproblematic.

When religion is understood as a private matter, it necessarily encompasses the possibility of free choice. This possibility, as we have already established, corresponds to the metaphysical framework of the consumer society. The individual is driven by their individual choices which pervade the pluralistic society, and the field of religion is no exception. The world view is no longer a unit but a collage, a pluralistic view. Consequently, an individual now holds the role of a "consumer" of religious content.⁹ "In the absence of an 'official' model, the individual may select from a variety of themes of 'ultimate significance'. The selection is based on consumer preference."¹⁰

Even though Luckmann's theory is important for the rejection of the thesis of secularisation, it is necessary to impose some restrictions to this applicability. First and foremost, one needs to take into account the historical context in which religion was in fact prevalently "invisible". This was the case primarily in the 1980's and 90's in light of the logic of neoliberalism. Berger believes the progression from the first phase of liberalism to neoliberalism is no more than the continuation of the same process, only more radical.¹¹ As secularisation matures, it opens the door for pluralisation. The religious experience is moved from the context of the cosmos, or history, and to the individual's consciousness.¹²

After the year 2000, it became problematic to speak of an "invisible" religion since a very "visible" enemy led to the formation of a tight alliance in the West. A key factor contributing to this newfound "visibility" was the attack on the World Trade Centre on the 11th September 2001 by Al Qaeda.

⁹ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 98.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 166.

¹² *Ibid.*, 167.

Ruthven described the attack as “(...) a classic case of ‘propaganda of the deed’”¹³ as, from one point of view, this act became a symbol of terror inflicted by the Islamists, or, from the other, an example of rebellion against the USA as the symbol of the West’s hegemony. This opinion arose in spite of the fact that it is impossible for an act of a small group of extremists to be generalised to the whole religious community, as well as religious violence being anything but restricted to Islam.¹⁴

The institution of the Muslim as “the Other” was of course not only contingent on the attack on the World Trade Centre: during the course of history, this “otherness” has been emerging in different forms and with different levels of danger attached.

A Historic Overview of the Construction of the Muslim as the European “Other”

There have been several groups of people serving as Europe’s antagonists throughout its history. However, it is necessary and of exceptional importance to focus on the Muslim “Other” due to the present circumstances in which all followers of Islam are being portrayed as violent extremists. This has already been shown by Anja Zalta: “(...) the ultimate ‘Other’ in the European collective memory remains the ‘Turk’”.¹⁵ It is for this reason only that we will not be touching upon the attitude towards the Jews who have been banished from what is today Slovenian territory under the decree of Maximilian I between the 15th and the 16th century.¹⁶

Another reason to focus in the construction of the Muslim as the European “Other” is the following the thesis proposed by Mastnak: “Without this adversity, there would not be a European history in the

¹³ Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: a very short introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ Anja Zalta, “Evropski ‘drugi’: turški islam in njegova evropska perspektiva.” *Teorija in praksa*, 43(3–4, 2006): 558.

¹⁶ Maja, Toš, “Judje na Štajerskem do druge svetovne vojne,” in *Slovenski Judje: zgodovina in holokaust: pregled raziskovalnih tematik*, ed. Irena Šumi and Hannah Starman (Maribor: Center judovske kulturne dediščine Sinagoga, 2012), 33–34.

narrow sense of the word".¹⁷ The Muslims settled on the continent during the 7th and 8th centuries but were not immediately recognised as the main enemy. The Christian rulers labelled them simply as one of the "infidels."

The beginning of their construction as the "Other" stretches back to the end of the 11th century. Europe underwent massive transformation after substantial social change, which was the result of the power shift and the consequential changes in the social life. The atmosphere in which those changes were taking place in the end of the 9th century and the beginning of the 10th was "overflowing with millenarian, eschatological, apocalyptic, and chiliastic fears."¹⁸ The united "Christian Europe" started to behave as a unit at the end of the 11th century by taking part in the Crusades which were at least spoken of as holy war.

The term "Europe" did not acquire an emotional undertone during the Crusades, however, the undertone only started to develop in the 14th and 15th centuries. It was only then that Europe began to exist as a political term and an incorporation of a certain set of values, which would make it a community. As Constantinople fell and was occupied by the Ottoman Empire, so did it become a symbol of the "Turkish" threat.¹⁹ Mastnak points out that the anti-Islamic sentiment was not born with Europe, but rather "played a key role in the making of Europeans, and of Europe."²⁰ This process undergone, Europe was able to become self-aware as a united entity. The antagonism towards Muslims survived the Middle Ages and transformed during the Early Modern Period under the influence of the fall of Constantinople and the Ottoman conquest, thereby allowing the transition from the "Christian Europe" to the self-aware West.

The Ottoman conquest brought about an important transformation of the European "Other." The conquest meant the resentment against an abstract "Muslim world" could find a new, concrete target in the

¹⁷ Mastnak, Tomaž, "Europe and the Muslims: The Permanent Crusade," in *The new crusades: constructing the Muslim enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 205.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

character played by the “Turk” who needed to be driven out of Europe.²¹

The conquest only made the situation worse: the pillage and plunder could not result in anything other than the increased adversity towards the Ottoman Empire. This is how “(...) the Turks became a standard against which every other brutal military practice was measured.”²² As we have already said, the construction of an Other is crucial for the formation of the awareness of belonging to a community. This awareness did not only pertain to the widespread idea of Europe, which did acquire an emotional undertone, but also to the use of the label of “homeland.” Whenever a particular piece of land felt threatened, it too acquired an emotional component – it became a homeland.²³ The echoes of such a characterisation of the “Turk” can still be heard since one of the arguments against Turkey joining the European Union is that the Union is a *European* project to which, historically, the Turkish identity supposedly does not belong.²⁴

The End of the Cold War and the West’s Identity Crisis

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989 was followed by the symbolic collapse of the Eastern or Communist Bloc controlled by the Soviet Union, whose downfall ensued in 1991. From the end of the World War II onwards, the Communist Bloc would serve as the main antagonist of the Western Bloc under the USA’s hegemony. Many, starting with American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, celebrated the Eastern Bloc’s fall as “the end of history.” Fukuyama understood the ruin of the Bloc as the victory of a universal combined doctrine of liberal democracy and capitalism. He and Samuel Huntington claimed the remaining regimes not practicing democracy represent new chal-

²¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

²² Vasko Simoniti, “O vojni, množični smrti, domovini, njenih junakih in mitu kot ‘strašnem opozorilu’ (vpliv obdobja turških bojev na oblikovanje nekaterih slovenskih mitov),” in *Množične smrti na Slovenskem: zbornik referatov*, ed. Stane Granda and Barbara Šatej (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije), 100.

²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁴ Mastnak, “Europe and the Muslims,” 231.

lenges for the West. Picking among several different opponents of the Western ideals, they identified Islam as the liberal democracy's enemy number one. With that, the Muslims not only became the main threat to the West, but have also been declared irrational.²⁵

This is why the spectre of the former Communist Bloc did not disappear: it simply metamorphosed. Establishing the new enemy did not dictate a structural change in international relations, it required but a different antagonist. The East was relieved of the communist representation and was turned back to the Orientalist: developing of backwards region where Islam and Confucianism are the dominant ideological forces. What did this mean for the identity of the West? It can be observed that the construction of the enemy always plays a key role in its establishment – in this case, antagonising the “Islamic world” as opposed to the “free” West enables the latter to build its identity.²⁶

During the 1980's, different factors contributed to the increased “visibility” of the members of the Islamic faith in the West. Let us take France under scrutiny: one of the more important ongoing affairs was the “stabilisation” of the Muslim minorities who have immigrated to the country in the 1960's and 70's. It was often the case that their settling would take time, as would the reunification of their families since it was typical for the fathers to migrate to the West first in order to look for work, and only after a successful employment would they arrange for the rest of the family to follow.²⁷

As stated in the introduction to this discussion, in the 1980's, there were changes ongoing in the realm of economy as well. This was due to the impending end of the crisis of the late 1970's and the rise of neoliberalism. The precarious situation of the economy illuminated the previously invisible migrant workforce. Their newfound “visibility” was

²⁵ Fatema Mernissi, “Palace Fundamentalism and Liberal Democracy,” in *The new crusades: constructing the Muslim enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 53.

²⁶ Emran Qureshi and Sells Michael A., “Introduction: Constructing the Muslim Enemy,” in *The new crusades: constructing the Muslim enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 12.

²⁷ Neil MacMaster “Islamophobia in France and the ‘Algerian Problem’,” in *The new crusades: constructing the Muslim enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 296–297.

of course not the result of their loss of physical transparency but the increased amount of attention from the media.

“The 1970’s equation ‘immigrant / worker = Arab = Algerian was slowly displaced through the 1980’s by another interchangeable set of terms ‘Muslim = Arab = Algerian = Terrorist.’”²⁸

How was it possible for the attitude towards migrant workers to change so drastically over the course of a single decade? A part of the blame can certainly be attributed to the economic crisis and the unavoidable sordid atmosphere which followed, but what was also important is the shift in legitimation of racist standpoints. The largest proponent of the shift was the then-prevalent (and now re-emergent) extreme right-wing party *Front national*, the National Front. The key transition for the popularisation of racism was the one from racism on biological grounds to the new racism on cultural grounds.²⁹

This shift can be observed on the level of transcending the biological nature of the human being, which Luckmann deems to be the foundation of religion as such.³⁰ In this case, it was the “French culture” which adopted the elevated position: the position of the civilised and progressive culture threatened by the immigrants from the “underdeveloped world.”

And so, the paradigm for the “clash of civilisations” had been created around a decade before Huntington’s article *The Clash of Civilisations* was published. The paradigm energised the emergent populist movements. It must be said that this new resentment against the immigrants was not only part of the far right’s discourse – it pervaded the whole French political spectrum, including the Communists.³¹

It was through this process that the connection between Islam and terrorism was drawn and solidified. The fear of communism (after the Communist Bloc’s downfall) was replaced by the fear of Islamic fundamentalism. The concept used to connect the Islamic doctrine with the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 298–299.

³⁰ Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*, 49.

³¹ MacMaster, “Islamophobia in France and the ‘Algerian Problem’,” 298–299.

Soviet one was “aggressive fanaticism.”³² The cohesive material between the two concepts was the totality advocated for by both of these doctrines as both claim to possess the ultimate answer to all of the world’s questions.³³

Alongside identity-building, a new enemy was paramount for the needs of the weapon industry, which would suffer devastating losses without a new “threat” on the horizon.³⁴

If we follow Huntington’s logic, we come across a paradox: the “Islamic threat” in fact saved the Western identity since, as he writes, multiculturalism is “(...) eating away at the whole set of ideas and philosophies which have been the binding cement of American society.”³⁵

Fundamentalism

As has been settled in this discussion already, secularisation brought about the freedom of religious choice, not the disappearance of the religious experience. The space formerly belonging to “traditional” religions was vacated and became open for occupation by any alternative ideology. Secularisation took place in the private domain as well, not only setting up an individual’s freedom to consume religious explanations of the world, but also opening up the public sphere to various religious content. Among that content, we will take a close look at what Lester Kurtz has named “antimodernist movements.”³⁶

Hunter saw the collapse of the dominant religious paradigm as the start of a particular polarisation. His research on the American society led him to differentiate two categories based on the submission to religious norms. On one hand, there are those who are “tight-bounded”

³² John Trumbour, “The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of the Post–Cold War World Order,” in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 101.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ MacMaster, “Islamophobia in France and the ‘Algerian Problem,’” 228.

³⁵ Trumbour, “The Clash of Civilizations,” 107.

³⁶ Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in global village: the world's religions in sociological perspective* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1995), 169.

to the norms, and on the other, there are the “loose-bounded.”³⁷ Kurtz builds on Hunter’s two categories and renames the tight-bounded to the orthodox and the loose-bounded to the modernists. With this, he shows the tendency to perceive the looseness of traditional religious norms as modern, and religious orthodoxy as opposing modernity.³⁸ We shall now turn our attention to the category of the orthodox, more specifically to religious fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is primarily opposed to the legacy of the Enlightenment and modern-day science. Additionally, there is its activist component present in some groups of adherents of contemporary Judaism, Christianity and Islam.³⁹ The fundamentalists advocate a wholesome revision of the contemporary world in which minority beliefs are being driven towards marginality. What prevails is reading the sacred texts verbatim as they are understood as infallible dogmas. It is important for them to spread the dogmas and thereby halt the “degradation of the world” caused, according to them, by placing human rationality above the word of God. It is worth noting that in spite of their unwavering opposition to science, the fundamentalists do not reject the use of scientific discoveries. Therefore, the “(...) modern medicine, electrical wiring, jets, computer technology, mass media and telecommunication etc. are not at all unfamiliar to the fundamentalists.”⁴⁰ Quite the opposite: they appropriate modern technology to achieve their aims with a large degree of success. Let us take a look at a high-profile example, the use of the mass media by IS. They want to “bring down” the modern society “in its own backyard, taking it on at its own game.”⁴¹ This example additionally sheds light on another fundamentalist tactic: to familiarise oneself with the enemy before taking it down using its own arsenal.

With fundamentalism, it is of course imperative that there be no more than one interpretation of the sacred text. Hence, they strongly

³⁷ James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic-Books, 1991), quoted in Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in global village*, 172.

³⁸ Lester R. Kurtz, *Gods in global village*, 172.

³⁹ Aleš Debeljak, *Oblike religiozne imaginacije* (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1995), 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

oppose plurality of interpretations. They constitute their identity in relation to an enemy and legitimise themselves as adherents to the "true" religion with particularised reading of the sacred texts. The particularised reading is based on the rhetoric of "the end of the world."⁴² Whenever this rhetoric is accepted as genuine, there is usually an upturn in acts and actions (e.g. terrorist attacks) deemed illegal, unacceptable, and deplorable by the rest of society.

In short, fundamentalism strives to return a particular monopolistic religious explanation back to the public domain so that it would displace secularism. The heads of fundamentalist organisations are usually "charismatic and authoritative, 'full-time job' leaders"(...).⁴³ It is actually a remarkable turn of events that such movements succeeded and keep succeeding at forming a collective body around fundamentalist leaders in an ever-increasingly atomised society.

Malise Ruthven defined fundamentalism in the broadest sense as "(...) the religious way of being that manifests itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identities."⁴⁴ This definition is congruent with the "anti-modernist movements" coinciding with the emergence of the religious "market." There is a common "face" to different fundamentalist movements around the globe, which is not limited either to Islam or the original protestant varieties of fundamentalism.⁴⁵

We will now focus solely on Islamic fundamentalists due to their "privileged status" as the Europe's main Other. Standard Arabic does not have a word which would correspond to *fundamentalism*. The word which stands in for it denotes the "antimodernist movement" campaigning against secularisation and consequential plurality of religious explanation. On the structural level, *fundamentalism* denotes "(...) the response of individual or collective selfhoods, a personal or a group identities, to the scandal or shock of the Other."⁴⁶ What is especially problematic when resurrecting an "original community" is the fact that

⁴² *Ibid*, 27.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 30.

⁴⁴ Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 5–6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 22.

the historical and social circumstances have irreversibly changed between now and the time the Bible or the Quran were written. It has, simply put, become impossible to avoid religious pluralism. Contemporary adherents will inevitably be faced with more than one religious explanation and will therefore become acquainted with different paths toward salvation, which may rouse in them the suspicion that they might be led on by a false explanation of the world.

Islamic fundamentalists believe that Muhammad's successful military campaigns have been the "golden age" of Islam. This worldview has been adopted primarily by the more militant currents, such as the Salafists and the Wahhabis who use particularised readings on Islam's beginnings to legitimise Islam as a religion of conquest.⁴⁷

The end of the "golden age" is followed by what we can call "religion-shock." Cupitt writes: "Religion-shock occurs when someone who is a strong and sincere believer in his own faith confronts, without evasion and without being able to explain it away, the reality of an entirely different form of faith, and faces the consequent challenge to his own deepest assumptions."⁴⁸ When faced with the shock cause by religious plurality, the fundamentalists engage in an active rebellion.

"The encroachments of modernity through state power and state bureaucracies are pervasive and continuous and a constant challenge to all religious traditions."⁴⁹ Fundamentalism provides its followers with "psychological reassurance in a world in which areas of relative security interlace with relative doubt and with disquieting scenarios of risk"⁵⁰ as well as "sources of authority".⁵¹ But, the fundamentalist religious ideologues do not read the sacred texts as paths towards the revelation of "true morality" but rather for personal gain, which is further backed by the fact that most Islamic activists are not educated in theology but in other fields. The modern education they have acquired is used to achieve their own strategic goals.⁵²

⁴⁷ Olivier Roy, *Globalizirani islam* (Ljubljana: Krtina, 2007), 121–125.

⁴⁸ Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith* (London: BBC, 1984), quoted in Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 30.

⁴⁹ Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 39.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

Another recurrent theme affiliating fundamentalisms is equating a constructed myth with actual history. This enables the sacred texts to be used purely as tools for legitimising the ultimate goal. They would abuse the eschatological function of religion by proclaiming the end of the world to legitimise many a violent act against either religious or secular movements.⁵³

Religious Violence and the Demonization of the Enemy

It is common knowledge that fundamentalist movements often escalate into violent or even suicidal attacks. This is far from the normal and expected: in order for the adherents to willingly sacrifice themselves for their faith, there needs to be a very tight social organisation in place. It is therefore no surprise that fundamentalists display a great level of loyalty to the group. Often facilitated by a charismatic leader, a unified goal and the answer to all of the world's questions consolidate the bond between the group and the individual, to whom the group offers all the support they need. There is a lot of emphasis on a rigid hierarchy, which serves to prevent disputes and polarisation. It is precisely the polarisation of opinions which disrupts fundamentalist associations, and usually even the most insignificant dispute is enough to split the association into smaller fractions.⁵⁴

The fundamentalist cause has a paradoxical consequence. Namely, it facilitates the secularisation of religion despite explicitly fighting against it. The adherents' acts of rebellion against modernism are for them of transcendent nature. In "classical" religion, the myths, traditions, transcendence and the like belong to the realm of the spiritual. However, fundamentalism renders all those spiritual matters belonging to the world of humans, the realm of the mundane, secularising them in the process.⁵⁵ The mythological images of the afterlife are meant to give the religious some sense of meaning to their pain and suffering, but fundamentalism distorts this as well: their reading of mythology does

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 56–58.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 126–127.

not involve any explanation of God's intentions, only legitimisation of violent rebellion.⁵⁶ Fundamentalism is therefore "(...) a religion materialized, the word made flesh, as it were, with the flesh rendered, all too often, into shattered body parts by the forces of holy rage."⁵⁷

We can safely claim that fundamentalist movements are bringing elements from the realm of the spiritual into the realm of earthly life. This is not limited only to the elements of the myths of salvation – an important part of fundamentalism is the demonization of the enemy, and with that, the sacralisation of the war. There is a new phenomenon on the rise: religious nationalism, which sees nationalism extend into the cosmic dimension. George W. Bush, the former president of the USA, in 2003 demonstrated the rhetoric of Good versus Evil, the typical rhetoric of religious nationalism. He joined Iraq, Iran, and North Korea into not just an alliance of enemies of the USA but into an "axis of evil," a formulation which bears more than a hint of the cosmic clash between good and evil.⁵⁸ The use of religious terms causes an even bigger splash in the countries where religion plays an important role in the culture. The conflicts become inflated and leave realm of the mundane, escalating to the realm of the cosmic – they become sacralised. The conflict between the absolute Good and the absolute Evil creates an apocalyptic atmosphere for the war.⁵⁹

This leads us to an important question: why do "tight-bounded" communities which operate with a high degree of internal cohesion make violence against the outside world such an integral part of their systems of belief? Again, we see how important the construction of the Other is for identity creation. Aleš Črnič states that "(...) as religion ties a religious community together, providing it with identity and meaning, it simultaneously excludes everybody else"⁶⁰ and "(...) it is not uncommon for religion to display its vitality through tensions with

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Aleš Črnič, "Sodobne religijske apokalipse – nova religijska gibanja in nasilje" ["Modern Religious Apocalypse – New Religious Movements and Violence"], in *Religija in nasilje: eseji in razprave*, ed. Iztok Simoniti and Peter Kovačič Peršin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede: Revija 2000, 2008), 77.

neighbouring communities, and utilise the tensions to strengthen its own identity and mobilise its adherents.”⁶¹ The violent conflicts are of course not a part of every religion. What is of key importance here is the interpretation of the sacred texts and this interpretation is usually extremely distorted.

Psychoanalysis can be of use for understanding the connection between prominent internal cohesion of fundamentalist groups and resistance against the outside world with the consequent emergence of violence. It teaches how severe repression is connected with suppression to the subconscious. Following that logic, we can see how the aggression produced by the fundamentalist reading of the sacred texts is being “piled up” inside the unconscious. This is happening unbeknownst to the individuals, but it is precisely because of this rough and aggressive defence mechanism that they are always under threat of violent tendencies breaking into the realm of the consciousness.⁶² This is called projection, and it is a defence mechanism at work “(...) whenever we attribute our internal, occluded and undisclosed matters to others.”⁶³ There is another important phenomenon explained through projection: at first glance, it is difficult to understand how God can be perceived as aggressive or vengeful. However, that is because we project our “(...) unacceptable and usually subconscious attributes (...)”⁶⁴ onto the image of God.

Alongside others, Mark Juergensmeyer studied the incorporation of violence and war into religion. He estimates that this incorporation proves how religion seeks to create a system which would consociate “(...) every human experience into a meaningful unit(...)”⁶⁵ This leads us to believe that explaining violence and death is necessarily inherent

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Janko Bohak, “Religija in nasilje – psihoanalitski pristop” [“Religion and Violence – a Psychoanalytical Approach”], in *Religija in nasilje: eseji in razprave*, ed. Iztok Simoniti and Peter Kovačič Peršin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede: Revija 2000, 2008), 59.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Christian Moe, “Kdo se boji monoteistov?” [“Who is afraid of Monotheists?”] in *Religija in nasilje: eseji in razprave*, ed. Iztok Simoniti and Peter Kovačič Peršin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede: Revija 2000, 2008), 245, cf. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 158–159.

to all systems of thought, not just religion, aiming to cover the whole range of the human experience.

Why, then, is it important to analyse *religious* violence if violence is also present in secular systems of thought? It is the aforementioned sacralisation of war which is the distinctive feature of religious violence. The sacred texts do not universally portray violence as positive whereas particularised reading is in fact able to paint such a picture.

This reading which legitimises the holiness of the war is, as mentioned above, not always carried out by theologians. On the contrary, such a reading is most often one of the drastic measures undergone by secular leaders as a last-ditch attempt to achieve their goals. Saddam Hussein, for example, had been supporting the secularist agenda as well as advocated the complete separation of church and state in the early stages of his political career. It was only when “stronger” legitimation was required that he started to use the rhetoric of the holy war and thereby gained the support of the extremists.⁶⁶

Nationalism and fundamentalism complemented each other very efficiently during the break-up of former Yugoslavia. Their deadly alliance claimed many lives during that time. Because of that and the similar phenomena, Juergensmeyer does not describe nationalism as a phenomenon as such but either a complement or even a variety of fundamentalism. He labels the movements which combine the two as “religious nationalism.”⁶⁷ Both nationalism and fundamentalism “(...) serve the ethical function of providing an overarching framework of moral order, a framework that commands ultimate loyalty from those who subscribe to it.”⁶⁸

The demonization of the enemy means that he or she has had its human characteristics alienated from him or her. Such an enemy represents “the animalistic gaze of the ‘Other’” as described by Žižek.⁶⁹ By

⁶⁶ Roy P. Mottahedeh, “The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist’s Critique,” in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 149.

⁶⁷ Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 88.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Slavoj Žižek, “Živalski pogled Drugega” [“The Animal Gaze of the Other”], *Problemi*, (1–2, 2011): 49.

robbing the enemy of their humanity, the now "it" is assumed to also be devoid of rationality. This lack of rationality becomes the counterpart to the rationality of the aggressor: the enemy has been reduced to some kind of "primitivism" caught in the past from which there is no escape. Having said that, let us return to the case of the former Yugoslavia. To the then audience, there was something new in Slobodan Milošević's idea of an ethnically pure country. When establishing something "(...) radically New, all of its past with all of its inconsistencies must be reduced to a single basic signification."⁷⁰ The perspective we humans have of animals is a felicitous metaphor. Just as we usually (and erroneously) perceive animals from only our perspective, so, too, we err when perceiving the Other. In Milošević's case, the "civilised" Serbian nation is juxtaposed to the "barbaric" Muslims.⁷¹ There are a lot of parallels to be drawn between the examples: the human and the Serbs are fully developed and civilised, and clearly distinct from the animal and the Muslim, who both only follow their instincts. This distinction "human / animal not only mystifies the fact that animals are indeed independent from humans but also the very distinction as such, which effectively signifies the human being ripped out of the animal universe."⁷² The Serbs therefore occupy the position of the more advanced, the mature and fully developed nation as opposed to Bosnian Muslims who represent backwardness through the Serbian optic. Serbian nationalism grasps the conception of Islam as formed by Bat Ye'or and Ellul. The only option for Islam to reform is in their view to walk the same path as the Soviet Union – a total collapse.⁷³

Let us consider the adversity that the powerful create tensions even with a simple gaze. Here is another example from the relationship between humans and animals: Derrida's discomfort caused by the gaze of his cat when he was standing naked in front of the shower. He was so disturbed by the gaze that he tied a towel around his waist and chased

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷¹ Using the term "Muslim" for all Bosnian people is problematic on its own.

⁷² Žižek, "Živalski pogled Drugega," 8.

⁷³ Michael A. Sells, "Christ Killer, Kremlin, Contagion," in *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*, ed. Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 366.

the cat out of the bathroom. This is of interest to us since “the gaze of the cat represents the gaze of the Other – the non-human gaze, which renders this gaze even more that of the Other in all of its bottomless impermeability.”⁷⁴ Bringa applies this discomfort and adversity to Serbian nationalists and their attitude towards Bosnian Muslims: “They thought of Islam as a foreign object on the European soil which needs to be (or rather needed to be) eliminated by defeating the Ottomans.”⁷⁵

The Clash of Fundamentalisms?

It now seems appropriate to ask ourselves if we are living in a world of conflicts and if yes, what kind of conflicts they are. Žižek believes in the world of conflict and describes the contemporary society as one of two universes: “(...) the modern open ‘risk society’ versus the safety of the old secluded universe of Meaning.”⁷⁶ The two universes can safely be re-labelled as *the modern world* and *the fundamentalist world*. As Berger has shown, the contemporary society is mainly a society of choice, and religion is no exception. Secularisation sparked the liberation of the ultimate signification, which in turn caused the domain of religion to partly model itself after the marketplace.⁷⁷

Where there is no universal system of ultimate signification, there is uncertainty. To abscond to a fundamentalist community is to take shelter from the “risk society.” But how can a closed community address the risks of modernity? It is by mythology: the fears transform “into a mythical threat with which the community establishes a temporary truce and against which it has to maintain a permanent state of emergency.”⁷⁸ And it is precisely this upkeep of the state of emergency that sounds all too familiar to contemporary Westerners – Fear is not the predominant mobilisation technique only in the anachronistic fun-

⁷⁴ Žižek, “Živalski pogled Drugega,” 10.

⁷⁵ Tone Bringa, “Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina” in *Islam and Bosnia, Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States*, ed. Shatzmiller, Maya (Montreal & Kingston – London – Ithaca. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 25, quoted in Zalta, “Evropski “Drug””, 559.

⁷⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 29.

⁷⁷ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 138.

⁷⁸ Žižek, *Violence*, 29.

damentalist world but also in the contemporary West. Fear has become the key element of modern politics,⁷⁹ affecting both the “concerned citizens” of the West and the fundamentalists. The “concerned citizen” is tormented by the “(...) fear of immigrants, fear of crime, fear of godless sexual depravity(...)”⁸⁰ Still, it seems odd that such fears should arise in a liberal society, especially regarding immigration. Žižek addresses those in fear thy neighbour as thyself. He believes that tolerance is an illusion, as the “Other” is “(...)just fine, but only insofar as his presence is not intrusive, insofar as this Other is not really other (...)”⁸¹ In that specific atmosphere, a new principal right is formed, which Žižek names “(...) *the right to not be harassed*, which is a right to remain as a safe distance from others.”⁸² Europe is upholding the distance between itself and other cultures because of a special codex of mutual evasion.⁸³

The alienation of social life typical of the West can have a positive effect on the tolerance of other cultures. Ignoring the Neighbour can, paradoxically, benefit the attitude towards the Other. But alongside this perspective, which is rather pessimistic from the humanistic point of view, there is another way to view the West’s ostensible high degree of tolerance. “The crisis of meaning,” being the legacy of modernisation, had been lingering on in the West, but the breaking of ties or identities was simultaneously compensated by the formation of new ties proliferated by cultural institutions. In the East, however, modernisation was mostly forced by colonial overlords, which meant the tradition had collapsed immediately and that there had been no time to build bridges between the old and the new, other than, of course, recursion and reclusion.⁸⁴

Žižek brings to our attention the significant switch of science and religion. Science, traditionally a source of certainty, now represents security. Meanwhile, religion has relinquished its function of providing security in favour of providing certainty. In this turn of events, religion

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82–83.

becomes “(...) one of the possible places from which one can deploy critical thoughts about today’s society. It has become one of the sites of resistance.”⁸⁵ It is from precisely this turn of events that the fundamentalist groups get the fuel for the legitimacy of their existence, be it the “classic,” religious fundamentalisms or populist movements, which operate almost identically to fundamentalisms, especially regarding mobilisation. This sheds further light on Europe’s far right’s resurgence, which can to a large extent be attributed to their insistence on being “against the system.”

We are standing before an important intersection. The first road leads to the modern pluralistic society in which secularisation has not abolished religion but rather liberalised the choice of “ultimate significance.” The second road leads to an enclosed world of “tight-bounded” religious norms leaving no room for those who think otherwise. Taking the first road makes us lose certainty but lets us keep the option to choose between models of ultimate significance. Taking the second road relinquishes the right to personal opinion and the right to choose a model of ultimate signification in favour of a certain Meaning.

Religion was described by Žižek as “(...) one of the possible places from which one can deploy critical thoughts about today’s society”⁸⁶ and such a provocative thesis deserves to be critically analysed. The critical doubt Žižek speaks of is very likely present with most of reactionary leaders but not as much with their followers. Juergensmeyer has researched this situation in the case of fundamentalisms. His conclusion is that religious violence is the most attractive option for marginalised groups, but not as a result of premeditated, critical doubt. It is rather the consequence of social pressure and discrimination. He estimates that the groups which are the most likely to use religious violence are those without access to power and ignored by the powers.⁸⁷

The “critical doubt” provided by religion as the response to the challenges of modernity can also be viewed as the response of the frustrated masses betrayed by their officials. The tensions between the tradition-

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 167–170.

ally religious and their pluralistic surroundings stem from when the latter nurture their identity by projecting their problems onto groups displaying otherness. This is the reason why the West spits vicious vitriol on immigrants: it is projecting the same imagery as it did onto the "Turks" during the Early Modern Period. It was then that "(...) the Turks became a standard against which every other brutal military practice was measured."⁸⁸ We will understand these fears brought into a contemporary context as the result of major social precariousness and the "collapse" of future stability – in the world where, as mentioned above, fear is the key element of politics,⁸⁹ anachronistic stories about "the good old times" appear ever so attractive. Fundamentalist adherents of monotheistic religions abuse this sentiment to construct myths: "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification (...)."⁹⁰

This quote by Jan Assmann can be used to conclude our discussion: "The fuse on the semantic dynamite, hidden inside the sacred texts of monotheistic religions, is not lit by the adherents but by fundamentalists in search of political power, using violent religious motifs to attract masses of followers."⁹¹

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⁸⁸ Simoniti, "O vojni, množični smrti," 100.

⁸⁹ Žižek, *Violence*, 41.

⁹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972), 143.

⁹¹ Jan Assmann, "Monoteizem in jezik nasilja," in *Religija in nasilje: eseji in razprave*, ed. Iztok Simoniti and Peter Kovačič Peršin (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede: Revija 2000, 2008), 29.

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