

LUISS

POLITICAL THEORY

**SUSTAINABLE
IDENTITY**

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“La libertà è un respiro. Ma tutto il mondo respira, non solo l’uomo. Respirano le piante, gli animali. C’è ritmo (che è respiro) non solo per l’uomo. Le stagioni, il giorno, la notte sono respiro. Le maree sono un respiro. Tutto respira, e tutto ha il diritto di respirare. Questo respiro è universale, è il rollio inavvertibile e misterioso della vita. Se la libertà è prima di tutto un respiro, se è il respiro: sì, rispondo, c’è libertà per l’uomo. Ma è in questo modo, come cosa e diritto di *tutti*, che l’uomo intende la libertà? Non credo. A me sembra che vada diffondendosi il concetto di libertà come furto del respiro altrui; libertà come sopraffazione. (...) Vediamo *tutti i figli* della vita patire e cercare spazio, inutilmente, girare il capo doloroso in cerca della libertà, dell’aria, la libertà promessa dal secolo superbo che ci trascina. Questa libertà non appartiene che a pochi, quest’aria non è di tutti!”

Anna Maria Ortese, *Corpo Celeste*.

“Imparo a voler tutto e a non aspettare niente, guidato unicamente dalla costanza di essere umano e dalla coscienza di non esserlo mai abbastanza.”

Raoul Vaneigem, *Noi che desideriamo senza fine*.

“Sono un apolide *metafisico*.”

Emile Cioran.

“Vivere è essere un altro.”

Fernando Pessoa, *Il libro dell’inquietudine*.

“Il repertorio
della memoria è logoro: una valigia di cuoio
che ha portato etichette di tanti alberghi.
Ora vi resta ancora qualche lista
Che non oso scollare. Ci penseranno i facchini,
i portieri di notte, i tassisti.

Il repertorio della tua memoria
Me l’hai dato tu stessa prima di andartene.
C’erano molti nomi di paesi, le date
Dei soggiorni e alla fine una pagina in bianco,
ma con righe a puntini... quasi per suggerire,
se mai fosse possibile, *continua*.

(...)”

Eugenio Montale, *Il repertorio*.

“Donnez une chance à l’impossible. Vous n’avez pas idée à quel point l’impossible en a marre et à quel point il a besoin de nous.”

Romain Gary, *Claire de femme*.

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1. Symptomatology

Islamic Terrorism and Fundamentalism

a. Conflicting interpretation of Islam.

Starting from the second half of last century and, in particular, with the end of the Cold War, public visibility of religion has been increasing at a global level. The certainties of secularization started to waiver, or at least so it appeared to many interpreters. The very same sociologic theory, which had dominated the eyes of western scholars for a good part of the twentieth century, has slowly given ground to readings more oriented in a *culturalist* sense. In other words, religion was not disappearing from the now disenchanted scene of the world, but it was conquering it back, interrupting that anomaly that western modernization had, in a certain way, temporarily imposed on the world. According to this vision, it was “God’s revenge”.

From phenomena such as international terrorism of Islamic, but not only Islamic, matrix to the spreading of ethnic-religious conflicts, to the increase in variably fundamentalist movements throughout the world, until the terrible days of September 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and till the event of the Danish comic strips, everything seems to confirm a renewed centrality of religion in domestic and international events, and, therefore, of the theories that such phenomena seemed able to explain.

I shall, therefore, try to review some of the key issues, of the paradigms, of these *culturalist* interpretations in a broad sense. However, being aware that a certain dose of discretion in the choice

of authors is inevitable, given the endless quantity of literature that can be involved in this perspective, I shall try to underline, from time to time, those, which I consider as the principal ones in this context.

I shall then consider more in detail the matters that have involved Muslim religion, not only because the attention of scholars and media has been increasingly focusing on it in the course of the years, but because we shall see how, nevertheless, the point does not lie in any particular religion and what applies to Islam also applies, with the due differences, to Christian faith, Hebraism and Hinduism.

The famous theory of Samuel Huntington on the *clash of civilizations* is particularly emblematic from this point of view. The famous Harvard professor has in fact given rise to a large debate starting from the early nineties, when he proposed for the first time an explanation for international conflicts and identity matters no longer focused on ideology, as it had been in the Western internal clash between democratic and communist blocks, or on material resources, but rather on the cultural variable.

Huntington maintained that the world would be re-portrayed on the basis of cultural criteria and the identities, which he caused to derive, at a broader level, from the respective civilizations of appurtenance of the playing actors, would determine global cohesion, disintegration and conflict processes. He, therefore, proposed a reading of identity given by contraposition to an enemy, to the Other, proposing again the ancient dichotomy We-They structured, this time, around the civilization of origin. Civilization was, in turn, determined by the religion that represented its essence. Civilization was, therefore, described as a whole and as a variable able to explain the political matters and not only these. It is in this sense that Huntington stated, together with many other scholars, that, for example, the failed success of democracy in the Arab world was to be ascribed mainly to the Islamic culture.

He explained such phenomenon as a consequence of unjust globalization, the violent conquest by the Western world of the rest of the world and the failure of the (western) social, economic and cultural modernization. The masses need new sources of identification, stable forms of

communion, moral rules able to give meaning and order to life. According to this reading Religion, both in its traditional form and in the fundamentalist form, could satisfy these needs. Religion also answered the question: “*Who am I? Whom do I belong to?*”

Through religion and Islamism in particular, according to Huntington, an attempt was made to react to secularism and moral relativism, proposing again values of order and solidarity, channeling into the non-western world those feelings of frustration and resentment against the more or less direct dominion of old colonizing powers, Europe and United States in particular.

Huntington found an analogy between Islamic re-birth and protestant reform as reaction to the stagnation and corruption of the existing institutions. Iran could be considered similar to Poland: religion became the vehicle of opposition to authoritarian regimes, and if secular oppositions were excluded from governments, then Islamic movements represented the only alternative.

However, the U.S. political scientist went further describing a basic incompatibility between Islamic culture and societies, on one side, and liberal principles, on the other. According to this point of view, the problem was not a specific regime, but the very same Islam. Mohamed’s religion, in other words, would be the independent variable of international relations.

It is the centrality ascribed to religion the issue that this paper wants to underline. Religion, the Muslim one in this case, is in fact the element through which historical situations and specific conflicts are explained. Religion is the essence that determines the individual identity of its followers and of the civilization that is established around it. An essence conceived as unchangeable and closed. Pure. Above all, an essence that inevitably leads to conflict. This is the thesis of the clash of civilizations. A thesis well described by the words of Pellicani¹, according to which, anticipating in a certain way Huntington, a real true permanent aggression by the Muslim world to the detriment of western civilization has allegedly been under way for decades now. This would be his interpretation of Islamic fundamentalism. An existential war that witnesses the contraposition of two models of civilization that are incompatible due to their very constitution.

In this perspective, the reasons for the clash between different cultural entities are looked for within religion. A dichotomy is, in fact, established starting from religious categories between believers and unbelievers intended to mark the threshold around which the conflict will take place. An existential conflict, therefore, which goes beyond the categories that can always be recomposed of politics. There can be no mediation. Once portrayed in these terms the fight is between Good and Evil.

For this reason, according to Huntington and those who make reference to him, only those entities that are culturally homogeneous can collaborate with one another. The promises of a world unified around the principles of liberal democracy towards the end of the Cold War, as Fukuyama had triumphantly announced, cannot be kept. In this framework, as a matter of fact, democracy is meant as part of a large cultural heritage, fully extraneous to the non-western world in general, and Islam in particular.

The typical separation between State and religion, for example, which is a fundamental part of constitutional democracies, is inconceivable in the Muslim world, at least according to this interpretation of the Koran's religion. In the Islamic civilization, temporal power and spiritual power are two aspects of the same indivisible reality. God's Law. From this point of view the statement by Khomeini regarding the fact that Islam would either be political or would not be at all, is well known.

Bernard Lewis, the great British-American historian, scholar in [Oriental studies](#), and [political commentator](#), agrees with this interpretation. He maintains, in fact that ever since the Prophet's times and, therefore, inside the Holy Scriptures, Muslim religion was associated to the exercise of political and military powers. There certainly was a distinction between the earthly world and the afterlife, between human values and divines values, but a distinct institution that took care of these matters, for governing and deciding them, was unconceivable. In this sense, the ultimate sovereignty pertains to God and not to men. And democracy (this is an argument typical of Islamic

fundamentalists) is a heresy, an invention of the blasphemous West and cannot put down roots in the Muslim world.

Another aspect that Lewis, like the Islamic fundamentalists, finds and underlines in his analysis of Islam, is the duty of each believer to continue the Jihad. According to the Islamic law, it is rightful to start a war against apostates and heathens. Classic jurists made a distinction between offensive and defensive war. The former should only be fought by volunteers, whilst the latter would be the duty of each individual who is physically able. This is a principle claimed by Osama Bin Laden when he asks to go to war against the United States.

Continuing this reading of Islam, this interpretation of domestic and International conflicts based on the religious factor, the world would be divided between the House of Islam (Dar al-Islam), where God's law applies, and the House of war (Dar al-Harb), or the world of the unbelievers. The duty to undertake the Jihad will not cease until the entire world has not reached the just and only Faith. Those who will die while fighting for this cause will become martyrs. We know how powerful is today the appeal of this word in the Muslim world, and not only in that one.

However, it is no use probing in detail into the substance of the Muslim theory. The purpose of this section is to underline a perspective, an approach, a method in the analysis of the current geopolitical situations. Authors such as Huntington and Lewis, just to mention the more famous and influent ones, proceed with a certain number of assumptions by the conclusive consequences. As already briefly mentioned, the cultural factor takes up for them the role of independent variable of International relations. The cultural factor overlaps in turn the religious dimension as much as coinciding with it. Religion determines, therefore, *essentially and totally* the identity, both at an individual level and at a collective level, of civilization. Culturally different entities will put themselves in a relation that is *necessarily of conflict*. This is true in particular for the western and Islamic civilizations. Huntington writes, in fact, in his work "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" that the true problem for the West is not Islamic Fundamentalism but Islam as such, a different civilization whose populations are convinced of the superiority of their

culture and obsessed by the poor power they have at their disposal. Islam's power, according to Huntington, is not CIA or the Department of Defense of the United States, but the West, a different civilization whose populations are convinced of the universal character of their culture and believe that the greater (albeit decreasing) power held by them imposes on them the obligation to spread that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that are feeding the conflict between Islam and the West.

*“Il vero problema per l’Occidente non è il fondamentalismo islamico, ma l’Islam in quanto tale, una civiltà diversa le cui popolazioni sono convinte della superiorità della propria cultura e ossessionate dallo scarso potere di cui dispongono. Il problema dell’Islam non è la Cia o il Dipartimento della Difesa degli Stati Uniti, ma l’Occidente, una civiltà diversa le cui popolazioni sono convinte del carattere universale della propria cultura e credono che il maggiore – seppure decrescente- potere detenuto imponga loro l’obbligo di diffondere quella cultura in tutto il mondo. Sono questi gli ingredienti di base che alimentano la conflittualità tra Islam e Occidente”.*¹

Phenomena such as Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism must be explained through the understanding of Islam, since it would disclose its actual nature. The message transmitted by the attackers of the World Trade Center would be, in this optic, its *authentic* expression. The thought to which jihadists and Islamic fundamentalists make reference must be so traced, hoping to sum up the political situation of the Muslim world. It is the substance of Koran and of the Hadiths (the sayings of the Prophet), meant in this way, which we must investigate for answering the question deriving from similar premises: Is Islam the problem?

¹ S.P.Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order”. Garzanti, Milan 2000. Page, 319.

b. Is Islam the problem?

This thesis does not handle theological matters, but tries to clarify the link between certain events that may be referred to as “political”, and the explanations that may be referred to in short as “cultural”, which were given of similar events. In this sense, no attempt will be made to disclose here the ultimate truth of Muslim religion through an exegesis of Koran, an undertaking that is prohibitive. The purpose of this thesis is to make a more modest and certainly arbitrary operation: to represent, even though in short and in paradigmatic manner, the peculiar vision of Islam, which in the interpretative line described above (Huntington, Lewis...), is considered as the origin of Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism, and, more in general, of the problems experienced by the Muslim world.

According to this approach, it was said that there is a constitutive incompatibility between Islam culture and the conquests of western modernity, such as democracy, separation between religion and politics, gender equality, pluralism and freedom of thought and expression, individualism and the market, etc. ... and that such incompatibility is to be ascribed to the very same nature of Muslim religion.

We shall try to describe this perspective through the stands of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), considered the ideologist of Islamic radicalism and a figure whose thought is still central today in the fundamentalist principles. Obviously, his theories do not exhaust the very large universe of Muslim religion, which is radical and traditional. They have here the mere function of emblem.

He writes in the Egypt of the first half of last century, a country where he will be sentenced to death by Nasser, and in the broader context of a Muslim world in a crisis and submitted to the dominion of the West and of local corrupt *élites*. A rebirth, in his opinion, could arrive only from a militant adherence to the authentic message of the Koran, a message considered dynamic and, therefore, liable to being interpreted by the fighter, in opposition to the too formalistic reading of the doctors of Law and jurists.

Qutb makes a distinction between the Mecca and Medina parts of the Koran. In the former the uniqueness of God and the absolute submission of man are announced. Man must serve exclusively God. In this respect Renzo Guolo writes:

“Servire Dio e Lui solo: questo è il senso del messaggio meccano, incentrato sulla fede e non sulla Legge.

Nel Corano medinese si realizza invece l’ordine islamico, incarnato dalla comunità dei Puri. Medina è una concezione del mondo, un ordine sociale, un microcosmo dove si dà forma alla personalità islamica. Allo stesso tempo Medina è il simbolo del Politico, nella duplice veste di fondazione del potere islamico e ostilità verso il Nemico; luogo in cui alla fede si affianca l’uso della forza per abbattere l’incredenza. Elemento costitutivo della comunità medinese è l’hijra, la rottura con l’ambiente “empio” meccano operata dal Profeta, un obbligo per ogni credente che intenda sfuggire alla seduzione/sedizione della fitna. (...) Solo la lettura del Corano fatta attraverso il Corano gli consentirà la comprensione della via per realizzare l’ordine islamico.”²

We can note from this short passage that there is a totalizing, almost circular approach, where the Koran represents the exclusive horizon of conscience and action of the believer, and how the different interior and collective or more exactly political dimensions, must be traced back to the prominent religious dimension.

Inside QUBT thought we can identify certain basic concepts, such as the *Jahiliya* (ignorance), *hackimiyy* (divine sovereignty), *ubudiyya* (worship), *hirja* (rupture), *Jihad* (fight on the way to God) and *fiqh haraki* (dynamic law).

By the first of these terms, i.e. *jahiliyya* the state of ignorance is indicated in the Holy Book of Islam in which the population of La Mecca was lying before the revelation, but which is reprocessed by Qutb for describing all that is alien to Islam. Such condition of ignorance is

² R.Guolo, *Il partito di Dio, l’Islam radicale contro l’Occidente*. Guerini associati, Milano 2008, p. 25.

reproduced every time that a community goes away from Islam, meant in holistic sense. A true Islamic must, therefore, repeal any *jahili* system with its many false idols, starting from the key of democracy, i.e. “human sovereignty”. In the authentic Islam one single form of worship and obedience is conceived, that to God. The Islam described by Qutb is then a declaration of war against any social organization that attributes to man power, in any form, since it would fall in this way into idolatry. Ultimate decisions pertain to God and only God is source of authority. From this a dichotomic vision of reality derived in which two poles only are opposed: Islamic society and the *jahili* one. In the former, Islam determines certainly the faith, but also the legislation and the individual behaviors. To the latter all those societies must be traced back which, albeit they are basically Muslim, do not realize Islam as totality. The duty of the believers is then to oppose the obscurity of the *jahiliyya* recomposing that community of believers, the *Umma*, which the positive law of man that replaced God’s law, has shattered. To such purpose then an avant-garde of the forthcoming community shall take up the fight, like the Prophet did in his time.

According to Qutb vision, the first step for reaching this target is the proclamation of the “true faith”, i.e. a total breaking of the values and behaviors with the *jahiliyya* society, in order to show its own political and religious alterity and, in this way, proselytize. However, this is nothing other than the Jihad, the fight for God, in the twofold meaning of an interior war of the soul, and a real true armed fight. With respect to the traditional geopolitical Islamic division between House of Islam (Dar al-Islam), i.e. place of Muslims, and House of War (Dar al-Harb), o.e. space of unbelievers, Qutb considers Islam’s world as invaded by *Jahili* systems. According to his vision, the enemy has penetrated the House of Islam, radicalizing the scenario and leaving two alternatives only: Faith or Error. “Party of God” or “Satan’s Party”. With such interpretation we are at the above-mentioned opposition between Good and Evil. Whet the clash takes up such characteristics any means appears to be rightful in the realization of salvation. Events such as the eleventh September 2001, or the attacks of London and Madrid, seem to be perfectly inserted in this vision, confirming the culturalist interpretation.

c. Dialogic Interpretation of Islam.

Towards the end of the nineties the newly elected Iranian president Mohammad Khatami pronounced the famous discourse at the time of taking office before the Islamic consultative assembly. In that discourse the absolute need for *dialogue* between civilizations was stated for the first time.

In this vision, no longer a non-resolvable dichotomy between culturally closed entities appeared. The clash between different civilizations was no longer described as inevitable. The solution was no longer the clear alternative between victory and defeat. An interaction was conversely hoped for, an exchange, a dialogue between different civilizations in a global multicultural perspective.

Even though he was a child of the Iranian revolution, Khatami was trying to cause the defense of an authentic Islamic identity (of a relatively Jihadist type) to live together with an opening towards the trade of ideas and information with the other civilizations, in particular with the Western one, described until that time, at least with reference to the United States, as the Great Satan, because inserted in an oppositive logic typical of the clash between Good and Evil.

Khatami wanted to develop a theoretical scenario able to account for the global situation, but which would defend at the same time the particular identities. The defense of this authenticity should and could take place, according to the Iranian reformist, in the context of a dialogue rather than of a clash between civilizations. It can be stated that, with respect to Qutb perspective (considered as paradigm of the culturalist theses of the Huntington type), whose authenticity is obtained by opposition, through the conflict with the Other, in this case the looked for authenticity remains the same, but passes through the dialogue.

khatami recognized the absolute incompatibility of Islamic tradition with modernity and found in it the cause for the crisis of the Muslim world. Should then the solution pass through an abandonment

of tradition, as declared by modernizers, in a complete merger with the western world? Or should one close oneself completely in the very same tradition?

Khatami wanted to overcome this net alternative. The dialogue with the West aims at strengthening and building a new Islam since it will help it to regenerate, also in view of the inevitable decline of the West. Islam shall catch in the western civilization what good there is in it expelling the harmful elements. In this sense, he renews the traditional “eastern” criticisms of the western world, or its lack of spirituality, its avidity, egotism..... He upholds, for example, science and technology.

Once again, however, according to Khatami, the identity is totally defined by Islam, by religious appurtenance.

Great importance is ascribed to the use of human reason in the construction of more exterior forms of human life. The content of its essence can, conversely, be given and established exclusively by religion. Religion is an unchangeable truth, in this vision.

Khatami insists in stating that the fight with the West takes up the importance of “life or death”, an existential importance, since from a political standpoint the West does not want that Islamic world is free and independent, master of its destiny and of its material resources, in addition and above all of its spiritual resources. The West wants to hegemonize also the thought of the non-western world. This is what the Iranian reformer maintains. Islam must recognize the will to deceive of the West and oppose it with all its forces, to avoid humiliation. At the same time Islam must find those positive elements that are present in the European and US culture, beyond the merely political standpoint.

Khatami supports the use of force in order to defend oneself against an invasion or military aggression, but for the rest the fight must be conducted on the basis of ideas. Consent must be created. He states that Islam provides the logic and the way of thinking that are suitable to this task.

“We repeal the West since we wish to free ourselves from its political, cultural and economic dominion, since *being Muslims* (the italic character is of the author) we are basically different from western people as far as the conception of the world and ethics are concerned”³.

Khatami criticizes then the western conception of human freedom, judging it incompatible with Islam.

If this was the most important and first one of the voices that tried to promote a dialogue between different civilizations, even though with the nuances that we have shortly described above, it was certainly not the only one. Here we want to understand the perspective included in the dialogue approach; we want to understand in what it is different from the clash and what are the main assumptions.

To such purpose it will be useful to review a second voice of the dialogue, that of Benazir Bhutto. In her book *Reconciliation*, which she finished to write just before being killed in a terrorist attack, Ms. Bhutto presents an open, equalizing and democratic Islam, an Islam that adjusts to the need for dialogue with the other civilizations and even promotes it.

The Pakistani-born politician looks, like Khatami, but also like Huntington or Lewis, within Muslim religion for the necessary reasons, values and principles for establishing a peaceful exchange with the West, for the growth of a form of democracy close to the Muslim world, for an instrument, the best instrument in this perspective, suitable to repeal the fundamentalist violent visions of Mohamed’s religion. Ms. Bhutto, in other words, looks for the *true Islam*, being convinced that in it the way can be found that leads to dialogue, peace and justice.

An Islam is so described that fights oppression and invites its followers to rebel against tyrants, an Islam that consecrates piety as only judgment criterion for judging mankind, and which repeals any discrimination of race, color or sex, which promotes a free consultation of people, based on discussion; an Islam that places men and women on the same level, ensuring to women the same

³ Mohammad Khatami, *Religione, libertà e democrazia*, Editori Laterza, Bari 1999, p.127.

civil, political and economic rights; an Islam that promotes the diversity of human beings as a source of wealth and freedom of choice. Ms. Bhutto repeats continuously the verse of the Koran that states that there can be no constriction in faith and that Islam is absolutely compatible with science.

Ms. Bhutto makes then a distinction between an internal fight in the Muslim world between groups that are disputing about the interpretation of Islam, and an external one, against the military and economic dominion, in particular during colonization, of the West. She recognizes, therefore, that in addition to the responsibilities of the western countries, there is also a responsibility on the part of Muslims for the failed development of democratic institutions, albeit adjusted to the values of Islam. She describes a relation between the lack of freedom, education and resources, on one side, and temptation to the extremism, on the other side. She maintains that desperation generates violence.

Ms. Bhutto then criticizes directly the thesis of the clash of civilizations, denouncing it as a dangerous self-producing prophecy and as a distorted reading of Muslim religion, a *falsification of the Koran*, and of the empirical reality that disproves Huntington's predictions.

The central point in this vision lies, however, in focusing the attention on the internal clash of the Muslim world, placing in this way the correct interpretation of the holy texts as the conclusive element for the construction of peace and justice. Once again, therefore, even though with opposed emphasis, it is from religion that one starts for determining the non-religious dimension, for explaining and building it. In this perspective, the "true Islam" indicates what is wrong and unjust and what must conversely be supported.

Once again the identity, both at individual and at civilization levels, is given by religious appurtenance. Even though in this vision one does not necessarily arrive to a clash, but conversely one wants to promote the way to dialogue between different identities, it is the centrality maintained by its religious essence that it is necessary to underline. Therefore, it is not the case of accommodating a religious dimension, Islam, and a secular dimension, but to find the "Right

Islam”, to explain it to the masses and cause them to understand it, for opposing it to a “False Islam” corrupted by extremism or by powers looking for renewed legitimacy. In other words the dialogue is a function of religion and we can ask ourselves the question: Is Islam the solution?

D. Is Islam the solution?

In this section I shall present an interpretation of Islam that is not different from that described by the vision of Sayid Qutb, and to do this I will follow the perspective offered by Benazir Bhutto, describing it as emblematic of the huge quantity of literature that in Islam looks for the solution to the problem of fundamentalist violence that we are trying to understand.

According to this line of thought, Islam accepts as an irrefutable principle the fact that mankind has been divided into different groups and religions, and that God himself wanted so. The Koran, in this respect, would promote religious pluralism and freedom of choice: “There shall be no constriction in faith” (II,256).

Ms. Bhutto describes, for example, how the discrimination against women is not only the results of a perversion of the principles contained in the Koran, but the contribution of a pre-Islamic tradition extraneous to Arab civilization. In this respect she writes:

“In order to understand the role of women in Islam it is necessary to review the holy text of Muslims in an adequate context. The Koran was written in a period when women were considered inferior in almost all the societies, in particular in the Arab Peninsula, and often considered almost like slaves. Newborn baby girls were often buried alive. It was taught to us that Islam fought for emancipation of humankind after the age of idolatry and obscurantism. Islam prohibited the killing of baby girls and granted women the right to divorce, the custody of children, alimony and inheritance far earlier than the western societies adopted these principles. Islam has underlined the

*importance of education and knowledge, of compassion and help to the weak, poor and underprivileged. The message of Islam is, therefore, in favor of women's rights.”*⁴

More in general a Creed is described that is not only compatible with democracy, but would carry in itself the principles of democracy: the freedom of thought and religious freedom. Moreover, Ms. Bhutto insists, Islam gives more importance to pluralism and justice than other religions do. In this way she denounces the existing prejudice towards that “Islamic Exceptionality” according to which the current attitude of the Muslim world towards democracy is caused to derive from the attitude of the past centuries; however, the former Pakistani-born politician asks herself: “Are we possibly judging the West through the lenses of Inquisition or of the Middle Ages?”

On the other hand, the interpretation of the Koran is open to any Muslim (*ijtihad*). No authority exists designated by the Koran to interpret it in the name and on behalf of the community of believers.

If, as we have seen for Qutb, human sovereignty is considered incompatible with the exclusive sovereignty of God, in the reading proposed as authentic by Benazir Bhutto, the Koran permits, conversely, the establishment of human authority and, therefore, of the government. This is made possible by the Koran's concepts of *shura* and *ijma*, i.e. consultation and consent, respectively.

In synthesis, Islam is not the source of the problems, of violence and intolerance. Islam understood in this way, the authentic Islam is the solution, since it contains all those values and universal principles that support peace, democracy and justice. Phenomena such as Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism are not the most complete expression of Koran's Creed, but Ms. Bhutto asks us:

*“Who can doubt of the fact that Islam –being religion and a system of values – was distorted and manipulated for political reasons by extremists, fundamentalists and dictators?”*⁵

⁴ B.Bhutto, *Riconciliazione*, Bompiani, Milano 2008, p. 60.

Once again the position described by the theses briefly mentioned herein above does not exhaust the vast literature that finds in the holy texts of Islam the way for defeating the perversion represented by radicalism. It is a merely emblematic position, as it was that of Sayyid Qutb in the same manner. Regardless of what is caused to appear from the Koran and the *Hadiths*, what this text wants to underline is that, even though with opposed emphasis, both positions such as those of Huntington or Qutb (Clash of Civilizations), and positions such as those of Khatami or Bhutto (dialogue of civilizations), treat the religious dimension in the same way as the independent variable of contemporary political and social phenomena that we are here investigating. They find there the Problem or the Solution. All would depend on the understanding of the Text or its misunderstanding. It is, therefore, necessary to support the truth of Islam, both positions say.

Conclusions: finding the authentic Islam? Holy Text, human interpretation.

We started from a specific symptom. Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism, and we tried to portray these phenomena availing ourselves of theories of a culturalist type, i.e. which looked for the causes of Islamic violence inside Muslim religion, or which looked inside Muslim religion for the solution to the very same violence. In both cases, one had to proceed with the discovery of the truth of Muslim religion. In both cases, it is starting from the return to the Holy Text, from the Koran and the Sayings of the Prophet, that the authentic Muslim identity, the individual and political action, the condemning or promotion of violence, the legitimacy of democratic institutions or their impiety are defined.

One of the issues that must be stressed here is that, also starting only from the two identical examples of Qutb and Bhutto, speaking of *an* Islam, meant as monolithic entity, is rather misleading. As a matter of fact, Islam upholds in its interior a very large variety of interpretations and, therefore, alternative ways of being Muslims. One billion and three hundred million of people

⁵ Ibidem, p. 109.

spread in different nations, cultures, ethnic groups or tribes, which speak different languages or with different traditions and customs, are linked throughout the world to Allah's religion.

The majority of Muslims live in Asia and Africa, and not in the Arab world, as one would be led to believe. The largest communities are in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Nigeria and not in places more commonly characterized as Muslims, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Iran. Many Muslims have been present for a long time in Europe and in the United States, representing there the principal religious communities after the Christian ones.

From a religious, economic and political standpoint we can describe a plurality of realities different from one another but that can be considered similar to Islam.

The principal distinction that it is necessary to make, in this contest, is the more known one between Sunnism, which gathers approximately 85% of Muslim believers, and Shi'a Factions, which represent approximately 15%. Such distinction dates back to the time of the death of the Prophet Mohamed, when the problem arose of his succession to the leadership of the Muslim community. On one hand the Sunnis believed that such leadership pertained to the most authoritative person; on the other hand, the Shi'a factions considered that Mohamed himself had elected Ali, his cousin and son in law, as *imam*, for the leadership to remain within the family of the Prophet. The *imam*, contrary to the Sunni Caliph, was not only religious leader, but also political leader. Other differences appeared then within the Shi'a factions with the emerging of three principal branches with each branch supporting different Imams, i.e. that of the Zaidis, Ismailis and Twelvers (which represent the majority in Iran and Iraq).

Like in all the other religions, also in Islam different theologies, jurisprudence schools (just in the Sunni world there are four schools of Islamic law: [Hanafi madhhab](#), [Maliki madhhab](#); the [Shafi'i](#), [Hanbali](#), [Zahiri](#) and [Jariri](#) schools were established later, though the latter two schools eventually died out, and the Wahhabita) and Sufi, i.e. mystic confraternities, exist.

Therefore, it is wrong from a descriptive standpoint to speak of Islam in the singular and include in one definition only all the plurality existing in its interior. In this respect, the matter of the

interpretation of the texts appears to be conclusive, and it is even more so in the Sunni universe that does not provide for a clergy and an educational authority. As suggested by Massimo Campanini, it is extremely difficult to define heresy in Islam⁶.

Other than the five pilasters it is actually impossible to appeal to *a True Islam*, since we lack a criterion of truth that would enable us, outside our hopes, to choose between Qutb and Bhutto on the basis of a mere words of the Koran and of the *Hadiths*.

The impossibility to define what is the “true Islam”, other than the few untouchable knots contained in the Koran and in the *Hadiths*, gives rise to the need to have a more complex approach towards phenomena such as terrorism or fundamentalism. Religion cannot be considered, therefore, as the only variable capable of determining the entire political, social, cultural and even military equation. At this stage we must suppose, at least, a communication between religious level and historical level, in which a sort of reciprocal contamination, or reciprocal influence, occurs. History drives towards a certain interpretation of religion, religion drives towards a given interpretation of history and, therefore, of historical action, in a movement in two directions.

Bencheikh⁷ writes, in fact, that one of Islam’s problems today is the attribution of a holy character not only to the Koran, but also to the interpretations that men of the past gave to it. This makes it a prisoner of historical situations, of epochs and contingent needs. Also Bencheikh continues, in fact, underlining the need to free Islam from history in a certain way, or from politics, regimes and States that have looked for legitimization through religion, and led the oppositions to look in religion for the same instrument to achieve power. Who paid the price for this run-up to consent was religion itself and the population of believers.

As maintained by Abdullahi An-Na’im, the perception and practice of Muslim religion are human matters, always placed in precise contexts and this occurs because Islam has, as we have seen, a very dynamic character, able to adjust to the most different realities. This applies in particular to

⁶ Massimo Campanini, Karim Mezran, Arcipelago Islam, tradizione, riforma e militanza in età contemporanea, Editori Laterza, Bari 2007.

the *Shari'a*, Islamic law. This is a body of rules that each Muslim should follow for complying with the will of God, in any environment: political, social, economic and personal. The point is that the concrete content of this regulatory system is given by the human thought, and the human thought is historically determined. A variable. As it always happens in these cases, each community believes that its interpretation is the true one and, therefore, divine. On the other hand, we have seen that the very same fundamentalist interpretation of Sayyid Qutb is in explicit rupture with respect to the tradition of the doctors of Law and claims an interpretative freedom that is *per se* sufficient to deny the possibility to lead the entire Islam to one single truth. Speaking of Islamic civilization in Huntington's manner appears to be a simplification that we cannot afford if we want to find adequate solutions to the problems handled here.

From what we have reviewed up to here, we see that a series of directions can emerge to which we may draw our attention. We have understood that a hiatus, a gap exists between the religious essence of Islam, or we could say its transcendent dimension, and the human interpretation that is given to such essence, its immanent dimension. No passage from one to the other is then necessary and determined in advance. What we must, therefore, understand is that Islamic fundamentalism, like Islamic terrorism, are specific interpretations of Islamic religion. They are a way of living Mohamed's religion and we cannot take a part for the whole. Bin Laden is not *deterministically* Islam. Unfortunately even Benazir Bhutto is not. Both are possible ways of understanding it.

What we must investigate, on the basis of the concepts that have appeared till now, is not Islam as such, but the relation between *Religion* (regardless of its specific contents) and the other dimensions of human actions, starting from the *political* one, but not only that; we must review then those particular manners of conceiving religion (any religion?) that are *fundamentalism* and *terrorism* in order to find their nature and causes. We must understand what is meant today by the concept of religion and that of *culture*. Finally, we must understand what defines *identity* (at an individual and

⁷ In, *Lumi dell'Islam, nove intellettuali musulmani parlano di libertà*, a cura di N. Furstenberg, Marsilio, Venezia 2004.

collective level; at *civilization* level?) in today's global context and whether this must actually be made to coincide with culture or the religion of appurtenance.

Religious Terrorism and Fundamentalism.

a. Religious Fundamentalism.

We have approached the subjects of Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism trying to better understand their nature through the specular theories of the clash and dialogue of civilizations. Both looked inside religion for the origin of religious violence, avoiding or, however, reducing that gap that we understood to exist between the holy Texts and human interpretation. According to such vision, Islamic terrorism derived from the Koran, or from the authentic reading of its principles, and also justice, this time interpreted in a democratic tolerant key, was made to derive from the Revelation.

We have understood that Islamic fundamentalism and its terrorist radicalization are a peculiar interpretation of Muslim religion. What we need to do now is to understand these peculiar interpretations, the link with religion to which they make reference and what determines, in addition to the strictly religious dimension no longer considered as an independent variable, its emerging in concrete historical situations. In other words, if Islam does not necessarily generate Islamic fundamentalists, then there must be a cause or a series of external causes to Islam, which trigger such apprehension. What said by Olivier Roy in its book *Généalogie de l'islamisme* then applies:

“(...) l'islamisme est-il la conséquence logique ou la perversion de l'Islam? En fait, c'est le problème de tous les débats globalisants sur l'Islam (l'Islam est-il ceci ou cela?): ils font dépendre l'analyse de mouvements sociaux concrets d'une réflexion préliminaire et théorique par définition toujours ouverte. Car la réponse aux questions n'est pas dans l'étude minutieuse du Coran, faute d'instance qui pourrait sans appel nous dire ce qu'il y a dans le Coran. Comme tout texte religieux, le Coran garde sa transcendance, son mystère et sa complexité. Son contenu ne sera jamais que ce

que le lecteur y trouvera. La vérité d'un mouvement social et politique n'est pas dans l'érudition théologique. Il y a ici deux ordres différents. Les mouvements politiques et sociaux cherchent un sens et une légitimation dans le répertoire symbolique qui domine leur société et leur horizon de pensée.

Si l'on s'intéresse donc aux mouvements politiques et sociaux islamistes, il faut étudier, non ce que le Coran dit en vérité, mais ce que ses acteurs disent que le Coran dit.”⁸

Let's start by clarifying what is meant by religious fundamentalism.

Numerous fundamentalisms exist around the world, but what seems to belong to all its possible declinations is the importance ascribed to politics, even if this does not mean that the various fundamentalist movements are directly engaged in the political struggle since their objective seems to be broader.

Enzo Pace and Renzo Guolo define fundamentalism as follows:

“Fundamentalism is, in fact a type of religious thinking and acting that questions itself on the ethical bond that holds together people living in the same society meant as totality of believers engaged, as such, in any field of social acting. They see the problem of the ultimate, ethical and religious problem of the polis in a radical manner: the political community that takes up form in a State must be based on a pact of religious fraternity.”⁹

We can see how such definition can be easily applied to the rapidly described positions of Sayyid Qutb. Human sovereignty and the neutrality of modern institutions are denied, described as empty and idolatrous and religion is placed back in the centre of social life.

Modernity, of which national States, democratic institutions and finally popular sovereignty are some of the principal products, seems to play a conclusive role inside the fundamentalist

⁸ Olivier Roy, *Généalogie de l'islamisme*, éditions Pluriel, Hachette, 1995, p. 114-115.

phenomenon. As a matter of fact, such phenomenon seems to have an ambivalent relation with respect to modernity. As stated by Bassam Tibi in its book *Religious Fundamentalism*¹⁰, all the fundamentalisms are marked by a contradiction relating in particular to modernity, in other words they are at the same time a product of the historical global context and a reaction to cultural modernity. In this sense, religious fundamentalism is not traditionalist, as we have seen for Qutb, and is not even an orthodoxy. Albeit the rhetoric of the fundamentalists may be considered as alternative to modernity, they are in reality its children, even though they refuse its individualism, secularism and liberal pluralism.

Tibi writes:

*“The cultural project of modernity develops a really new vision of the world, looking to the future and not to the past, according to which man would be able to form his destiny in an autonomous manner and to determine his social and natural environment. The secular answer to the question of whether man can govern is affirmative, whilst the fundamentalist answer to the same question is negative. At the basis of the secular vision of the world lies the modern idea of a knowledge based on modern science and technology.”*¹¹

Fundamentalists repeal, therefore, modernity in its cultural aspect, whilst they appreciate, explicitly or implicitly, its technical and scientific conquests. They repeal the rationalistic vision of modernity, but uphold the fruits of this same vision. They also, and principally, repeal the centrality assigned to the individual person, his autonomy, since it is the religious law that, according to this vision, must prevail.

However, can we find common principles in the different fundamentalist movements? From the existing literature it would seem that we can give an affirmative answer to this question. The

⁹ R. Guolo, E. Pace, *I fondamentalismi*, Editori Laterza, Bari 1998, p. 4.

¹⁰ B. Tibi, *Fondamentalismo religioso*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1997.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

fundamentalist, in fact, identifying the Holy Book with the direct expression of God's will, will cause his behavior to abide by some principles and in particular, according to Guolo and Pace: by the principles of inerrancy, unhistoricity and superiority of the divine Law over the earthly law, and to the prevalence of the myth of foundation¹². According to this perspective, the contents of the Holy Book, regardless of whether it is the Koran or the Torah, is considered as a totality of meaning that cannot be decomposed and interpreted by human reason, an unchangeable truth, a truth that cannot be reduced to any historical context and cannot be adjusted to the changed needs of any time; a truth that expresses God's law (superior to human law) and which provides the model of a perfect society. A truth, finally, that lies in the myth of the origins, whose function is to express absoluteness and the bond that is created among the believers.

We can establish at this stage a first point along the itinerary that we are following: *a reading of the holy texts that prohibits the human interpretation of such texts is itself a human interpretation*; because, as already mentioned above, we lack a criterion of truth that fills the gap between holy text and its understanding, in other words: how can one choose between Qutb and Bhutto? The solution to the problem of the choice of how to interpret a text cannot be found inside the text itself, otherwise there would be a contradiction or circularity, i.e. the understanding of the correct interpretation looked for in the Holy text (the authentic religion) requires for being understood, a previous understanding of the correct interpretation. If man, as such, could not claim the ultimate understanding since if he would do so he would replace God, then man cannot decide what sense to ascribe to God's message. In a certain way, there is always an element inside the holy texts that man misses and it is its transcendent component. Also Olivier Roy pointed out this. At the same time we can never leave out of consideration also a human, and, therefore, historical, situated, fallible and immanent element, when approaching the Bible or the Koran.

This aspect requires that we give a precise direction to our research. In the wording of "Islamic fundamentalism", contrarily to the culturalist Huntington's approach, it is not to the word "Islamic"

¹² R. Guolo, E. Pace, *I fondamentalismi*, Editori Laterza, Bari 1998, p. 6.

that we must draw our attention, but to the word “fundamentalism”. Therefore, it is not on a religion in particular that we must insist, but on a particular manner of understanding religion, and consequently on the nature of that particular manner, on its reasons, on the contexts in which it emerges. We shall also avoid confusing, like in the perspective of the clash of civilizations and in the identical position of fundamentalists and terrorists, the fight to terrorism with the fight to Islam. As a matter of fact, the studies conducted on fundamentalist movements have a tendency to define it as a political movement, rather than a religious movement. This is exactly what Bassam Tibi says:

*“...it is a fact that neither historians of religion nor the orientalists who have a philological formation are able to fully catch the phenomenon of fundamentalism. This is due to the fact that fundamentalism is first of all a political phenomenon, based on a social movement that is expanding, for catching which neither the subtleties of religious analysis nor those of Arab grammar or of any other language are sufficient.”*¹³

In fundamentalism we find traces of a real *political ideology*, which wants to establish an alternative order to that represented by today’s secular states undergoing a crisis. Its purpose is pursued through a politicization of religion. Through the religious discourse sociological, political, economic and cultural objectives are articulated and an answer to that *crisis of meaning* represented by modernity. On the other hand, the legitimization offered by religion is one of the most powerful ideologies of our time, able to mobilize the masses thanks to its simplifications and promises. This issue is underlined also by Huntington, even though it was then “misunderstood” in the consequences, when he describes religion as the most powerful mobilizing force of the modern world¹⁴, albeit it was certainly not the only one and not even isolated by a broad complex of factors. But we shall see these aspects later on.

¹³ B. Tibi, *Fondamentalismo religioso*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1997, p. 11.

¹⁴ S.P.Huntington, *Lo scontro delle civiltà e il nuovo ordine mondiale*. Garzanti, Milano 2000, p. 85.

Fundamentalism is, therefore, a complex historical phenomenon and it must be investigated as such. Its origin, contrary to what one might be led to think, is not in the Muslim world, but in the Protestant world. It is toward the end of the eighteenth century that this theological faction was born in the United States in opposition to the interpretation of the Bible that was being spread in Europe. Whilst in Europe all the critical instruments of human sciences were considered useful for freeing the holy texts from historical conditionings, in the USA the conservative theologians were afraid that science could alter the truth. Such position emerged on the occasion of a conference in Niagara Falls (1895), which represents the protestant fundamentalism birth. On that occasion a manifesto was worked out whose principal items were to protect the eternal truth of the Bible. The main issues (in line with the study of Guolo and Pace) are:

- “a) the absolute inerrancy of the Holy Text;
- b) reaffirming the divine nature of Christ;
- c) the fact that Christ was born from a Virgin;
- d) the universal redemption guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Christ;
- e) the resurrection of the flesh and the certainty of a second coming of Christ.”¹⁵

The first issue is a true distinctive trait of fundamentalism with respect to other religious movements. Guolo and Pace continue:

“In general terms, these two elements represent a mental form that is widespread also in other religious contexts in which fundamentalists movements emerge: we always find, on one hand, the statement of the inerrancy of the holy Text, and, on the other, the idea that the believer is required to engage in the political struggle for defeating the Enemy who prevents the triumph on earth of the

¹⁵ R. Guolo, E. Pace, *I fondamentalismi*, Editori Laterza, Bari 1998, p.14.

kingdom of truth: An appeal to an extreme engagement in the final war between the kingdom of Good and that of Evil.”¹⁶

We can find this common aspect of the different fundamentalisms in what was said before with regard to Islam.

However, the appeal to the Truth opens to a series of conclusive matters. Leaving out of consideration the fact that this matter is being handled in a thesis of political philosophy and not of theology or philology, a question must be asked about the role taken up by the truth. In other words, not only we do not know and we are not interested in knowing whether an access to the Truth is possible, since we lack a criterion that confirms its finding, if any, but we doubt of its relevance in this context. As a matter of fact, according to what we have said and by observing human history, we know that what is *politically* important is the reception, the consent that forms around an idea, regardless of whether this is right or wrong, true or false. It is said that a lie repeated thousand times is a truth. The political question is, therefore, to understand how an interpretation emerges and spreads, how it acquires historical relevance and deploys consequences, maybe even dramatic ones. It is necessary to find the dynamics of power, the political aspect underlying the religious discourse, in this case. It is for this reason that limiting the answer to fundamentalism to the mere level of the discussion about what is true and authentic, means in a certain way letting the very logic of fundamentalism to prevail. It means to uphold the *paranoiac* logic of such vision, whilst one should put in relation a true or false position with the broader context in which it appears. In this direction the Nietzsche-Foucault approach to *genealogy* appears useful.

Genealogy studies, as a matter of fact, the concrete production of discourses, placing them in their historical interaction and puts then itself in a critical perspective with regard to any *research of the origins*, meant as pure, essential place, as place of truth. We know how such research is strictly related to the fundamentalist phenomenon. Foucault writes:

¹⁶ *ibidem*, p. 16.

“La généalogie ne s’oppose pas à l’histoire comme la vue altière et profonde du philosophe au regard de taupe du savant; elle s’oppose au contraire au déploiement métahistorique des significations idéales et des indéfinies téléologies. Elle s’oppose à la recherche de l’origine. (...)

Pourquoi Nietzsche généalogiste récusait-il au moins en certaines occasions, la recherche des origines? Parce que d’abord on s’efforce d’y recueillir l’essence exacte de la chose, sa possibilité la plus pure, son identité soigneusement repliée sur elle-même, sa forme immobile et antérieure à tout ce qui est externe, accidentel et successif. Rechercher une telle origine, c’est essayer de retrouver ce qui était déjà, le cela même d’une image exactement adéquate à soi; (...) c’est entreprendre de lever tous les masques, pour dévoiler enfin une identité première. Or, si le généalogiste prend soin d’écouter l’histoire plutôt que d’ajouter foi à la métaphysique, qu’apprend-il? Que derrière les choses il y a tout autre chose: non point leur secret essentiel et sans date, mais le secret qu’elles sont sans essence ou que leur essence fut construite pièce à pièce à partir de figures qui lui étaient étrangères.”¹⁷

One must look at concrete history, at the battles, the errors and games of the chance. It is necessary to look at the dynamics of power that surround any stance. And we know, thanks to Michel Foucault, that any power produces its own *regime of truth*, that the power is also a fight for the truth, for establishing its own *order of the discourse*. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake a sort of genealogy of religious fundamentalism and terrorism and, maybe of the religious discourse itself. We must, therefore, ask ourselves why it was possible, in precise historical moments and in precise places, to interpret and live Islam (but not only) in such a way as to justify or even feed violence, intolerance and so on. And also in this case the scientific literature on the subject is endless.

In this respect, and on the basis of what we said up to here, it could be useful to insert theories such as that of Huntington and, consequently also their dialogic version, in a broader and more ancient

¹⁷ M. Foucault, Nietzsche, *la généalogie et l’histoire*, in *Dits et écrits*, Gallimard, 2001, p. 1004 and following.

framework: that which Edward Said has referred to as *Orientalism*. This operation enables not only to discover the power implications underlying similar visions, but also to criticize the very same practicability, in this context, of notions such as those of West, East, Civilization, etc. ... The novelty, with respect to the past, lies in the appearance of what Margalit and Buruma have called *Westernalism*¹⁸, in relation to the work of Said, and in which we can actually find a distribution of power and, therefore, of the categories that power produces, no longer concentrated exclusively in the European and US capital cities, like at the time of colonialism, but a power that has today many centers spread around the world. What is meant by Orientalism?

*“It is an afterthought of what has been considered for centuries an insurmountable abyss between West and East. My purpose was not so much to avoid the differences – who can deny the constitutive character of national and cultural differences in the relations among human beings? – but to defy the idea that differences necessarily entail hostilities, a frozen reified whole of essences in opposition, and the entire polemic knowledge built on this basis. What I wished was a new way of reading the separations and conflicts that had caused hostilities and wars and the imperialistic control to prevail.”*¹⁹

The analysis of Said are debtor to the Foucault’s *L’ordre du discours*, are *anti-essentialist*, and has a constructivist vision of identity. The Orientalism, of which I consider that of Huntington as one of the latest chapters, is that set of institutions created by the West for the purpose of managing its relations with the East. A management based also on cultural factors, in addition to the economic, political and military relations of force, i.e. a set of true or false notions on the East. It is the western way for exercising its influence and dominion over the East. For centuries the East, because

¹⁸ “What we told here (...) is not the Manichaeian history of a civilization in war with another. Conversely, it is the history of a contamination of bad ideas ...” in, I. Buruma, A. Margalit, *Occidentalismo, l’Occidente agli occhi dei suoi nemici*, Einaudi, Turin 2004.

¹⁹ E. W. Said, *Occidentalismo, l’immagine europea dell’Oriente*, Feltrinelli, sixth edition, Rome 2007, from rge postface.

of Orientalism, and above all of the English and French ones at first, U.S. then, is not the subject of freely conceived acts and theories. Said shows that European culture derived force and defined its identity also in opposition to that removed *Self* that the East represents. Each society and each time recreates its “others” to oppose with “We”. This creation is not static, but is an historical, social, intellectual and political process.

The very same notions of West and East are problematic:

“I am moving from the assumption that the East is not a given natural entity, something that simply exists, so as the West exists. We must take very seriously Vico’s observation that men are the originators of their history, and what we are able to know is what they have done, for transporting it on a geographic level: as geographic and cultural, in addition to being also historical entities, East and West are the product of man’s material and intellectual energies. Therefore, just like the West, the East is an idea that has a history and tradition of thought, images and language that have given to it reality and presence. The two geographic entities support one another and, to a certain extent, reflect each other.”²⁰

Orientalism is, therefore, a cultural *and* a political fact.

Said, on the other hand, directly criticizes Huntington’s thesis, by underlining how one of the conquests of modern cultural theory lies in having understood that cultures and civilizations are hybrid, heterogeneous and so much inter-related as to make it impossible any unified description of their individuality or the research of their essence. In fact Said asks himself:

“How is it possible to speak today of “western civilization” if not, for a large part, in terms of an ideological fiction that assigns a sort of detached superiority to a handful of ideas and values, none

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 15.

of which has a great meaning outside the history of conquests, emigrations, travels and mixes of peoples, which have given to the western nations their current inhomogeneous societies?”²¹

In synthesis it is necessary to analyze the specific situations which have radicalized identities from time to time, and the religious identity in particular. In the Orientalism we see what was said with regard to fundamentalism, i.e. that each power fights for causing its interpretation, its regime of truth to prevail. Circumscribing the analysis inside the discourse that tries to build its own *order of the discourse* means losing the sight of the complexity of what is real, the relation of the discourse with what exceeds it, i.e. history, politics. It means not to understand the emergency conditions of the discourse itself. On the other hand, if we want to identify adequate answers to the phenomena of religious terrorism and fundamentalism, we must ask ourselves, as we are trying to do here on a preliminary basis, whether *a translation* is possible of the religious discourse that cannot be mediated, into categories that are always subject to the compromise, exchange, negotiations, of politics, whether it is possible and effective to *de-transcendentalize* the fundamentalist position. We are seeing how both fundamentalism and Orientalism are two mainly political discourses, behind the text.

Religious fundamentalism is not without relations with Orientalism, i.e. with the theoretical establishment that accompanied and permitted colonialism. The latter subtracted from the dominated populations, in addition to material resources, also that “spiritual”, discursive autonomy, their very same identity, which the ancient and new subjects of the colonial dominion are trying to recover, or build, in a “pure religion”. It is not by chance that, outside the western world, all fundamentalist movements are anti-western. We shall probe into these subjects in the subsequent chapters devoted to culture and religion. Let’s try now to better understand the phenomenon of terrorism.

²¹ Ibidem, p. 345.

b. Terrorism.

We have seen how religious fundamentalism, albeit its rhetoric, must be principally understood as a political phenomenon. Also the lens through which the holy texts of the different religions are understood and lived is of a political nature. So suggests also Elie Barnavi, professor of Modern History of the West at Tel Aviv University and ambassador of Israel, in his book “Assassin Religions”:

“We invented “the dialogue among civilizations”. It is a stalking horse. Because of what can be discuss in these sessions of “dialogue”(…)? Of the texts? But the texts (…) only say what one wants them to say. Therefore, it is of this that one should talk, but it is of this that one cannot talk. First of all because the way in which the texts are lived is a political problem (…).”²²

It would seem, therefore, that a very strong continuity exists between the political dimension and the religious dimension able to cause either one to shift over the other. From this point of view, it appears useful to make reference to the concept of *securitization* as defined by Copenhagen School. i.e. how, through a linguistic act, some issues are configured in terms of security. In other words, these issues are lifted above the level of ordinary politics, since they are particularly urgent or necessary. According to this approach it is considered

“(…) that religion has essentially to cope with existential matters, and that, consequently, the threats to holy objects are often seen as existential threats that require an immediate actual action by the State or an entity endowed with similar powers. For this reason it is always appealing to present holy objects inside a discourse about security. In general the probability of success in

²² E.Barnavi, *Religioni assassine*, Bompiani, Milan 2007, p. 159.

proposing a “security move” in favor of holy objects is greater than proposing it for other reference objects.”²³

We know how the language of international relations, its key concepts, and those of politics in general are linked to religion. Carl Schmitt. In this case, however, the link becomes more direct. According to the argument offered by Lausten and Waever:

religion+security=ideology²⁴

Ideologies can, in fact, be interpreted as attempts to legitimize the politics of a certain government or group through an almost religious semantic.

“Overlapping the religious discourse to the political one (relating to security), certain preferred political options are presented as the only possible political actions conceived as if they were prescribed by a transcendent power and, therefore, necessary, imperative. Ideology is religion submitted to the securitization process.”²⁵

In this sense, religion loses its connotation of transcendence, present in all the religions, for replacing, up to confusing itself with it, with the political and, therefore, immanent dimension. What interests me, here, is not religion as such, nor the research of its authenticity. What I want to underline, once again, is how this shifting of the religious into the political is a precise political strategy, of which theories such as that of Huntington make use and that the line of the Dialogue, with its accepting the centrality afforded to religion, does not succeed to neutralize, i.e. does not

²³ Carsten Bagge Lausten- Ole Waever, *In difesa della religione, il sacro come questione di sicurezza*, in, *Ritorno dall'esilio, la religione nelle relazioni internazionali*, by Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2006, p. 200.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 210.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 210.

succeed to *de-securitize*²⁶, i.e. to distinguish with the due attention between political matters and religious matters, thus falsifying the analysis and making it extremely difficult to draw adequate solutions to the challenge. In synthesis, it is at historical and political matters that we must look, asking ourselves the following question: what does lead to the radicalization of one's own religious, but also ethnic or national identity, so as to culminate in terroristic or however violent actions?

One of the most frequent answers to this question is usually found in material hardships and poor education. Several studies, including *inter alia* that of Alan B. Krueger, economist and professor of Public policy at Princeton University, as well as adviser to the National Counterterrorism Center, demonstrate that such hypothesis is without empirical systematic foundation. If it was not so, the world would be full of terrorists.

Rather than being recruited among poor classes, in fact, terrorists are coming in general from middle-class or upper-class families with good education. Analphabet unemployed population usually does not work out its own opinion on political matters, being too involved in daily survival problems. This does not exclude, however, that among the reasons of the terrorists there are the lack or inequality of resources in their countries of origin. The level of education is not *per se* a sufficient element to describe the quality thereof. As a matter of fact, and we shall better see this later on, it is not sufficient to study, one must investigate what and how one studies. In this respect it is the *contents of education* that is important.

Krueger maintains that among the reasons that are more likely to feed a radical vision of one's own identity, regardless of how this is expressed (from the religious, ethnic, nationalistic, etc. standpoints), and, therefore the support of or participation in terroristic actions there is:

²⁶ "Noi non crediamo come Huntington, che le religioni siano necessariamente questioni di sicurezza. Ma, d'altra parte, esse lo diventano facilmente a causa della natura del discorso religioso. La religione presenta affinità strutturali con il processo di securitization (...). Se la religione è presente in politica, l'obiettivo cruciale diventa quello di prevenire che si trasformi in ideologia. Quindi, l'obiettivo è quello di privare l'ideologia del suo carattere di questione di sicurezza." Tratto da, Carsten Bagge Lausten- Ole Waever, *In difesa della religione, il sacro come questione di sicurezza*, in, *Ritorno dall'esilio, la religione nelle relazioni internazionali*, by Pavlos Hatzopoulos and Fabio Petito, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2006, p. 214.

“La soppressione delle libertà civili e dei diritti politici, compresi la libertà di stampa, la libertà di riunione e i diritti democratici. Quando i mezzi di protesta non violenti sono limitati, sembra più probabile che i contestatori ricorrano a tattiche terroristiche. Se vi è un modo in cui le condizioni economiche favorevoli contribuiscono a ridurre il terrorismo, è rafforzando la probabilità che un paese sia in grado di sostenere le libertà civili e i diritti politici. Vi sono tuttavia numerosi esempi di paesi con un basso tenore di vita che garantiscono ai loro cittadini le libertà e i diritti politici e sufficienti esempi di paesi ricchi (come l’Arabia Saudita) che limitano le libertà civili e i diritti politici per poter affermare che un tenore di vita più elevato non è di per sé sufficiente a ridurre il rischio di terrorismo.”²⁷

However, we can ask ourselves on this basis whether, in an inter-related world such as our world, also in those countries that have not yet granted to their citizens true civil freedoms and political rights, there is not, however, the feeling, the awareness that something was subtracted from them. Internet and the satellite television make political realities to be simultaneously present throughout the world. Comparisons are now possible, if not mandatory, with all the psychological weight that this implies. The recent revolutions in North Africa (Egypt, Tunisia and Libya) seem to confirm this.

Krueger, demonstrates, however, that the fundamental point is *resentment*. Religion can be one of its elements but not the only one, nor it is the exclusive heritage of a specific religion. No religion has the monopoly of terrorism.

Among the principal reasons for resentment we can identify the *occupation by foreign powers*. It is against the occupying countries, against its symbols and representatives, that this resentment tends to result in violent attacks. As stated Krueger, terrorism may be then defined as an *improper violent form of political expression*, a form of expression that in 88% of the cases occurs in the countries of

²⁷ A.B.Krueger, *Terroristi perché*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2009, p. 9.

origin of the attackers. This means that the largest part of international terrorism is, in reality *local* and that the victims are for the largest part fellow citizens of the terrorists.

In synthesis, in the analyses of Krueger terrorism is described as a *tactic* implemented by sub-state organizations and individuals that has the purpose of exercising an influence that overcomes the direct targets and generates *fear*.

The Nobel prize award winner for economy Amartya Sen put himself, following this line of reasoning, the problem of the link between poverty and violence. He finds in fact in the explanations that see material hardships as sources of violence an “*economic reductionism*”. These explanations that identify poverty, in general, as unique cause of violence have a tendency to leave out of consideration a far larger series of factors. It is always possible, conversely, to establish a link between poverty and violence in the opposite direction: terrorism, war and repression are among the probable causes for an impoverishment of society. Poverty and inequalities can also generate a climate of acquiescence towards violence among those populations who consider themselves excluded from the *globalization* process. It is thanks to this acquiescence that the leaders of the most violent movements find it easy to recruit simple soldiers of terrorism:

*“La grande asimmetria del potere politico mondiale, inoltre, aumenta la distanza degli indifesi dall’idea di un mondo pacifico e cooperativo. Ridurre le asimmetrie in termini di potere politico potrebbe essere importante almeno quanto lo è ridurre le asimmetrie nelle relazioni economiche”.*²⁸

In a subsequent chapter we shall talk of globalization itself.

The Indian economist reminds us that resentment is not only generated by current situations, but also by the *memory* of past destructions and segregations, from past deprivations and injustices such as those that colonialism imposed to a large part of mankind.

²⁸ A. Sen, “La povertà genera violenza” Luiss University Press, Milan 2007, page 34

We have been talking till now of terrorism as of a tactics and tried to identify some of its principal causes, without, however, insisting in a particular manner on religious terrorism. However, it is from religious terrorism that we started and from the relation linking religion and politics. If the former does not necessarily become violent, then we must understand in what contexts such shifting can occur, and why this happens, i.e. whether additional “structural” connections exist between religion and violence.

As the Californian professor Mark Juergensmeyer suggests in his study on religious terrorism, religion has the power to offer a “transformative vision of human potential”²⁹. He questions himself, in fact, on the role of religion in terroristic attacks and concludes that religion provides not only ideology, but also the reasons and organizational structure.

The author of “Terrorists in the name of God”, investigates on the place occupied by violence within religious traditions: its symbols are pervaded thereby. Death occupies a central place in the religious imagination. It is not a case, in fact, that the greatest scholars of religion, from Mauss to Freud, asked themselves for what reason religion seemed to need violence and violence seemed to need religion.

Juergensmeyer asks himself how can it be possible that normal devout people, with a moral vision of reality, can perform such violent acts and most times again innocent people. The same author is aware that the line that separates terrorists from those who support them without being terrorists is very thin. He is also aware that the denomination of terrorism is a subjective judgment about the rightfulness of violence. In any event he states:

“La domanda è se il terrorismo religioso sia diverso dagli altri tipi di terrorismo. (...) Alcune differenze sono palesi: il moralismo trascendentale con cui azioni di questo tipo vengono giustificate, ad esempio, e l'intensità rituale con cui vengono commesse. Altre differenze sono più profonde e attengono alla vera essenza della religione. Le tradizionali immagini religiose di

²⁹ M. Juergensmeyer, *Terroristi in nome di Dio*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2003.

conflitto e trasformazione –il concetto di guerra universale- sono state utilizzate in conflitti sociali molto terreni. Quando qualcuno ritiene che queste battaglie cosmiche si svolgano sul piano umano dell'esistenza, esse finiscono per sfociare in atti di violenza reali.

Questo ci porta a un'altra domanda ancora: quando si usa la religione per giustificare la violenza, lo si fa solo per scopi politici? Questa domanda è meno semplice di quanto possa apparire. A renderla complessa è soprattutto il ritorno della religione, in diverse parti del mondo, nel ruolo di ideologia di ordine pubblico (specialmente all'interno di movimenti di nazionalismo religioso), dove le ideologie religiose e politiche si saldano tra loro. (...) la religione non è innocente, ma, comunemente, non conduce alla violenza. Questo succede solo quando una determinata serie di circostanze (politiche, sociali e ideologiche) si saldano insieme, quando la religione diventa tutt'uno con manifestazioni violente di aspirazioni sociali, orgoglio personale e movimenti per il cambiamento politico.”³⁰

This interpretation is consistent with our approach that tries to identify that series of extra-religious factors that lead to religious violence. Once again that possible trade-off is underlined between political and social matters and religious discourse starting from which we can aspire to a sort of translation of religious violence into political claims; in other words, the possibility to pass from a level without compromises such as the religious one to a level in which action and dialogue remain possible, i.e. to a political level.

Juergensmeyer says that in order to be successful a terrorist action must be able to rely on a social acknowledgement and the broadly shared perception of an already violent environment. One of the fundamental issues to which we already made reference, is resumed here: the *perception that one's own community is already under attack*, and that violent actions are nothing but an answer to the damage suffered. Regardless of whether such perception is rightful or not, it is undoubtedly

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 11.

considered valid by the members of the community. This perception generates what the author refers to as “*cultures of violence*”.

Juergensmeyer in his study on religiously motivated terrorism does not consider exclusively Islam, but describes and analyses the Christian, Jewish, Sikh and Buddhist variants of similar violence, confirming what said on the fact that all the religions, under certain precise circumstances, can provide the ideological support that is necessary to perpetrate violence.

What makes religion particularly incline to support terrorism can be found in its characteristic to easily present itself in the form of a public ceremony. The *violence-show* organized then by terrorists is particularly familiar to those who have a religious formation. Like religion, also terrorist acts have a symbolic aspect that is useful to force the “public” to take, to get into that specific alternative vision of the world brought forward by terrorists.

The religious imagination is full of visions of cosmic wars and this makes religious violence more terrible since it leads this imagination to coincide with earthly and political battles. The fact of taking up such perspective of *absolute fight* proves that once arrived to this stage it is impossible to reach, but even just to conceive, a compromise or consent around shared solutions. Hence the need arises to find oneself in a violent context that may justify in turn terrorist violence. It is not a chance then that, given the absoluteness of the fight, terrorists criticize those who support mediation in the same manner as one’s own enemy. In the perspective of radical Islamists, for example, the moderate governments of their countries are, maybe, enemies worse than the foreign governments.

Violence offers then an *illusion of power*. Universal war permits to hope in the final victory, beyond earthly limitations. Many of the terrorists who were interviewed by Juergensmeyer maintain, in fact, that they have found *in the struggle that order and that meaning which their life was lacking*.

Through the clash, interpreted as a cosmic Manichean battle, certain marginal individuals succeeded in believing that they could finally control their lives, understand their destiny. And we cannot avoid thinking in this sense, as briefly mentioned above, to how much economic and cultural globalization produces a widespread sense of loss, eradication, non-dominion of one’s own

existence. It is for this reason that many individuals who join terrorist groups, even suicidal ones, do not have the sensation of sacrificing their lives, but to realize it.

It is then necessary to understand when a real conflict can easily take up the character of a universal clash. Juergensmeyer lists three principal conditions:

The first one consists in perceiving the struggle as *defense of a fundamental identity and dignity*; the second in considering defeat as unthinkable, shifting it from an historical to a metaphysical level; and third, *when the clash appears to be blocked*, and one does not believe that it can be won in real time, when it appears hopeless, without a way of exit at a human level.

As stated by the author at issue:

*“La presenza di una qualunque di queste tre caratteristiche fa crescere la probabilità che un conflitto del mondo reale venga concepito in termini universali come guerra sacra. Se tutte e tre queste caratteristiche sono presenti simultaneamente, la probabilità è elevatissima. Una lotta che inizialmente ha le caratteristiche di un conflitto reale può gradualmente assumere le qualità specifiche di una guerra universale man mano che le soluzioni diventano improbabili e cresce la consapevolezza di quanto sarebbe devastante una sconfitta. Fino alla fine degli anni '80, ad esempio, erano pochi quelli che vedevano il conflitto arabo-israeliano come una battaglia sacra. (...) quando una lotta viene sacralizzata, eventi che prima avrebbero potuto essere considerati scaramucce di poca importanza o leggere differenze di punti di vista vengono elevati a proporzioni monumentali. L'uso della violenza diventa legittimato e il minimo insulto o provocazione può portare ad attacchi terroristici. Quelli che prima erano semplici avversari diventano nemici universali”.*³¹

This signifies and involves a *failure of politics* in finding solutions that prevent differences and claims to fall in this category. If war is described as a continuation of politics with other means,

³¹ Ibidem, p.179.

then we can rather describe it as its failure. And war, in addition to providing a justification of violence, also permits to organize a separation between opposed field, between Us and Them. This organization of the field had a precise function. It is useful *to create the collective enemy*, to cause it to slip into a stereotype, to dehumanize it. The Jewish people know perfectly well this process of expropriation of its own humanity as premise to the killing.

Currently, however, the principal enemy is found, in most parts of the world, in the United States of America. This is due to the fact that they not only support several secular or authoritarian regimes against which the religious groups are fighting, but also because the USA are the symbol of modernization and globalization, perceived as a threat to one's own values.

The universal war of which we have spoken is experienced, once again as a way out from a situation of *Humiliation and impotence*. Which are the phases through which such war is determined?

The first phase starts with the perception of a world that does not work, in which *real problems exist*. The second phase goes through the frustration of seeing *the ordinary options (for solving problems) being denied* and experienced as *personal failure*. In the third phase, one finds *a solution in religion*: the universal war. In this third phase everything takes up a *meaning* and finds an explanation. Even the personal failure is no longer experienced as such, but as a part of a broader design, in which God is considered on one's side. The final phase consists, conversely in the execution of those symbolic acts that illustrate the universal import of the struggle under way. In synthesis religion and the struggle are perceived as ways out from humiliation and dishonor and help finding that enemy to whom to ascribe the responsibility for one's own failures and one's own marginality.

Juergensmeyer himself affirms at the end of his essay that the meeting between religion and violence is strictly related to social tensions in this period of history. Only by resolving such tensions can we defuse religious violence.

A specific instance, so to speak, of what has been stated to this point is offered by the study conducted by Martha Nussbaum into religious radicalism in India with the revealing title of “*Lo scontro dentro la civiltà*”.³² In opposition to the views expressed by Huntington, the American philosopher points out that a clash exists *within* every civilisation - between those who are prepared to live with people who are different, on the basis of reciprocity, and those who insist on the predominance of a single ethnic-religious tradition. Parallel to this, she insists that there is within each one of us, as Gandhi teaches, a war between the impulse to dominate others who are different from ourselves, and the impulse to live compassionately together with them.

In this context, Nussbaum defends the vitality of Indian democracy, since it has been able to maintain the plurality of visions of the world that are present within it, without falling into a Manichean vision of “us versus them”. She cites the case of Gujarat as an example of how dramatic a situation can become when a political party comes into power by appealing to religious nationalism and ideals of ethnic purity. The Hindu Right has affinities with the European experiences of romantic nationalism founded on blood, earth, purity and Volksgeist, and according to Nussbaum’s analysis it has achieved success for the same reasons as did the nationalist movements in Italy and Germany: a community that has been wounded in its dignity seeks to purify itself from the humiliation by resorting to violence.

The case of Gujarat is important because it shows how a long experience of humiliation and submission, like that suffered under British colonial domination, can lead to a sense of shame and to the desire to gain freedom by recourse to violence over other ethnic-religious groups. Nussbaum suggests, and this is another very important point, that *the image imposed by the dominant enemy is internalised*, so that Hindus actually ended up seeing themselves as inferior, destined for subjugation, exactly like the Hebrews for a long part of their history. The image of oneself as an impotent victim is internalised; and impotence generates rage. Nussbaum writes:

³² Martha Nussbaum, *Lo scontro dentro la civiltà*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009.

“Dunque la stigmatizzazione delle minoranze non è semplicemente un espediente per cementare l’unità nazionale. È una strategia con la quale gli esseri umani tentano di gestire la vergogna di essere impotenti, come tutti gli esseri umani in qualche misura sono. Non è possibile sfuggire a questo meccanismo. Lo si può limitare, date certe circostanze di sviluppo sociale ed economico. Ma quando un gruppo realizza di essere stato umiliato per secoli (...), la vergogna assume facilmente una forma aggressiva, come nel caso dei tedeschi dopo la prima guerra mondiale. Sulla scia della colossale ferita inferta alla virilità tedesca dalla guerra si sviluppò un’ossessione per la purezza corporea maschile (...). Proiettare disgusto e vergogna su un gruppo ne fa un gruppo subordinato. Ma visto che si tratta di una subordinazione alla cui radice stanno ansia e negazione, non può essere una subordinazione pacifica. Al contrario, la rabbia che un popolo sente contro la propria impotenza, la propria animalità, spesso viene scatenata contro quel gruppo, con umiliazioni, violenza fisica o entrambe. L’ansia raggiunge un punto estremo nei progetti di pulizia etnica...”³³

If the present is lived by a community as conflicted and degrading, then it is natural to seek a refuge in history. This refuge is idealised. But history, as Nussbaum reminds us, does not consist of a Manichean opposition between good and evil. It is a complex process in which very rarely is one side completely right, and the other side completely wrong. Education is thus of decisive importance, both in developing a critical spirit, and in leading a community to accept diversity as a source of enrichment and not as a threat. As regards education, it is not by chance that nationalist movements such as Hindu nationalism (but the same can be said, for example, of Pakistani madrassas) insist on rote learning, which is the precise opposite. Nussbaum here aligns herself with the pedagogical tradition of the great Tagore.

In the light of what we have seen so far, if we now look at the Muslim world, we can recognise how all the elements identified above (and others that will be clarified subsequently) can be recognised here. The Muslim world corresponds to one of the poorest areas of the entire world. The enormous

³³ [Ibidem, p.278.](#)

quantity of resources, especially petroleum, does not serve to make the average conditions of the inhabitants more tolerable. On the contrary, as Fareed Zakaria argues in his *“Democrazia senza libertà”*, the regimes which dispose of abundant natural resources tend not to develop, not to modernise, and hence to remain illegitimate. Governments that do not really need to tax their populations free themselves at the same time from having to provide citizens with those services and rights that would justify taxation. No transparency, no responsibility is demanded of them by the people. Similarly, wealth that derives from natural resources allows the institutions of a country to become repressive, because money for financing the police and army will never be wanting. Saudi Arabia and Oman are two obvious examples.

Add to this the consequences of globalisation, both from the cultural and from the more strictly economic point of view (which we shall soon analyse), and the result is that the institutions of government are extremely weak, if not totally indifferent, when it comes to granting the people those rights which governments can bestow, or even to securing the very conditions of survival of the people they rule. We can in fact affirm that the word “citizen” does not properly represent the condition of people living in much of the Muslim area. The notion of “subject”, with all the arbitrariness of any privileges that it implies, seems more appropriate. It therefore appears evident that this kind of state, “western” and free from any imposed religion - a relic of the colonial experience - is now considered to be a failed experiment. This failure has impelled people to seek alternative models of social organisation. Even ideas such as that of a Caliphate gain traction, although the sacred texts of Islam themselves do not offer any prescription and leave such matters open to choice.

We should also note that other political and ideological models of society, which have aroused great hopes of renewal and redemption in the Muslim world - such as liberalism or the nationalism of Nasser or socialism - have also failed. Zakaria writes:

“Le nuove tendenze politiche e i nuovi programmi non portarono il mondo arabo da nessuna parte. Nonostante il grande entusiasmo, i regimi mediorientali adottarono posizioni teoriche poco proficue e le misero in pratica nel modo peggiore. Il socialismo non produsse che burocrazia e stagnazione economica. Non essendo riusciti a correggere le disfunzioni della pianificazione centralizzata, i sistemi economici dei paesi arabi non progredirono mai realmente. Invece di muoversi verso la democrazia le repubbliche si cristallizzarono in regimi dittatoriali (...) l’unità del Medio Oriente si incrinò e sgretolò non appena i singoli stati scoprirono interessi e opportunità nazionali. (...) Come se non bastasse, *Israele* inflisse agli arabi una serie di umilianti sconfitte. La repentina, sconcertante *disfatta del 1967* segnò in un certo senso una svolta, poiché dimostrò che, dietro la retorica e la magniloquenza, le società mediorientali si stavano sfaldando. Quando nel 1990 Saddam invase il Kuwait, distrusse quel poco che restava dell’idea panaraba.”³⁴

The failure of western models of society has motivated a return to that past history which is perceived by Muslims to have been glorious, when Islam conquered the world. When the present is felt to be humiliating, this leads to the search for a pre-existent state, to the pursuit of an ideal purity of origins that is precisely the fertile ground where religious fundamentalism and violence thrive. It is in this context that Qutb, the father of Islamic fundamentalism to whom we have referred, offered, in the 1950s and 60s, the prospect of a return to the Koran. Against corrupt and violent regimes, Islam slowly became the sole instrument of opposition, the sole expression of dissent. Zakaria, sharing the opinion of many other specialists studying the Middle East, writes:

“Da questo punto di vista l’Islam non ha rivali. Il mondo arabo è un deserto politico, non ci sono veri e propri partiti politici né una stampa libera e solo pochi sbocchi per il dissenso. La moschea è diventata così lo spazio privilegiato dove discutere di politica.

³⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *Democrazia senza libertà*, Rizzoli, Milano 2003, p. 171.

essendo l'unico luogo a cui non può essere vietato l'accesso nelle società musulmane, è quello in cui l'odio e l'opposizione nei confronti dei regimi si sono coagulati e rafforzati. Il linguaggio dell'opposizione è diventato, in questi paesi, il linguaggio della religione. E la combinazione di religione e politica si è rivelata infiammabile. Le religioni, o quanto meno le religioni abramitiche (giudaismo, cristianesimo e Islam), mettono l'accento su assoluti morali. La politica invece nasce dal compromesso. Ne è scaturito un atteggiamento spietato e radicale nei confronti della vita pubblica. Le organizzazioni fondamentaliste non si sono limitate alle parole. I Fratelli musulmani, Hamas, Hezbollah, hanno fornito servizi sociali, assistenza medica, consulenze e alloggi temporanei. Chiunque sostenga il ruolo fondamentale della società civile, non può non sentirsi amareggiato nel constatare che in Medio Oriente alcuni gruppi illiberali *sono* la società civile.”³⁵

Here we find two of the elements emphasised above, i.e. on the one hand the absence of peaceful and democratic channels for the expression of political intent and dissent, and on the other the failure of the institutions to provide the services that justify their existence. These problems combined mean that any possible solutions become more and more radical, and this swells the ranks of fundamentalist movements and terrorist organisations.

In his “L'Islam è compatibile con la democrazia?” Renzo Guolo writes:

“Il meccanismo regolativo del fondamentalismo, adottato dai governi “moderati” alleati dell'Occidente, non riduce dunque l'espansione dell'islamismo. La devia, piuttosto, verso altri piani: quella neotradizionalista, verso la società; quella radicale, che si vede preclusa la scena nazionale dalla repressione interna, verso il *terrorismo globale*. È a partire dalla constatazione del fallimento di questa strategia di controllo che i teorici del “cambio di regime” americani guardano alla democrazia come al solo sistema capace di mettere fine, in prospettiva, al ciclo riproduttivo

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 182. p.142

dell'islamismo. Un ciclo alimentato, oggettivamente, dall'incapacità, o dall'impossibilità, dei regimi “moderati” di prescindere dal “fattore I” (Islam) come elemento di legittimazione politica.”³⁶

In conclusion, we can say that the tactic which terrorism espouses is not a necessary attribute of Islam, nor of religion in general, even though the symbolic universe of religions easily relates to questions it considers to be existential. We have, above all, delineated a series of elements, essentially political in character and hence non-religious, which tend to generate that improper form of political expression that is terrorism.

We must now examine in more detail some of the main concepts that arise in studies of fundamentalism and terrorism: Culture, Religion, Globalisation and Identity.

³⁶ Renzo Guolo, *L'Islam è compatibile con la democrazia?*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2007. p.24.

c. C. Cultures

Witold Gombrowicz, the great 20th-century Polish writer, wrote the following in his “Testamento”:

“L’uomo che impone la sua Forma è attivo, è il soggetto della Forma, quello che la crea. Quando la sua Forma subisce una deformazione al contatto con quella altrui, allora egli viene in un certa misura creato dagli altri, diventa un oggetto. E non si tratta affatto di trasformazioni superficiali, poiché la Forma ci trapassa fino al midollo: basta che modifichiamo il tono di voce perché certi nostri contenuti non possano più venire espressi, pensati e forse nemmeno sentiti.

A questo punto si apre una quantità sterminata di varianti: dato che le persone sono tutte diverse le une dalle altre, ne deriva un numero infinito di combinazioni. A ciò si aggiunge la fortissima pressione delle forme già pronte ed elaborate dalla cultura.”³⁷

Gombrowicz is here describing the meaning of his novel *Ferdydurke*, but we can borrow his words precisely as a way of approaching the concept of culture. One of the strong themes in this author’s oeuvre is the idea that human beings construct one another, in a process of reciprocal formation and deformation. There is the idea, to which we have earlier made reference in relation to Orientalism, of an active subject constructing himself and at the same time constructing others; and we take this idea as our point of departure in an analysis of culture. There is a power relationship which links one individual to another, and this provides the background against which the image or identity of both are constructed.

Culture and *power* are always linked, and this link is the core of Cultural Studies for example. As Stuart Hall explains, we can say - without casting any doubt on the fact that people really do believe in their particular faiths - that religious identity or sentiment, and culture, are always *overdetermined*. The discourses of religion and culture are not isolated or resistant to change,

³⁷ W.Gombrowicz, *Testamento*, Feltrinelli, 2004, p. 79.

because they are always implicated in cultural struggle. Thus they change as the contextual conflicts and situations change. The case of the headscarf in France is a good example of this instability and interactivity of religious/cultural symbols in a political context.

The works of Edward Said have revealed how power resides in cultural discourse. After his analysis of Orientalism, the concept of culture can no longer present itself as a neutral space, and knowledge about culture can no longer claim to be autonomous, detached from political struggle, an academic knowledge that is purely objective.

Said has undermined the foundations of the European cultural system, showing that:

*“L’Europa non sarebbe stata, anzi non sarebbe potuta essere completamente se stessa senza la storia coloniale, e che l’idea antropologica di cultura è stata in gran parte prodotta dall’esperienza coloniale. Il colonialismo era cultura: una cultura emersa dal laboratorio coloniale come scienza e come strumento di governamentalità”*³⁸

Said demonstrates how, in the relations between the West and the “Orient”, knowledge and culture have been a means of establishing hierarchy and subjection, tools of western imperialist will. Analysis of the concept of culture can therefore usefully begin with a question, even if it cannot be answered; I borrow the question from Miguel Mellino:

*“In che misura è possibile lo sviluppo di saperi post-orientalisti, e cioè non finalizzati all’espropriazione e alla segmentazione culturale, alla produzione di soggetti gerarchicamente differenziati in funzione delle esigenze degli Stati (nazionali e imperiali), del mercato e delle logiche dell’accumulazione capitalistica?”*³⁹

³⁸ M.Mellino, a cura di, *Post-Orientalismo, Said e gli studi postcoloniali*, Meltemi, Roma 2009, p. 9.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p.11.

This question has the specific purpose of emphasising an aspect to which we shall return, i.e. the possibility, not to be discounted, of a relationship between different persons or peoples that does not necessarily imply asymmetries of power. It also serves to emphasise once more that the cultural question is not autonomous or innocent.

Said indeed wonders if it is possible to carve up humanity – which would on the face of it seem amenable to distinctions on the basis of different cultures, traditions, social systems and even races – while saving one’s own humanity from the consequences of making such divisions, from the hostility implicated in a division established between an Us (western) and a Them (oriental). He examines Orientalism as an expression of that deep and ambivalent logic cutting across western civilisation and because of which its highest values are contradicted (or are they maybe completed?) by a violence that one could consider to be ontological. He thus denounces a sort of negative mechanism of identity, according to which identity may only be affirmed through an arbitrary cultural construct of the Other. It is no accident that Said denounces the *essentialism* intrinsic to the orientalist view, which aims to neutralise the threat that the Orient has represented, to the extent of denying it any existence outside the categories used to represent it, denying it a history of its own, and transforming it rather into the history of an encounter that failed to materialise. Narcissism and paranoia are the appropriate terms in which to discuss such a view.

Mellino writes:

“(…) Nello schema di Said è stato l’orientalismo, attraverso la sua graduale metamorfosi storica da mero campo del sapere (accademico e testuale) a “disciplina di accumulazione sistematica di territori e di popolazioni, a trasformare progressivamente l’Oriente da semplice “esterno-costitutivo” dell’Occidente a un (s)oggetto-altro separato, inferiore, arretrato, silenzioso, passivo, femminile, estraneo ed esotico, a gettare le basi culturali di quei fenomeni di dominio e di violenza che sono stati al centro stesso della formazione e dello sviluppo della modernità capitalistica

occidentale: del colonialismo, della schiavitù, dell'imperialismo, del razzismo, del nazionalismo, dell'antisemitismo."⁴⁰

Thus the West, through orientalism, has tried and still tries to domesticate that threat to the mythology of its self-image that the Other represents. In this perspective, western identity would seem to be born precisely through its separation from, and subjugation of, the oriental Other, and then through the negation of the violent and predatory nature of its foundation. The western subject therefore represses its way of being in the world, its relation to plurality, the limits of its particular mode of constitution. By denying its own humanity, it constitutes itself as an absolute and universal subject; hence a subject that is sick, since from its very inception it has betrayed its emancipatory potential.

But the true sickness of modern man, according to Said, consists in the very idea of cultural identity, defined as the production of ontological cages isolated one from another, defined as essences.

The production of a cultural discourse going beyond the western monologue is the aim of *post-colonial* anthropology, aimed at giving a voice back to those peoples who had been denied it by the European project of colonialism. The post-colonial approach therefore expresses the need for global equality, both in material and cultural terms, in order to restore subjectivity to the old peripheries of empires.

Extremely useful in this regard is the account given by Professor Young, of Oxford University, of the experience of Frantz Fanon, the author of "*I dannati della terra*", a fundamental work of the anti-colonial movement.

"La prima reazione di Fanon, come egli stesso ebbe a dire, fu quella di vivere appieno il dolore di una condizione in cui si sentiva in uno stato di schiacciante oggettività. Più tardi, però Fanon si

⁴⁰ *ibidem*, p. 17.

rese conto che il problema andava oltre. La trasformazione in un oggetto, l'oggetto di un indice puntato e di uno sguardo denigratorio, era solo la sua parte più visibile. Accadeva che anche coloro che si trovavano in questa situazione finivano per introiettare una visione negativa di se stessi, si percepivano come diversi, come altri, come soggetti sminuiti.”⁴¹

Every power produces knowledge, every power produces its culture, and this culture expresses a division between those who hold power and those who must submit to it. This culture ends up being internalised even in the consciousness of those who are dominated.

Here is a vicious circle that must be broken. However, many post-colonial states have instead ended up reproducing this European error, assimilating a romantic conception of nationhood for example, with the aim of creating an authentic community with a people that is homogeneous in language, history, culture and race. If this model of nationhood might appear useful in the struggle for independence, it is shown to be dangerous and fallible once independence has been obtained. A (European) 19th-century idea of authenticity was imported into India, as we have seen, with Hindu nationalism. It is no coincidence that in northern India it is very easy to find copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. *Hindutva* aims at asserting the existence of a pure, homogeneous Indian culture that is therefore discriminatory towards other communities, beginning with the Muslim and Christian communities, and at concealing the painful hierarchical distinction between the different castes.

Such imagined (and nostalgic) cultural communities are also one of the consequences of globalisation, even if they are not only a contemporary phenomenon. This is what Eric Hobsbawm maintains in his essay with the revealing title “*L'invenzione della tradizione*”. But what are we to understand by the idea of “invented tradition”? According to the English historian, we should understand a set of practices, usually regulated by wide-spread norms and rituals, which have the aim of inculcating specific values and behaviours that implicitly claim continuity with the past – obviously a highly selective past. One example would be the Nuremberg rallies of the Nazis.

⁴¹ R.J.C.Young, *Introduzione al postcolonialismo*, Meltemi, Roma 2005, p.30.

These inventions tend to present themselves especially at moments of transformation, when social and cultural standards are becoming less efficacious and convincing. Hobsbawm alerts us to the fact that this has been a particularly intense phenomenon in the last two hundred years.

“Più interessante nella nostra prospettiva, è il ricorso a materiali antichi per costruire tradizioni inventate di tipo nuovo, destinate a fini altrettanto nuovi. Nel passato di ogni società si accumula una vasta riserva di questi materiali, ed è sempre facile ripescare il complesso linguaggio di una pratica e di una comunicazione simboliche. Talvolta era possibile innestare nuove tradizioni su quelle vecchie, talaltra potevano essere inventate attingendo ai forniti magazzini del rituale, del simbolismo, dell'esortazione morale ufficiali – la religione e i fasti dei principi, il folclore e la massoneria (a sua volta tradizione inventata, e ricca di forza simbolica).”⁴²

If similar invented traditions actually represent a real break with the past rather than its exhumation, their main function is to cement the cohesion of a group and its members' sense of belonging; to legitimate an institution or a relationship of authority; and to socialise individuals, imposing on them beliefs, values and behaviours.

Culture therefore seems to assume a particularly important role with the explosion of modernity. Modernity treats time as a forward progression, ever advancing, and relegating the past to oblivion. The response to such a trauma is to convert the past into something sacred. This constitutes a ground upon which an identity can be founded, something that remains immune to change. On this subject, Francesco Erspamer, of the University of Harvard, writes:

“Come avevano sempre fatto le religioni, in fondo; ma con una differenza sostanziale: il passato della cultura non restava confinato in un'epoca più o meno mitica o remota e però stabilita per sempre, l'età degli dèi o degli eroi; il passato della cultura si espandeva sino ai confini del

⁴² E.J Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, a cura di, *L'invenzione della tradizione*, Einaudi, Torino 2002, p.8.

presente, includeva tutto ciò che era concluso e in quanto tale inalterabile, dunque fatto della stessa materia degli archetipi. In questo senso la cultura fu un grandioso ed efficace programma di immunizzazione contro l'entropia: esponendoci alla varietà e variabilità del passato, ormai innocue e fortemente attenuate, ci tutelava, almeno psicologicamente, contro i rischi del disordine sociale, dell'instabilità economica, della confusione epistemologica, dell'angoscia esistenziale-tipici della modernità."⁴³

This search for protection has ended up becoming an obsession, as in nationalist or fundamentalist programmes. The past, a manufactured past, becomes the present form of a response to disorder, change, and the clash of opinions. Culture therefore has to build for itself stable boundaries. It becomes a process of *mnemonic socialisation* consisting of the rote learning of a specific identity. The identity does not depend on choices of future action, objectives to be pursued, or suchlike matters; rather it depends on what the inventors of a collective identity decide to *remember*. Erspamer tells us that through culture, a local community, based on physical proximity, is transformed into a *community of memory*.

The result is a concept of culture based on exclusion and purity. This is not without consequences, obviously in the relations that bind the members of a community together and also in the relations that separate communities from one another. In this connection, Young, picking up on what has been said about the colonial experience, writes:

“Il razzismo e l'intolleranza cui inevitabilmente dà luogo questa concezione totalitaria della nazione – e della cultura- spiegano in parte perché molti degli intellettuali postcoloniali, in modo particolare quelli indiani, abbiano cercato di pensare diversamente l'idea di nazione (...) che non abbiano necessariamente come punto di partenza una versione idealizzata (...) bensì il suo presente, ciò che essa in effetti è. Il postcolonialismo (...) ha tentato di mettere in luce i modi in cui

⁴³ F.Erspamer, *Paura di cambiare, crisi e critica del concetto di cultura*, Donzelli editori, Roma 2010, p. 4.

la nazione (e il nazionalismo) può divenire uno strumento di oppressione. Gli intellettuali postcoloniali hanno ripensato la nazione sulla base dei suoi frammenti, vale a dire a partire da quei gruppi che non appartengono in modo automatico a essa, che esistono ai suoi margini o nelle sue periferie. La nazione postcoloniale interpreta se stessa a partire dai suoi margini.”⁴⁴

What is said with regard to nations holds good for all cultural notions, including religion. To commence from the margins in fact is not only standard procedure from an egalitarian point of view, it is now also a descriptive, methodological requirement for anthropology itself. This is due mainly to the phenomenon of globalisation and post-modernity, the explosion of boundaries and of communities once clearly delimited.

As one of the greatest contemporary anthropologists, Clifford Geertz, writes:

“In un mondo in frammenti come il nostro è proprio a questi frammenti che dobbiamo prestare attenzione. (...)

Qual è il significato di questo sgretolarsi in singoli pezzi per i grandi concetti integrativi e totalizzanti ai quali ci siamo abituati da tempo nell’ordinare e catalogare le nostre rappresentazioni della politica mondiale? Quali conseguenze ne derivano per le nostre opinioni su analogie e differenze tra popoli, società, stati e culture? Che ne è di concetti come tradizione, identità, religione, ideologia, valori e nazione, o addirittura, cultura, società, stato, popolo?”⁴⁵

Geertz alerts us to the fact that not only is it no longer defensible to divide the world into blocks that are culturally homogeneous, but the interpretation of culture itself now appears to be an almost impossible task. The heterogeneous nature of the world would appear to have manifestly and even violently exploded; the grand ideas of the past seem incapable of bringing such differences under the

⁴⁴ R.J.C.Young, *Introduzione al postcolonialismo*, Meltemi, Roma 2005, p. 76.

⁴⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Mondo globale, mondi locali, cultura e politica alla fine del ventesimo secolo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1999, p. 17.

same umbrella. On this subject, another anthropologist, Ulf Hannerz, is correct when he writes that, in a world characterised by its high level of mingling and mobility, the concept of culture must be abandoned in favour of that of “*cultures*”. The traditional idea in anthropology of culture divided into homogeneous blocks scattered round the globe, integrated within themselves and tied to specific communities and territories, no longer holds water. Nowadays, people circulate, carrying with them their cultural background, and indeed the cultural background itself circulates independently of people. Territories therefore no longer correspond to particular cultures, they are no longer the necessary containers of those cultures. Even within the same community, the biographies and experiences of the inhabitants are so different that they cannot be boiled down to one and the same culture, however constructed. The distribution of a culture is not homogeneous. Hannerz, and numerous others, therefore suggest that we should abandon the metaphor of a cultural “mosaic” in favour of a vision that better represents the globe’s cultural interconnectedness and openness today. This would already suffice of itself to avoid what is called “cultural fundamentalism”, of which Huntington is one expression, which sees human beings as by nature carriers of a particular culture, distinct from and incommensurable with others, so that relations between carriers of different cultures are of necessity conflictual. In a world devoid of cultural homogeneity - if indeed cultural purity has ever existed (and we have seen that that this is not how things are, at least since the onset of modernity) - diversity and plurality dwell within each of us. Cultural fundamentalism is an ideological fiction. Like all ideologies however it unleashes its destructive potential when it is properly harnessed. We have seen in what contexts a similar operation becomes likely and politically attractive. In his “Eccessi di culture”, Marco Aime writes:

“These ideological constructions end up by becoming widespread shared opinions, since the means of communication have often a tendency to describe conflicts that are exclusively political as cultural, ethnic and tribal conflicts.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Marco Aime, *Eccessi di culture*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p.18.

Each culture, says Aime, is *per se* multi-cultural, impure, in movement and in the age of triumphant globalization, for the first time in his history, man experiences a split up between place of origin and sense of appurtenance. In other words, being born in Italy does not necessarily mean to feel Italian and to experiment oneself as Italian. Being born in a family of Muslim religion does not automatically mean to be Muslims. This reasoning applies to culture in general. Cultures are now a complex open fact, they contaminate each other and in their interior.

Seyla Benhabib (born in 1950 in [Istanbul](#)) is a [Turkish Jewish](#) professor of [political science](#) and philosophy at [Yale](#), and director of the program in Ethics, Politics, and Economics, and a well-known contemporary philosopher. She writes in her book “The Claims of Culture”:

“Sotto l’aspetto filosofico, non credo alla purezza delle culture, così come non credo neppure nella possibilità di individuarle come totalità significativamente discrete. Piuttosto, guardo ad esse come a complesse pratiche umane di significazione e rappresentazione, organizzazione e attribuzione, frazionate al proprio interno da narrazioni in conflitto. Le culture si costituiscono attraverso dialoghi complessi con altre culture e, nella maggior parte di quelle che sono pervenute a un certo grado di differenziazione interna, il dialogo con l’altro è intrinseco piuttosto che estrinseco alla cultura stessa.”⁴⁷

Benhabib criticizes, inter alia, the Huntington’s type theories since these lie on wrong epistemic premises, as we have noted. However, to the already evidenced criticisms, she also adds that no correspondence relationship exists, as similar reductionist theories believe, between a culture and a group of population, and that the culture of a group can be described in an incontrovertible manner. She then underlines that the excessive insistence on the internal homogeneousness of a group represents a threat to the individual members of that group. This approach generates, in other

words, in the best of hypotheses, conformism, but it can go far beyond that, up to those totalitarian visions that we have mentioned above.

Just on these bases Benhabib repeals, like many others, the *multiculturalist* theories, at least in their strong variants. That vision is a “mosaic” that we have described as impracticable in a planet so strictly interrelated and in movement, a vision that is as much useless from a descriptive standpoint as is normatively and politically dangerous.

The deconstruction of culture meant in a holistic sense goes, as we have seen speaking of orientalism and postcolonial studies, through a research of the courses that have generated those same essentialist visions, i.e. adopting what we wanted to link to the understanding of fundamentalism, a genealogic approach.

It is, for example, what undertaken in ethnology by researchers such as Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo. As a matter of fact, they have meant to underline how the recourse to the concept of ethnic group as an explanatory factor of conflicts, including dramatic ones, was fully inadequate and that, like traditions and cultures, in general, also ethnic groups were “an invention”. They support, therefore, a constructivist vision of the social world, whereby defined groups are not a reality *per se*, but the result of a political construction. In particular, Amselle and M'Bokolo maintain that:

“Le etnie non esistono oggettivamente come entità fisse e immutabili, bensì esse stesse vengono progressivamente introiettate in modo da esistere soggettivamente nella coscienza degli attori sociali. L'appellativo decostruzionista, assumendo la storicità come elemento interno dei processi identitari e dei fatti culturali, in questo contesto viene ad analizzare la questione nei termini delle molteplici e successive “reinvenzioni della tradizione” nella contemporaneità, evidenziando il carattere ascrittivo dell'etnia come una “finzione coloniale” – e si veda l'esempio del Ruanda- che

⁴⁷ S.Benhabib, La rivendicazione dell'identità culturale, eguaglianza e diversità nell'era globale, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2005, p.9.

*viene rimessa in gioco e strategicamente reinterpretata nella competizione politica a partire dagli attori sociali che se ne fanno interpreti.”*⁴⁸

The case of Rwanda's genocide actually represents a dramatic example of mobilization of the ethnic argument in the construction of a political conflict. However, the same logic can be applied to religious fundamentalism, or be inserted in any privileged cultural element.

This is the greatest problem of the *political construction of the alien* that finds in culture and religion, from time to time, the pivot on which to be erected. It is the problem that the German sociologist Ulrich Beck submits to himself in an article with the title: “How the neighbours become Jews”⁴⁹.

In this article he describes how the German people, meant as “community of people”, was born through the deployment of a great emotional Energy aimed at cancelling any extraneous elements, any impurities and conflicts that are characteristic of democratic societies.

In describing such process he illustrates the nature of the cultural identity. When speaking of “French people”, “English people” or “Algerian people”, one has the tendency to speak not only in terms of political citizenship, but also of groups or peoples with substantial, defined and limited cultural identities. Beck denounces, once again, the substantialistic presupposition of similar discourses, and the willful removal of the political and social character of cultural identities.

The category of *alien* is, in this sense, a danger to the established order of *indigenous*, since it escapes from its stereotypes, demonstrating in this way that the “naturalness” claimed by our social order is, as a matter of fact, fully artificial, fragile and equivocal. The alien proves through his very same existence that things could be different from what they are, and we know how much violence this admission has caused in the course of history.

The alien can be meant and constructed in such a way only starting from a holistic and essentialist vision of culture and of the communities that want to be strengthened on it. We have seen it with

⁴⁸ J.L.Amselle, E.M'Bokolo, L'invenzione dell'etnia, Meltemi, Roma 2008, p.13.

regard to orientalism, or in the construction of the modern western subject. We see it today in westernism, of which phenomena such as fundamentalism and the terroristic imagination are permeated. As a matter of fact, westernism reproduces in a specular manner the logic underlying orientalism, implying the totalizing notion of culture that we are here deconstructing.

Buruma and Margalit write the following:

*“La visione occidentalista dell’Occidente è paragonabile agli aspetti peggiori del suo contraltare, l’orientalismo, che spoglia i suoi bersagli umani della loro umanità. Alcuni pregiudizi orientalisti presentano i non occidentali come esseri umani minorati, infantili, quasi una specie inferiore. L’occidentalismo è almeno altrettanto riduttivo: il suo settarismo si limita a capovolgere la visione orientalista. Ridurre un’intera società o una civiltà a una massa di parassiti senza anima, decadenti, avidi, senza radici e senza fede, è una forma di distruzione intellettuale. (...) I pregiudizi attengono alla condizione umana. Ma quando l’idea dell’altro come essere inferiore si traduce in forza rivoluzionaria, si va verso la distruzione degli esseri umani.”*⁵⁰

In synthesis, we must intend culture, according to Clifford Geertz, to whom we made earlier reference, as “the network of meanings” woven by man for orienting in reality and for dominating it. This network of meanings, just because produced by man, cannot be considered natural, even though it has the tendency to present itself as such. In this chapter we wanted to describe the genealogy of culture, of cultures. On the basis of Orientalism, we showed the connection of culture with power, its being the stake in a fight among interpretations, among different truths. For this reason, we described its nature as always situated, historical and, therefore not isolated, autonomous, pure and unchangeable. We have seen how culture has been the human answer to disorder, change, diversity.

⁴⁹ contenuto in, U.Beck, I rischi della libertà, l’individuo nell’epoca della globalizzazione, Il Mulino, Bologna 2000.

⁵⁰ I. Buruma, A. Margalit, *Occidentalismo, l’Occidente agli occhi dei suoi nemici*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p. 10.

We asked ourselves whether a cultural knowledge, a notion of culture that did not produce automatically exclusion and dominion was possible, as it happened for the construction of the modern western subject vis-à-vis colonized countries, which would not produce “aliens”. We have seen how such construction derives from a holistic vision of culture, from its essentialist conception, and how this happens through a true construction, invention, of that memory that must mark the borders of the community, establish its rightfulness and authority, normalizing the behaviors and leading differences to the Same, how such operation is, therefore, political, and potentially dangerous and unjust from a normative standpoint.

Against similar visions we have described, conversely the mixed, impure, open nature and in movement of cultures, and even more so following globalizations, their being crossed by internal interpretative fights, by historical stratifications and causations.

In conclusion, we must find new interpretative categories, starting from the notion of culture, suitable for a world in fragments, which know how to describe it correctly in its complexity, on one hand, and which may provide adequate instruments to the solution of the problems afflicting it, on the other.

d. D. Religion.

As stated by many, our time is a “post-secular” time (Habermas). By this expression we must mean the fact that religions, according to a similar perspective, are at the time of globalization, *beyond secularization*.

The latter is defined as that complex process, particularly strong for industrialized Europe, by virtue of which religion would have lost its political and public relevance for becoming an essentially private problem. All the sociology of the nineteenth century was dominated by this paradigm, which would seem to no longer correspond today to reality. Filoramo writes:

*“Anche se i processi di secolarizzazione incidono e continueranno a incidere sulle religioni tradizionali, dal cristianesimo all’Islam, di fatto vige oggi un consenso sempre più esteso secondo il quale la secolarizzazione come metanarrativa del moderno non è più in grado di render conto di un fattore nuovo e decisivo: la rinnovata centralità pubblica e le rinnovate funzioni sociali delle religioni. Quella a cui oggi si assiste –e prevedibilmente si continuerà ad assistere nei prossimi anni- è un gigantesco processo di riformulazione e adattamento del religioso come dimensione privata e individuale e della religione come fattore istituzionale alle trasformazioni epocali della società della tarda modernità, indotte sia dalla rivoluzione tecnologica e massmediatica sia dai processi di globalizzazione.”*⁵¹

In a certain way, one could say that religions become central again due to their going backward.

It is in a similar perspective that two American scholars, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, have approached the debate on secularization, questioning the relationship between religion and politics

⁵¹ G.Filoramo, *Che cos è la religione*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p. 3.

in a globalized world⁵². They say that the traditional theory of secularization, as it had been expressed by Comte, Weber and Marx, must not be fully repealed under the blows of the religious renaissance around the world and to which we have referred in short. It must simply be updated.

In the center of such re-visitation of the secularization theory the two scholars place the concept of “existential security”, or how much one’s own existence can be perceived as safe and given for granted. The assumption that they submit to empirical verification consists in the idea that religiousness is and remains more important among populations that are perceived and are more vulnerable. *Where personal safety is not guaranteed, the need for religion increases.* Vice-versa, secularization with its erosion of religious practices and values, advances in the wealthier environments of post-industrial nations.

Norris and Inglehart consider that individuals, in the largest majority of cases, which experiences *ego-tropic* risks (against themselves and their families) or *socio-tropic* risks (against the communities of appurtenance) have the tendency to be more religious than those who, conversely, live in conditions of greater security.

In their study they try to show how religiousness is systematically connected, in the first place, to the degree of *social modernization, to human security and to economic inequality*; in the second place, to the type of prevailing religious culture in a given country; in the third place, to the trends of values for generations; and in the fourth place, to the demographic trends of the population.

The traditional theory of secularization, in particular in Durkheim, maintained that with the prevailing and spreading of the social functions (schools, canteens, hospitals....) of the state-nation, the centrality of religious institutions was decreasing. We have seen that in those contexts where the State does not provide the essential services, the religious organizations of fundamentalist type prevail: Hamas, Muslim Brothers.

⁵² P. Norris, R. Inglehart, *Sacro e Secolare, religione e politica nel mondo globalizzato*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2007.

Norris and Inglehart define the existential security not only as the military protection of the borders by the State, but above all the protection against other risks: from environmental degradation to natural disasters, from epidemic illnesses to the violation of human rights and to poverty in general. In poor countries survival appears to be difficult. Access to drinking water and sufficient food is usually failing. Efficient public services that provide medical services and education are lacking. The income is usually insufficient to satisfy one's own needs. These countries usually suffer also from environmental problems such as pollution, ethnic conflicts, inequalities in general, etc. The governments appear to be usually corrupt and unstable.

When the passage occurs from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, also the conditions of existential security improve. However, wealth is not sufficient *per se* to ensure human security. *Wealth must also be distributed.*

An important point is the assumption according to which growing up in conditions of insecurity causes the importance of religion to increase. This happens also because the need to be reassured becomes less pressing under conditions of security. Any religion worldwide, in practice, the authors remind us, guarantees to its followers that even if they do not understand what is happening in their lives, a superior power will supervise. Disorder finds a sense. It is typical of religions and of secular ideologies, in fact, to describe the events as parts of a pre-established plan and that, if the rules will be complied with, all will go well. This conviction is a conclusive remedy against the stress and the problems of survival. Who is in conditions of strong anxiety and difficulty has the *need for clear permanent rules*, which make the future and the choices to be made predictable. Conversely, who grew up in situations of relative security can tolerate greater ambiguity.

Another fundamental data that emerges from the research of Norris and Inglehart is represented by the discovery that higher security levels, lowering the value of religion, cause the growth rates of population to decrease. This translates into the fact that whilst the richer nations are becoming more secular, the world as a whole becomes more religious. To the distinction between rich

countries and poor countries, another distinction is added within individual countries between rich and poor classes of population.

Norris and Inglehart write the following:

*“ Conseguenze sociali e politiche. Ipotizziamo che il processo di secolarizzazione, dove ha avuto luogo, abbia conseguenze sociali e politiche importanti, in particolare perché indebolisce l'influenza della religiosità sull'acquisizione dei valori morali, sociali, economici e politici, diminuisce l'impegno attivo nelle organizzazioni e nei partiti politici religiosi, e riduce la rilevanza sociale delle identità religiose e del conflitto etnico-religioso.”*⁵³

With a retrospective view to what we have said till now, this last link appears to be illuminating.

The most important pre-condition for human security established by the two scholars is the *human development* of UNDP. With this indicator the access level is measured, by everybody, to education, medical assistance, welfare etc. It enables a comparison to be made at planetary level between different societies and indicates human security and distribution of public essential goods in a more precise complex manner than the only macroeconomic indications provided by the GDP.

Norris and Inglehart say that in poor societies where religion is socially central, those who hold an authoritarian power draw benefit from the control of religious institutions as bases for their own power and its legitimacy. In these societies the political power has the tendency to strictly bind to the religious power, whilst where human development reaches higher levels, there is a tendency to find greater tolerance towards religious freedom, in addition to less importance. In industrialized countries, conversely, fundamentalist groups will have a tendency to radicalize their action moved from the perception of the progressive disappearance of the values to which they refer.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 57.

The research conducted by Norris and Inglehart is concluded with the prediction of an increasing centrality of religion in international politics. Centrality, maintain the two authors in contrast with the thesis of the clash of civilizations, which will not necessarily lead to a conflicting world.

In this way we traced a connection between the need for and importance of religion, on one hand, and the distribution of a series of extra religious rights, on the other.

In addition to this, we touched again the subject of the confrontation by man with disorder, with chaos, his attempt to provide an answer to this lack of sense, his research of a meaning. A research that becomes increasingly impelling under certain circumstances, such as those just described, and inevitable in a time of shattering of certainties such as that of the globalization. Maybe it is just in the relation to this Sense that escapes that we can find the closest element to the definition of Religion. It must be clear that, however, we do not wish to support here a univocal exhaustive definition of religion, an enterprise that is, moreover, difficult. What will be proposed will be, conversely, only a minimal definition conducive to the path that we are following.

Antiseri and Vattimo, write in their work *“Ragione filosofica e fede religiosa nell’era postmoderna”*:

*“(…) Torna la domanda metafisica fondamentale: perché l’essere e non il nulla? Un interrogativo, questo, che afferma Bobbio, è “una richiesta di senso, che rimane senza risposta, o meglio rinvia ad una risposta che mi pare difficile chiamare ancora filosofica”. La scienza tace e la filosofia non salva. Ma “proprio perché le grandi risposte non sono alla portata della nostra mente, l’uomo rimane un essere religioso, nonostante i processi demitizzazione, secolarizzazione, tutte le affermazioni della morte di Dio, che caratterizzano l’età moderna e ancor più quella contemporanea”. E compito della filosofia, dice sempre Bobbio, “è di tenere in vita le grandi domande, perché impediscano alle masse degli indifferenti di divenire preda del fanatismo di pochi”.*⁵⁴

⁵⁴ D.Antiseri, G.Vattimo, *Ragione filosofica e fede religiosa nell’era postmoderna*, Rubbettino Editore, 2008, p.40.

The task of philosophy would then be, according to such conception, not to cause that research, that questioning to die, and always remember that the answers of science will not be sufficient, whilst the strength of religion, conversely, would consist in the need for those same answers. Wittgstein maintained, in fact, that even in the event that science should answer all his queries, even in this event we would not have come close in the least to the problems of man. The sense.

Our existence, our cultural constructions, etc. take place, therefore (resuming Cornelius Castoriadis), on an abyss, on a Bottomless, and religion has historically been an answer to such condition:

“Di tale abisso, di tale Caos, l’umanità ha sempre avuto una percezione insieme acuta e confusa. Ne ha sempre avvertito la natura intollerabile e al contempo insormontabile, e ha reagito con le istituzioni sociali, e soprattutto con quella che ne è stata, quasi ovunque, quasi sempre, la componente centrale: la religione. Lo riconosce chiamandolo trascendenza, parlando della finitezza umana. Lo ritrova e lo nasconde, mascherandolo in fogge e figure precise, immagini di dèi, luoghi, parole e libri sacri, destinati a carpirlo, ad addomesticarlo in qualche modo, a renderlo commensurabile a quanto per noi può avere senso. In questo la religione è un’immensa formazione di compromesso, per usare un linguaggio psicanalitico. La documentazione, l’atto notarile di questo compromesso, è il Sacro.”⁵⁵

However, since this is not a thesis of theology or anthropology of religions, we shall not go beyond an attempt to define religion. Suffice here what we just said. Fundamentally, man is afraid, he needs protection; he needs signification.

The manners in which religion structured this relation with transcendence have been many, historically determined, geographically distinct. With the affirming of the second modernity,

⁵⁵ C.Castoriadis, *La finestra sul Caos*, scritti su arte e società, Elèuthera, 2007, p. 73.

however, this changes. Religion, one's own religion, is no longer a structural data, an inheritance, a bond received as a gift with the birth: it appears to be increasingly more as a choice. It is just the inevitability of the choice, of what Berger refers to as the "heretic imperative", it is the consequence of the fact that religion does no longer cover the totality of individual existence. It is a *phenomenon of individualization*, studied by Ulrich Beck, who, together with *cosmopoliticization*, describes the reflexive modernity. Both individualization and cosmopoliticization are, in fact two distinct ways out from tradition.

The second is bound to denationalization and *deterritorialization of religions*, which determines in turn the possibility of choice of religion, therefore of its individualization. In a global world, on the other hand, the impossibility ends of comparing religions (and cultures) with one another, closed before inside the territorial system of the nation. We are in a global village.

A fundamental distinction that it is necessary to introduce here, at this stage, is that between religion and religious. As suggested by Beck, by the term religion, used as a substantive, one remain in an excluding logic of the *aut aut* type, whereby one belongs to a certain group and prays or worships a certain God in an exclusive manner. The adjective "religious", conversely rather follows a logic of the *vel vel* type: the exclusive and excluding adhesion to a group is not presupposed, but a manner of questioning oneself on the great existential matters. It is an attitude.

However, religions are, from a certain standpoint, global since the very beginning, due to their nature:

"Le religioni possono costruire dei ponti tra gli uomini, dove esistono gerarchie e confini, ma nello stesso tempo spalancare nuovi abissi di natura religiosa tra gli uomini, dove prima non ce n'erano. Questa ambivalenza di tolleranza e violenza può essere meglio compresa in relazione a tre componenti teoriche: le religioni universali superano le gerarchie sociali e i confini tra nazioni ed etnie; sono in condizione di farlo nella misura in cui riescono a generare un universalismo religioso, dinanzi al quale perdono importanza tutte le barriere nazionali e sociali; ma così nasce

tuttavia il pericolo di erigere, al posto delle barriere etniche, nazionali e di classe, delle barricate tra ortodossi da un lato ed eretici o non credenti dall'altro."⁵⁶

It is exactly what we have observed with regard to fundamentalism.

For this reason, Beck is convinced of the advantage that religions have in offering an alternative understanding of the global society, with respect to the traditional political science and sociology still affected by "*methodological nationalism*".

This global logic of universal religions is particularly true for its fundamentalist versions, which we can even describe as typical products of liquid modernity, just to use the famous expression of Bauman.

We have seen that secularization, which is one of the characteristic traits of the first modernity, did not eliminate religion, but it purified it. By this it is meant that upon the advancing of modernity, religion has been gradually separating itself from its own cultural context of origin. Culture and religion have therefore separated for giving rise to *forms of pure religion*.

Once disconnected from the territory, these new forms of religion have found themselves to be disconnected also from the political environment, which was still inseparably bound to the territory, contrary to what happened to those forms of the political religious, which had ended up by compromising religion itself, subjecting it to politics, or secularizing it.

In this sense Olivier Roy says that *secularization produces religious*, not in the form of a simple return, but in that of its evolution.

"(...) è evidente che a conoscere la crescita più spettacolare sono state le forme religiose dette fondamentaliste o carismatiche, che si tratti dell'evangelismo protestante o del salafismo musulmano. Un analogo irrigidimento ortodosso percorre anche la chiesa cattolico-romana, il giudaismo e l'induismo. Il fondamentalismo risulta così la forma del religioso più adatta alla

⁵⁶ Ulrich Beck, *Il Dio personale, la nascita della religiosità secolare*, Editori Laterza, p. 64.

mondializzazione, in quanto assumendo la propria deculturazione, la trasforma in strumento di pretesa all'universalità."⁵⁷

This evolution of the religious in a fundamentalist direction appears to be possible following two phenomena of our global age: the *detritorialization* and *deculturation*. The former is a consequence of mobility never reached before by people and ideas. Religion, Roy warns, can circulate only if it appears to be universal, i.e. disconnected from a certain territorial reality. The same can be stated about culture. The religious marker must be able to circulate free from cultural markers in order to connect itself, virtually, with the entire globe.

The dissociation between religion and culture causes the theories of the clash/dialogue among civilizations to be absolutely unable to decipher contemporary reality. This divorce between culture and religion is at the basis of the birth of a "pure", abstract religion, relegated within the single scope of the holy, exclusive heritage of the community of believers, a community that at this point structures its identity on faith only, creating a radical separation from all the others, apostates, non believers, followers of other religions.

This enculturation process of religion causes the religious rule to be the line of separation beyond which everything is considered non conform to the "authentic culture". The defense of religion, so declined, takes up then the form of a defense of the authentic cultural identity separated from real culture- It is what happens in certain segments of the Muslim world, for example, but not only, where the urgency of defending one's own authenticity, coinciding in this way with the pure religion only, acquires an importance and radicality without precedents. An impoverishment is determined at the same time of profane culture, rejected as pagan. The religion so conceived ends up by replacing culture as normative source.

The separation between culture and religion in such a world is perfectly described by the phenomenon of "*literalism*", the literal interpretation of the holy texts, which arrives as far as being

⁵⁷ Olivier Roy, *La santa ignoranza, religioni senza cultura*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2009, p. 23.

a pure word pronounced also when the believer speaks a different language and does not understand what he is saying. The language is cancelled in favor of the word, and without the support of the language, always anchored to a culture, knowledge is no longer possible. It is the phenomenon to which Olivier Roy refers to as “*the holy ignorance*”.

It is such dynamic that enables the consumption of a religious product regardless of the knowledge of the culture from which it originates.

It is for this reason that fundamentalism is at the same time a factor and a product of globalization. Could we even go as far as provokingly defining fundamentalism as the avant-garde of a globalized liberalism?

E. Globalization.

The horizon in which we handle the themes of culture and religion, and more broadly the themes of identity, is that of a globalized planet. Religious terrorism and fundamentalism seems to be closely related to this new dimension of the human condition.

A new condition that is not equally experienced by anybody. In other words, the cancellation of space-time distances, which belongs to globalization, rather than rendering homogeneous such human condition, pusher towards its polarization. Some are emancipated by territorial limits, whilst for those remaining closed in them, the territory does no longer mean the guarantee of a defined identity, as we have seen. In this respect Zygmunt Bauman writes in his work “Globalization, the human Consequences”, that for a lucky minority the cancellation of distances:

“Promette una libertà senza precedenti dagli ostacoli di carattere fisico e una capacità inaudita di muoversi e agire a distanza. Per altri, invece, presagisce l'impossibilità di appropriarsi della località – dalla quale pure hanno scarse possibilità di liberarsi per muoversi altrove- e di renderla accogliente e vivibile. Quando le distanze non significano più niente, le località, separate da distanze, perdono anch'esse il loro significato. Questo fenomeno, tuttavia, attribuisce ad alcuni la libertà di creare significati, dove per altri è la condanna a essere relegati nell'insignificanza. Oggi accade così che alcuni possano liberamente uscire dalla località – da qualsiasi località-. Mentre altri guardano invece disperati al fatto che l'unica località che gli appartiene e abitano gli sta sparendo da sotto i piedi.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Z.Bauman, Dentro la globalizzazione, le conseguenze sulle persone, Editori Laterza, Bari 2007, p. 22.

The global world appears, in synthesis as a source of freedom for an extra-territorial élite, whilst it appears to be as a prison for all the others; moreover, it appears to be a humiliating prison since the latter are constantly confronted with the freedom of the former.

Globalization appears as an historical process that cannot be stopped. Therefore, it is not the case of being in favor of or against it. It is necessary to understand its real nature and to guide it, insofar as possible, towards the right direction.

We may describe globalisation as a progressive *separation of politics from power*, as Bauman and others have explained. The economy indeed appears to have completely broken away from its territorial chains and from the consequent political domination of the sovereign states. Capital flows freely, as do goods, and ideas, but not people. At least, not everyone.

On this point, Habermas argues that it is not the economy that has deprived politics of power, but a global economy that that has deprived national politics of power. In other words, globalisation makes clear the extent to which the economic condition of citizens in different countries is beyond the control of the laws of those countries.

Globalisation is, generally speaking, that condition by which humanity is jointly answerable for the risks that are now global in nature. The financial crisis of recent years. Environmental disasters. International terrorism. Energy problems. These are just some recent examples.

More specifically, globalisation is the condition under which, at the present time, problems of a global nature are still being tackled with local responses. It thus appears to be a process leading only to the partial integration of the planet.

It is a process that offers up great opportunities, but also confusion, fear and frustration among those who, as we have seen, seeing the disappearance of old and reassuring certainties and of their local traditions, are unable to enjoy the benefits of these opportunities. For many indeed, especially in China and India, globalisation has produced an increase in income and a release from extreme poverty, while for many others this phenomenon has brought about a widening of economic and quality of life disparities.

State institutions, within the framework of which the economy once moved, are no longer able to guarantee the functions for which they were created. The *welfare state* model in particular, created as a collective guarantee against the risks faced by individuals, is no longer able to keep its promises. The underlying idea of the welfare state was to give citizens the possibility of effectively expressing the rights and duties of citizenship. In other words, guaranteeing a minimum level of existential security needed to make free and responsible choices. So that democracy could work properly. This security however is no longer tenable in an economy in which the centres of power lie beyond the state borders. This leads to some of the services traditionally provided by the state being delegated (or apportioned) to other subjects, chiefly operating in the free marketplace. A global marketplace. With all the destabilising effects this entails, also in terms of fair distribution. It is chiefly the nation state that is in crisis, as Hobsbawm writes:

“I governi dei moderni stati nazionali o territoriali – qualunque governo - si basano su tre presupposti: primo, che abbiano più potere di altre unità operanti su loro territorio; secondo, che gli abitanti dei loro territori accettino, più o meno volentieri, la loro autorità; e terzo, che tali governi siano in grado di fornire ai cittadini quei servizi ai quali non sarebbe altrimenti possibile provvedere, perlomeno non con la stessa efficacia (come “legge e ordine”). Negli ultimi trenta o quarant’anni questi presupposti hanno progressivamente perso la loro validità.”⁵⁹

States naturally remain the fundamental actors of the political arena, but they are coming into ever greater competition with very strong transnational powers. Multinationals, for instance, or financial giants.

The mobility of capital and of goods is however accompanied by cultural mobility. The traditional agencies of socialisation are no longer able to guarantee the cultural homogeneity of the nation (however it is defined and obtained). We can now be said to be in what has been called the “*post-*

⁵⁹ E.J.Hobsbawm, *La fine dello stato*, Rizzoli, Milano 2007, p. 53.

trinitarian World” (the trinity being the territory, the state and the nation), in other words globalisation has eroded the borders and sovereignty of nation states and transformed nations’ human and cultural landscapes:

“Oggi dunque ogni stato territoriale tende ad essere un insieme di diaspore etniche, linguistiche e religiose fatte di lealtà multiple, molte delle quali si estendono ben al di là dei suoi confini risultando per certi versi extraterritoriali.”⁶⁰

The link between territory and identity is thus tending to fade, obliging individuals to make certain choices. They are forced to continuously evaluate their sense of belonging, now devoid of a sound base. This “crisis”, which is now a permanent feature of this period of late modernity, has also led to phenomena such as fundamentalism, or the widespread of closing-in identities that we are witnessing. If identity becomes a problem to be solved, thus an unknown, new agencies that promise to solve it tend to come into being everywhere. Fundamentalism, as we have seen, promises to release individuals from the anxiety of constructing an identity, finding a role, a meaning. They release the individual from the burden of choosing. In the communities built in this way individuals also seek the solidarity that the nation can no longer guarantee. Individual autonomy, to which the welfare state aspired, at least formally, where this existed, is thus turned into *heteronomy*. Communitarism is an example of this dynamic, of this searching for security at the price of one’s freedom. A freedom imposed by globalisation but without providing the tools and means to manage it. At least in its current configuration. Some are free to move and reconfigure their identity as they wish. Yet others are chained to a destiny over which they have no power. And these are in the majority. The new factor for social stratification is in this context the real freedom of choice possessed by individuals. The distribution of the costs and benefits of globalisation, therefore, is in no way uniform. And this leads, among other things, to violence. Sen writes:

⁶⁰ Z.Bauman, *Modernità e globalizzazione*, Edizioni dell’asino, 2009, p. 24.

*“Una cosa dobbiamo capire con chiarezza, e cioè che la povertà, l’indigenza, l’abbandono e le umiliazioni associate a squilibri di potere, sono in relazione, in un arco di tempo lungo, con una inclinazione alla violenza legata a conflitti che traggono linfa dal risentimento contro i potenti di un mondo composto da identità divise.”*⁶¹

Given this uncertainty of identity, the resulting stiffening tends to coagulate around the figure of the foreigner, as we have already mentioned, as a threat to the order one is trying to construct. But in an interdependent world devoid of real borders, it is no longer possible to eject “otherness” elsewhere. Because there is no longer an “outside”. The result is widespread conflict and the constant need to re-affirm one’s specificity, be it real or imaginary, activating markers, be they cultural, religious, ethnical, etc., capable of separating, raising barriers, defending one’s identity from a sense of constant siege.

In a way we are constantly exposed to the “other”, to all the others. But we are also ineluctably connected to the other. It is also what determines the nature of “moral aggregate” of modern-day humanity, as Ulrich Beck stressed in “La società cosmopolitica” (The cosmopolitical society):

*“(…) con la globalizzazione culturale finisce in polvere questa speranza di poter recintare ed evitare anche in futuro le profondissime incomprensioni del mondo. Appunto il fatto che gli uomini e i problemi con i quali non abbiamo (non vogliamo avere) niente a che fare irrompano nel nostro spazio interno e non possano essere semplicemente di nuovo trasferiti, extraterritorializzati (...).”*⁶²

This interdependence results in a responsibility that can no longer be denied or concealed in the shade of national or cultural boundaries. And thus also in a new type of fragility.

⁶¹ A.Sen, *Identità e violenza*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2006, p. 146.

*“Su un pianeta avvolto nella ragnatela dell’interdipendenza umana, non c’è nulla che gli altri possano fare che sia certamente privo d’influenza sulle nostre prospettive, possibilità e sogni. E non c’è nulla che noi facciamo o tralasciamo di fare di cui possiamo dire con certezza che sia privo di influenza sulle prospettive, le possibilità e i sogni di qualcun altro che non conosciamo o di cui non conosciamo l’esistenza.”*⁶³

But the institutional mechanisms governing and managing such interconnections are still at an embryonic stage or completely absent. In other words, there are global issues of interest to everyone, but equally global responses are lacking. As Nobel laureate for Economics Joseph Stiglitz writes:

*“La globalizzazione – vale a dire la maggiore integrazione dei paesi del mondo – ha creato l’esigenza di un’azione collettiva da parte di popoli e paesi per risolvere problemi comuni. Ci sono troppe questioni – commercio, circolazione di capitali, ambiente – che possono affrontate solo a livello globale. Ma se da una parte lo stato-nazione è indebolito, mancano ancora a livello internazionale degli organismi in grado di affrontare concretamente i problemi creati dalla globalizzazione. Di fatto, la globalizzazione economica si è sviluppata più rapidamente di quella politica.”*⁶⁴

Economic globalisation which did indeed speed up in the last decades of the 20th century due to an extensive process of *deregulation* of markets and control agencies based on the logic of so-called *Washington consensus*. According to this vision, the real dogma of the 1980s, the role of governments had to be minimised, thus favouring the privatisation of some state-controlled sectors; commerce and financial markets had to be liberalised, removing all restrictions on the movement of

⁶² U.Beck, *La società cosmopolitica*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2003, p. 108.

⁶³ Z.Bauman, *Paura liquida*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2008, p. 123.

⁶⁴ J.Stiglitz, *La globalizzazione che funziona*, Einaudi, Torino 2006, p.21.

capital and trade barriers; finally, it was necessary to deregulate the running of businesses. It was the logic of “the state is not the solution, but the problem”.

It is not surprising that an equally vigorous political globalisation is absent.

This absence of global institutions causes a void in legitimacy, since (local) political choices end up by producing their effects, both intentional and unintentional, on subjects that have not been a part of the decision-making process and have no say in such a process. As Jurgen Habermas argues in “La costellazione postnazionale” (The postnational constellation):

“In un mondo sempre più strettamente interdipendente –sul piano ecologico, economico e culturale – gli stati che prendono legittime decisioni combaciano sempre meno, nel loro raggio sociale e territoriale, con le persone e le sfere che sono potenzialmente coinvolte dagli effetti di queste decisioni. Siccome lo stato nazionale continua a decidere sulla base del territorio, nella società mondiale interdipendente si accresce la discrepanza tra coloro cui tocca decidere (i decisori) e coloro su cui ricadono gli effetti (gli interessati).”⁶⁵

It is for this reason, and for what has been said thus far, that Habermas and many others express the hope for an evolution of the current institutional framework towards policies capable of dealing with the costs and risks of globalisation, of an equally global nature, and such as to be able to define it as a global “domestic policy”.

If this were not to pass, not only would there remain voids in legitimacy that we have just mentioned, and these would widen, but there would be a further erosion of the internal legitimacy of national states and a greater political irrelevance of citizens. This is because governments will have less and less power needed to tackle the questions of interest to citizens, issues that, as we have seen, go far beyond the sphere of influence of single nations. Thus the problem of democracy in a country will have to be tackled together with that of the situation and configuration of all the other

⁶⁵ J.Habermas, La costellazione postnazionale, Feltrinelli, Milano 2002, p. 44.

countries. Autarchy – economic, political, cultural – if it has ever been possible, will certainly not be possible in the future. And this is an extraordinary opportunity for the whole of mankind.

F. Identity.

We started our investigation by looking at the phenomena of Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism. In an attempt to better frame their nature and causes we examined the issues of religion and culture, and ended up looking at the more general issue of globalisation.

Regardless of the relations between these notions, and these realities, we can state that they all end up, sooner or later, crossing and overlapping with the question of identity. Thus it is this concept that we must study in greater depth, in terms of both emerging phenomena, in order to understand modern-day identity from a historical viewpoint, and normative aspects, where this is possible.

Our research began with an unusual interpretation of the above concepts, which we have likened to the culturalist perspective of Samuel Huntington and the Clash of civilisations. A perspective that we have also seen, not only from the supporters of Dialogue, but also in the fundamentalist interpretation of identity. According to such a vision, it would be possible to break down humanity into different categories based on *a single*, predominant criterion. Amartya Sen suggests, to define such an approach as *solitarist*.

But by doing so one ends up conceiving a “one-dimensional man”, as Marcuse said in a different context. This is because we would neglect the fact that we possess a *plurality* of identities, and this implies making *a choice* on the relevance to be ascribed, depending on the context, to each of these identities. As we have mentioned, this choice is of course never presented as absolute, not bound by any limitation. We will return to this point shortly, but what now needs to be emphasised is the fact that one of the obstacles, at least potential obstacles, is that of the attribution of identity on the part of others. We have seen this when looking at the issue of culture and orientalism. To realise how dramatic this external attribution of identity can be, we simply need to remember the Holocaust, the victims being simple “neighbours turned into Jews”. And as such, wiped out.

Sen writes, in “Identity and violence”:

“La menomazione peggiore avviene forse quando viene trascurato —o negato— il ruolo della scelta razionale, che è una diretta conseguenza del riconoscimento delle nostre identità plurali. L’illusione dell’identità unica è molto più foriera di divisioni che non l’universo di classificazioni plurali che caratterizza il mondo in cui viviamo realmente. La debolezza descrittiva dell’unicità senza scelta ha l’effetto di impoverire gravemente la forza e la portata del nostro ragionamento sociale e politico. L’illusione del destino esige un prezzo straordinariamente pesante.”⁶⁶

This idea of an already attributed destiny is implicit in the communitarist concepts of identity, according to which it would only be a question of *discovering* one’s identity, generally made to coincide with one’s cultural background, in turn intended in a holistic and essentialist sense. In other words, birth would be essential in determining the entire existential path of the individual.

Even when things are broken down into categories, but without describing reality, indeed mutilating or overturning this reality, if such categorisation is accepted it ends up becoming reality, at least in its consequences. As Sen himself recalls, based on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu: “the social world creates differences simply by designating them”. We have described, for instance, how the figure of the *foreigner* is constructed, and the violence that this operation may engender.

A similar interpretation of identity also makes it impossible to judge and compare one culture with another. These cultures are thus the only standpoint from which to pass judgement. Forgetting that if the community we belong to can influence our judgements, this does not mean that it goes to determine them in full. And also forgetting the fact that cultures are not homogeneous entities, but are characterised by internal conflicts of interpretation, and overlap with other cultures that are hybrid, open, dynamic.

“Il punto in questione non è se sia possibile scegliere qualsiasi identità (...), ma se abbiamo la possibilità di scegliere fra identità alternative o combinazioni di identità, e se abbiamo, cosa forse

⁶⁶ A.Sen, *Identità e violenza*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2006, p. 19.

più importante, la libertà reale di scegliere quale priorità assegnare alle varie identità che possiamo simultaneamente avere.”⁶⁷

This is what Ulrich Beck explains to us on the subject of traditional sociology⁶⁸. The social sphere, he warns, has always been conceived *within* tribes, religions, classes, etc, with individuals being considered as interchangeable elements of a broader system. And considering individuality as an *illusion* of the individuals themselves, thus incapable of realising the conditions and the conditioning of their lives. In this sense, the individual is denied his place, and becomes a function of the larger entity in which the individual is exclusively inserted. The individual thus disappears inside the collective identity.

This is exactly what happens when talking about Islam, as examined earlier. When one looks at the question of Islamic terrorism, indeed, one usually starts by seeking out that genuine part of Islam that can explain or condemn violence, without taking into due account the fact that:

“Essere musulmano non è un’identità preminente che determina tutto ciò in cui una persona crede.”⁶⁹

The same is true for all our affiliations. Religious or ethnical identity, or cultural identity, is only one of our identities, and no matter how important, it cannot erase the numerous other identities we possess. Realising this is a fundamental step in efforts to combat religion-based terrorism or identity-based violence in general.

Another prejudice that needs to be overcome in our approach to the identity issues of our time is identified by Sen in what he describes as “reactive self-perception”. Such a distortion can easily be detected among peoples that have been liberated from colonial rule, leading in some cases to the

⁶⁷ Ibidem, p. 40.

⁶⁸ U.Beck, I rischi della libertà, l’individuo nell’epoca della globalizzazione, Il Mulino, Bologna 2000, p. 27.

⁶⁹ A.Sen, Identità e violenza, Editori Laterza, Bari 2006, p. 65.

development of a futilely hostile vision of universal ideas (such as democracy or personal freedoms) that are erroneously associated with Western cultures. It would also prevent a correct interpretation of the intellectual history of the planet. Finally, it would favour support for religious fundamentalism and international terrorism. In such a vision, therefore, one ends up remaining tied to the identity that one would really like to get away from, defining oneself as “the other”, opposed to that very identity. The result is thus to focus exclusively on the differences, eliminating everything that brings people together.

This self-definition through negation is, as we have seen, particularly effective in the process of constructing a community, for example a national community. This procedure is indeed described by some as the fundamental, original, ambit of the Political. Laura Bazzicalupo writes, with special reference to the nation:

*“Se questa rappresentazione simbolica dell’unità di popolo e di nazione fa riferimento a contenuti comuni, a storia e ricordi comuni, certamente l’aggregazione identitaria riesce più salda se, come tutte le definizioni, avviene per negazione. Negazione dell’altro, dell’identità del vicino che minaccia di confondere e di dissolvere la nostra esistenza con l’aggressività o con l’omologazione. In questa chiave, Carl Schmitt, mette a fuoco il criterio di definizione della politica nell’antitesi amico-nemico.”*⁷⁰

In this sense, any definition of identity with reference to the other would be an eminently political phenomenon. Even though here a negative meaning is ascribed to the difference, and we would be connected to the other by a by definition conflicting relationship, what counts, once more, is that a choice is forced as the basis of identity. In this case, a “sovereign” choice, on which the political order is founded, establishing who is excluded and who must be fought against. In this choice,

⁷⁰ L.Bazzicalupo, *Politica, identità, potere, il lessico politico alla prova della globalizzazione*, G.Giappichelli Editore, Torino 2004, p. 48.

however, one's view of the other may be of an opposite sign. Amin Maalouf writes, in "Les identités meurtrières":

*"Car c'est notre regard qui enferme souvent les autres dans leurs plus étroites appartenances, et c'est notre regard aussi qui peut les libérer."*⁷¹

It is this element of choice that we have seen to be the fundamental effect of globalisation. More precisely, its inevitability, i.e. the fact that we are condemned to continually make choices. If the old ties are breaking apart, identity becomes a task. Zygmunt Bauman writes:

"Si diventa consapevoli che l'appartenenza e l'identità non sono scolpite nella roccia, non sono assicurate da una garanzia a vita, che sono in larga misura negoziabili e revocabili; e che i fattori cruciali per entrambi sono le proprie decisioni, i passi che si intraprendono, il modo in cui si agisce e la determinazione a tener fede a tutto ciò. In altre parole, alla gente non viene in mente di "avere una identità" fintanto che il suo destino rimane un destino di appartenenza, una condizione senza alternative. (...)

Si, in effetti, la "identità" ci si rivela unicamente come qualcosa che va inventato piuttosto che scoperto; come il traguardo di uno sforzo, un obiettivo, qualcosa che è ancora necessario costruire da zero o selezionare fra offerte alternative, qualcosa per cui è necessario lottare e che va poi protetto attraverso altre lotte ancora, anche se questo status precario e perennemente incompleto dell'identità è una verità che, se si vuole che la lotta vada a buon fine, dev'essere – e tende a essere- soppressa e laboriosamente occultata.

Oggi questa verità è più difficile da nascondere di quanto non lo fosse al principio dell'era moderna. Le entità più determinate a realizzare tale occultamento hanno perso interesse; hanno abbandonato il campo di battaglia e sono fin troppo felici di lasciare a noi, singoli uomini e donne,

⁷¹ A.Maalouf, Les identités meurtrières, Grasset, 1998, p. 29.

la fastidiosa incombenza di costruire un'identità, e di realizzare questo compito singolarmente o a piccoli gruppi, piuttosto che congiuntamente...la fragilità e lo status di perenne provvisorietà dell'identità non possono più essere celati."⁷²

In a landscape, as we have seen, in which the institutions originally set up to promote socialisation (but also serve as an insurance, protecting against life risks) are breaking up, or at least losing power, this state of perennial fragility of our identities becomes a source of anxiety and fear. The circulation of ideas and information, the constant exposure to the "otherness" surrounding us, brings us back to our no longer concealable diversity and indeterminacy. We have to construct our identity, even if it only means to re-confirm it, again and again.

The desire for an identity thus ends up expressing a need for security. We said the same thing when speaking about fundamentalism. The distinction can then be made between those who are able to freely form and re-form their identity, making use of the immense patrimony that globalisation has to offer, and those who do not have the means and the tools to choose, and end up seeing themselves closed in by others within dehumanising, degrading, stereotyped identities. Until that extreme border of that part of humanity to which, in a sense, the possibility of having an identity is denied. Thus it is that *exclusion*, from the distribution of the benefits of globalisation, from the protection of ever more fragile entities and from the list of recognised identities, which ends up being the real spectre of our time.

The metaphor, and perhaps something more, that best describes the current condition of identity is that of Marcel Duchamp's *readymades*.

In January 1913, at Neuilly, Duchamp took a kitchen stool and placed on it a bicycle tyre with the fork upturned. At that moment he had no intention of making it a work of art, yet it was that object that led to him defining in 1916 his *readymade*: an object, removed from its ordinary context, its

⁷² Zygmunt Bauman, *Intervista sull'identità*, Editori Laterza, Bari 2008, p. 13-14.

status of everyday object changed through the intervention of the artist. The object is “helped” to change nature.

“Affinché il ready made abbia luogo è necessario che più elementi si incontrino in uno stato di assoluta indifferenza. La “cointelligenza dei contrari” duchampiana, che non è altro che l’antica coincidentia oppositorum, piuttosto che superamento delle contraddizioni diviene apertura di nuovi regimi del senso e della visione. La meccanica, ovvero la procedura che porta all’idea di fabbricazione, (...) è dissimilante, ovvero: un oggetto si riconosce diverso da se stesso, anche se le caratteristiche iniziali e d’arrivo sembrano essere rimaste pressoché le medesime. Accanto a questa “meccanica dissimilante”, una funzione importante è riservata al possibile poiché una cosa potenzialmente può divenire altro, in un processo di trasformazione e individuazione. “L’appuntamento” del ready made è dunque l’incontro (...) tra un possibile, una scelta e uno stato di semplice indifferenza, in uno spazio e un tempo precisi, con uno o più oggetti disponibili e un autore.”⁷³

The metaphor appears to be very appropriate in our case, as it describes the situation in which the individual finds himself today, having to construct his identity from fragments already present yet, and at the same time experienced as different; making changes to it, variations on a theme, with a given yet open range of possibilities, exposed to randomness, and to the non-re-formed, conflicting otherness of others and of oneself. In an attempt to construct one’s individuality.

In the case of Duchamp, the very status of art was modified, in our case, the status of identity is changed. No longer a magic, metaphysical object, set down in stone for ever, received as an inheritance from the past, but an open book, a manipulation of everyday life, experimentation, ordinariness, *bricolage*, as Lévi-Strauss said so appropriately.

⁷³ C.Subrizi, Introduzione a Marcel Duchamp, Editori Laterza, Bari 2008, p. 69.

We should however add to this that today the status of “artist” of one’s own identity is within the grasp of a small percentage of the world’s population. The remainder can only see the “ordinary objects” age and go rusty. Leading to the psychological and political reactions of withdrawal and of identity-based violence that we have described.

Bauman writes, with considerable emphasis, and grasping the gist of the problem:

*“Le incontrollate e distruttive forze globali prosperano sulla frammentazione dello scenario politico e sullo spezzettamento di una politica potenzialmente globale in un insieme di egoismi locali perennemente in lotta, impegnati a contrattare una porzione più larga delle briciole che cadono dalla tavola imbandita dei baroni-predoni globali. Chiunque proponga “identità locali” come antidoto ai misfatti dei globalizzatori, non fa altro che fare il loro gioco e portare acqua al loro mulino. La globalisation ha raggiunto ormai il punto di non ritorno. Ora dipendiamo tutti gli uni dagli altri e la sola scelta che abbiamo è tra l’assicurarci reciprocamente la vulnerabilità di ognuno rispetto a ognuno e l’assicurarci reciprocamente la nostra sicurezza condivisa. Detto brutalmente: nuotare insieme o annegare insieme.”*⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, Intervista sull’identità, Editori Laterza, Bari 2008, p. 100.

Redefining Categories and Problems

Summary of argument to this point.

I shall try to summarise briefly what has been said, in order to draw some possible consequences, both descriptive and normative.

We began with an analysis of religious fundamentalism, arguing that it is in fact a political phenomenon striving to assert the origins of a community that is identified as the totality of believers. Although this political movement does derive from modernity, it opposes the modern claim to the autonomy of the individual. What is to be privileged in the future is rather the reproduction of a mythical past, a past that derives from a particular interpretation of the sacred texts. This interpretation lacks any criterion of objective truthfulness and is a human, historical construct.

The problem therefore does not appear to reside in any specific religion, but in a particular way of understanding religion in general. Leaving aside questions of verifiable authenticity, what counts politically in the possible interpretations of a religion is the consensus they achieve. We must look beyond any Holy Writ itself, and relate it to the set of factors that drives interpretation in a particular direction, and so proceed to map a genealogy of fundamentalist discourse.

The need to do this appears all the more pressing once we realise that every form of knowledge is intrinsically linked to power, that every truth is the result of a struggle for truth. This is what we have learned from the study of orientalism, inextricably linked to the colonial experience. Imperial orientalism helps explain the anti-western character of fundamentalist movements.

On the basis of these reflections, we asked whether it is possible to translate religious (fundamentalist) discourse into political discourse, i.e. if it is possible to relate it to political and social aims, to mediations and negotiations; and to shift the whole debate into the immanent domain

of human history, rather than to treat the whole matter as a Manichean struggle between good and evil.

We then investigated the phenomenon of terrorism, defining it as an improper form of political expression, i.e. not a strictly political mode of action at all, but rather a political tactic. We saw that the very interpretation of sacred texts is a political question. Equally political is the strategy used for security purposes of telescoping together strictly political discourse and religious discourse, as if they were one and the same thing.

We next considered the fact that terrorists tend to come from the upper-middle classes, with a good level of education, and from this we deduced that the content of educational programmes is a crucial matter. We must thus discount the prejudice that sees ignorance and poverty as among the causes of terrorism whereas the determining factors seems to be the suppression of civil liberties and political rights, and a feeling of general resentment. Among the main causes of the latter are foreign military occupation and the asymmetrical distribution of global power, as well as the memory of past humiliations.

We have seen how religion offers a transformative vision of human potential, and tends to become violent only in the presence of precise socio-political circumstances, when people perceive the environment in which they live as already violent, and its community as under attack.

In a context of instability and personal failure, combined with a sense of meaninglessness, religion constitutes a reserve of order and empowerment.

We have observed how political struggle slips from the plane of practical human affairs to take on a sacred and universal significance, and this happens when politics fails to solve problems that initially have nothing to do with metaphysics. This slippage happens when people want to defend their fundamental identity and dignity, and escape from a condition of humiliation and impotence, when concrete problems cannot be solved through ordinary political options. A solution, an order that explains everything, is traced back to religion. If the present is degrading, it is easy to seek a mythical past that serves as a refuge. This happens also when the image imposed by the enemy, by

colonisers for examples - an image that is similarly degrading and needs to be shaken off - has been internalised.

We have seen how this combination of elements comes together in the Muslim world which we began by examining, even if it is not limited to that world.

At the beginning of our study we referred to Huntington's explanation of the violence related to identity: he located the origin and explanation of violence in culture, which he made to coincide with religion. We instead have analysed the political reasons for religious terrorism and fundamentalism, and have focused on the cultural dimension in order to try to understand what exactly is to be understood by the term "culture", and see whether it is possible to trace connections with the phenomena studied.

We therefore described the intertwining of culture and power through the example of colonialism. In this perspective we asked whether a non-colonialist, non-imperial knowledge is possible, or whether instead knowledge is intrinsically a mechanism for establishing hierarchies. We saw that the form of knowledge termed "orientalism" provided an essentialist vision of culture, and permitted the western subject to be founded on the negation of alterity and the repression of the dominion it imposed on the world, which were in fact salient features of that very identity.

Culture is thus posited as something ontological, whereas it is in fact constructed around continual and arbitrary reinventions of the past aimed at creating internal cohesion for particular groups, legitimising authority, and standardising social behaviour. We saw culture described as a colossal enterprise aimed at immunising a power structure against entropy.

To this end, communities have had to choose what to remember of their past, in order to constitute themselves as "communities of memory": what unites them is not a project for the future, but a past inheritance constructed in the present.

We asked ourselves what might remain of this conception of culture, and what might be the use of umbrella terms such as "culture", "nation", "religion", "ethnicity", in a global context such as the present, and concluded that we should abandon the traditional vision of a culture as an internally

homogeneous, isolated entity, to embrace an open, hybrid, plural and dynamic concept of cultures. In other words, cultures are no longer to be conceived as immutable essences but as processes of continuous historical formation. On this basis we rejected “cultural fundamentalism” as an ideological fiction, and judged the insistence on the internal compactness of a culture as a political operation that was dangerous for individual members of that society. This is even more so in a world in which, for the first time, there is an increasing gap between the place where people were born and the place where they belong.

Taking ethnicity as an example, we argued for a constructivist vision of society and hence of culture, defining the latter as a network of meanings constructed by human beings to solve specific problems.

We then moved on to religion, examining the paradigm of secularisation, and tracing an empirical nexus between politics and religion. We saw that it is the individual exposed to personal and social crisis who has the greatest need for the reassurance offered by religion. Other people, who experience higher conditions of existential security, can cope with greater ambiguities and will be more inclined to religious tolerance, besides being less interested in religion itself. We have described a relationship between some concrete, extra-religious elements (health, protection, environment, inequality, etc.), the distribution of which belongs to the sphere of politics, and the place occupied by religion in society.

Religion has thus seemed to be strictly linked to human beings’ relation to Disorder, to their search for some Meaning that is always elusive; and in this tension we have attempted to locate a minimal definition.

If religion has been the human solution to Chaos, it is no surprise that in a globalised age such as ours it is making a reappearance on the jumbled world scene – also because the universal religions have been global from the beginning, leaping across ethnic and national boundaries, and therefore today exploiting an epistemological advantage over those political and social science categories that are still enclosed in the confines of a “nationalistic methodology”.

Religion however has tended to change shape following the individualisation and cosmopolitanisation typical of the second wave of modernity. Secularisation in fact produces forms of “pure” religion, since it separates them from their cultural contexts of origin. In this manner, fundamentalism is the form of religion that is most suitable to globalisation because the shedding of a particular culture means that it becomes an instrument with claims to universality.

We thus passed on to an analysis of globalisation, and the first characteristic we dwelt on was the division between those who freely create meanings, the cosmopolitan élites, and those who slide into insignificance, because they are locked into a local order that is now in the process of being overtaken.

We described the separation, typical of the current phase of planetary integration, between power (predominantly economic power) and politics, with the appearance of new global problems while local and national solutions linger on. We have underlined the interdependence of humankind and the new responsibilities that this implies, responsibilities that mount as the traditional avenues of political action crumble, starting with the institutions of the nation states and of the welfare state, which sought to provide the tools and foundations for the individual responsibility and freedom of citizens. We have, in other words, stressed the link that exists between security, widely understood, and democracy.

Security can no longer be attained through the expulsion of otherness and of its associated costs to beyond any kind of borders, because such borders are increasingly rickety. Autarchy, whether economic or cultural, is no longer possible. We have to live with difference, sharing the costs and benefits.

The question of identity therefore occurs in a landscape without labels, and all the concepts defined thus far seem to come together and overlap in the problem of identity. First of all there is the absence of any single criterion on the basis of which to subdivide humanity into categories (cultural, religious, ethnic), given the plural nature of identity and the role played within it by individual

choice, although choice is sometimes blocked by others. Choices and plurality conflict with that destiny which deterministic theories of natural communities, for example, wish to foist upon us.

The assertion of identity has become a task which not everyone possesses the tools to perform; a task which weighs on the individual, who is constantly threatened with the spectre of exclusion, and which separates those that have a very full identity from those who have none.

Indeed, globalisation poses problems that the recourse to local identities only exacerbates.

Redefining categories and problems.

After this summary of our argument to this point, the moment has come to draw some at least preliminary conclusions. On the one hand we must in effect redefine some concepts in the light of what we have discovered; and on the other, on the basis of these redefinitions, we must move on to consider the real problems that make up the sickness of which we have studied the symptoms – Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism.

We approached these symptoms initially by seeking in Islam the causal factor, i.e. we had recourse to culturally based theories. But we have discovered that this approach is not able to restore the proper complexity to the phenomena investigated. Recourse to a sole-factor explanation is in other words destined to fail when it seeks to provide an adequate means of understanding human problems. Moreover, theories that resort to concepts of culture, religion, ethnicity, etc. as sole explanation of, and therefore also as sole solution to, the problems set out above (but also to numerous others), simply do not describe reality as it exists, because they are structured around concepts that are fallacious, if not wilfully obfuscatory. They end up accentuating the problem that they pretend to solve, and confuse the question that has to be explained with the explanation that is offered.

A concept such as culture, for example, is interpreted in a totalising and essentialist sense, while it should be understood with all its internal complexity restored to it, and in the way it interacts with

the other dimensions in which individuals are involved. No field is autonomous, and no variable is independent, all are continuously held in a reciprocal tension, and each one in turn encapsulates the tensions of the infinite number of sub-fields that compose it.

We must therefore redefine concepts such as those of *belonging*, *authenticity*, *culture*, *identity*, *local*, *foreign*, *integration*, etc. in the light of what has been said, and above all because of the changed horizon in which these concepts occur: globalisation and its main consequence, the uprooting of the fixed horizons of meaning and their continuous mixing and blending together. This imposes the obligation to choose, interpret, reject, deconstruct.

Globalisation and late modernity therefore have brushed aside that “veil of ignorance” that could make the culture or the religion or the national identity within which one happened to be born appear to be something completely natural. If already in the past these instituted categories were evidently the work of mankind, human constructs, it has now become impossible to hide their artificiality. We are no longer automatically set on a pre-arranged path, we no longer have a fixed destiny. Rather, we must construct it, or else suffer it on the basis of choices made by others. In a certain sense the “imaginary institution” of society, to use a concept dear to Cornelius Castoriadis, is now made explicit.

Culture therefore does not exist as an entity in and of itself, nor has it ever existed as such. It is an abstract, totalising concept, which hides the impure movement of history. Above all, there is not much sense in speaking of culture as something different from the way in which each individual appropriates it on the basis of the specific conditions in which s/he finds him or herself, or as something distinct, we might add, from genetic, climatic, economic and all the other conditions. If we wanted to be really pedantic, we could say that there are as many cultures as there are individuals. This has always been so, but it is even more certain in the age of individualisation, in which the individual reappropriation of collective identities is no longer just a possibility, but a duty. Implicitly or explicitly, while cultures and all collective identities are not meaningful totalities, there does at least exist the act of an individual ratification.

Not only this, but besides falsifying the reality that they seek to explain, theories such as those examined (communitarism, fundamentalism, nationalism, multiculturalism, etc.) end up mistaking a privileged normative option for an empirical fact: they assign priority to the collective dimension over the members of these same collectivities. In this perspective, people are seen as functions of the institutions to which they are assimilated, with the danger that this entails for the individual.

Susan Moller Okin challenges this approach when she asks, à propos of the relation between multiculturalism and women's rights:

“Cosa fare quando le istanze delle culture o delle religioni delle minoranze collidono con la norma dell'eguaglianza di genere che, almeno formalmente, è promossa dagli stati liberali (per quanto essi continuino a violarla in pratica)?”⁷⁵

The notions of belonging and authenticity, but also of recognition, are suspect therefore, because they all presuppose what instead needs to be demonstrated⁷⁶. Let us approach this aspect through the words of Seyla Benhabib:

⁷⁵ S.M.Okin, *Diritti delle donne e multiculturalismo*, RaffaeleCortinaEditore, Milano 2007, p. 3.

“Per quale ragione la ricerca individuale di autenticità, di espressione della propria peculiare identità dovrebbe assumere la forma di una ricerca della collettiva espressione di sé? (...) Perché la ricerca da parte dell’individuo di una identità autentica dovrebbe essere subordinata alle lotte di una collettività, se non si dispone di una classificazione ontologica o gerarchica dei gruppi cui l’individuo appartiene, sulla base della quale possa dirsi che un gruppo rappresenta meglio degli altri un’espressione più autentica dell’individualità del singolo? Si tratta senza dubbio di una conclusione illiberale, la quale subordina la ricerca individuale di identità autentica all’autoaffermazione di gruppi particolari. (...) è tanto sbagliato teoricamente quanto politicamente pericoloso (...). L’errore teorico discende dall’omologia tra rivendicazioni individuali e rivendicazioni collettive. (...) Sotto l’aspetto politico, una mossa siffatta risulta pericolosa in quanto subordina l’autonomia morale ai movimenti di identità collettiva.”⁷⁷

To this we should add some further considerations. In fact, one might object that the value of the moral autonomy of individuals is valid only within a specific cultural traditions, that of western liberalism, and that therefore such autonomy no longer has value if viewed from a different perspective (over and above any arbitrary divisions of the world into civilisations, cultures and so on). Yet we have seen with fundamentalism that even the denial of any value accorded to individual autonomy is itself an expression of individual autonomy in its search for identity. Individual autonomy that denies itself, hides, transfers responsibility outside itself. To use the terminology of Castoriadis, societies in which the members defer to some extra-social authority are *heteronomous*. One might use the logic of Pascal’s famous wager on the existence of God. Let us suppose that there is no criterion of truthfulness that tells us whether the individual is truly something different and autonomous when measured against collective entities (however they are understood). To

⁷⁶ “dal principio generale secondo cui ogni identità umana si costituisce per via linguistica non può discendere alcun argomento circa quali reti di interlocuzione dovrebbero essere normativamente privilegiate, e in quali circostanze e da chi.” in: S.Benhabib, *La rivendicazione dell’identità culturale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005, p. 85.

decide whether to assign priority to the individual or to the group, Pascal's wager comes into play, where the individual corresponds to Pascal's infinite. If we do not wager on the individual and then individual autonomy is shown to be true, we lose. The individual will have been sacrificed. Nought multiplied by infinity equals zero. But if there exists just one chance that the individual comes first, we also have just one limited freedom of manoeuvre, so we have to stake everything on that. One times infinity equals infinity.

Returning to our argument, culturalist theories make authenticity coincide with something preceding the individual, with what he or she receives as an inheritance from the past - a view which incidentally betrays a (mistaken) uniform and essentialist definition of that past. What about artists then? Should we say that an artist's life and identity are not authentic, because he or she refashions styles to which they are supposed to conform uncritically in order to be themselves? On the contrary, is not this refashioning precisely the most authentic expression of that person's individuality? Is it not precisely in the disjunction between the standard handed down by tradition and the singularity of the individual artist that something unrepeatably, uniquely and *authentic* is created?

This holds good for every form of change, innovation, diversity. Let's think of the terrible consequences imposed in the past, and still today in many places on Earth, on anyone who behaves outside the socially fixed parameters: witches, or homosexuals for example. We think of those labelled as mad, and all those "infamous men" whose story was told by Foucault. The Inquisition operated along exactly the same lines. Freedom, besides being a good *per se*, is also the only possible proof of the authenticity of a choice. Only a genuine possibility of going elsewhere proves that our remaining is a sign of authenticity. For this reason, any collective identity must offer a real "opt-out" clause, not only to guarantee individual liberty, but also to demonstrate the worth of that collective identity. This is the crucial test. In his "Islam e democrazia", Fatema Mernissi for example writes:

⁷⁷ S.Benhabib, *La rivendicazione dell'identità culturale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005, p. 82.

“ Amiamo l’Islam perché la polizia ce lo ha imposto?”⁷⁸

To this must be added what has been argued above - that the individual today finds him or herself in a condition of having to continuously renegotiate their sense of belonging and identity, and to choose to do so. But not everyone - and, if it depended on the concepts being examined here one might say no-one (except for those that hold to such concepts!) - has the epistemological or material tools for making such choices. This is the new form of social stratification that we have seen separating out a cosmopolitan élite from the rest of humanity that is chained to its origin, and without the right to vote on that origin, or the ability to defend it, if it has to be chosen, against its crumbling under the pressure of globalisation.

It is thus a matter of accompanying the freedom that today is imposed on individuals with the tools that can transform an experience of uprootedness into an opportunity for the authentic construction of selfhood.

We can say that individualism, as a specific theoretical option, now finds itself in an historic situation that tends precisely towards detaching the individual from preceding constrictions and loyalties. Obviously this is true to a different degree according to the different prior political, economic, environmental and other conditions present on the planet. But it is certainly the direction in which we are moving, whether or not we are happy about it, and phenomena such as fundamentalism or terrorism are precisely an expression of this, both as an explicit reaction to this perspective of individual emancipation, interpreted as a crisis, and also implicitly (and this is one of the conclusions of this thesis) as an expression of failure to achieve an equitable distribution of opportunities and the tools of choice - one might speak of “*an autonomy gone wrong*”. In the great majority of cases, distribution of this kind is not only not planned for, it is, even worse, not even hoped for.

⁷⁸ F.Mernissi, *Islam e democrazia, paura della modernità*, Giunti, Firenze 2002, p. 111.

If, as has been said, cultures and collective identities in general are not entities endowed with a life of their own, much less is this the case in our global epoch; we should instead pay attention, as stated à propos of fundamentalism, to those *narratives*, true or false, around which a consensus is formed.

In his “La pensabilità del mondo”, Maffettone writes:

“Solo alcune narrative dell’identità rispondono a plausibili processi di identificazione, il cui successo dipende a sua volta dalla storia dei rapporti tra soggetti in determinati contesti.”⁷⁹

And further on:

“Sarà pure vero che le narrative identitarie sono spesso costruzioni sociali, resoconti fittizi, insomma strumenti creati *ad hoc* per mantenere situazioni di conflitto, a loro volta originate da cause diverse, per esempio nate per ragioni economiche o etico-politiche. Ma, bisogna riconoscerlo, non tutte le narrative identitarie attecchiscono allo stesso modo: alcune semplicemente falliscono o comunque influenzano poco o niente gli eventi. Altre, (...), prosperano e hanno effetti forti e duraturi.”⁸⁰

This is the reason why we should in a certain sense establish “rules of the game” that would exclude narratives that may lead to violent or ethically unsatisfactory outcomes. These rules should guide the production of narratives, a sort of *genealogy in reverse*, that is not the wilful construction of certain kinds of narrative, but the creation of a context, a sort of “procedure” which, while not determining the content of the narratives would avert the worst outcomes. We shall see in the following chapters whether such a thing is possible.

⁷⁹ S.Maffettone, *La pensabilità del mondo, filosofia e governance globale*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2006, p. 95.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p.107.

But, as we have said, we should also examine the narratives, of which Maffettone writes, as if they were symptoms, in order to trace them back to the sickness of which they are the expression, to the historically determined political and social context from which they have issued, and then to seek to act upon that context. That is what we are trying to demonstrate in relation to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, also through our “indifference” to any search for an authentic Islam⁸¹. As Mernissi writes:

*“Se l’obiettivo è puntato sulla violenza del fondamentalista, la strategia consiste nell’abbatterlo. Se, però, l’obiettivo è sulla sua angoscia, sulla sua paura di essere dimenticato nel grande banchetto della conoscenza, che è una delle promesse più attraenti della modernità, allora la soluzione è lasciarlo partecipare al banchetto.”*⁸²

So too, in line with our argument, we note Georges Corm writing in “La question religieuse au XXI siècle” as follows:

*“A-t-on jamais prêté attention, au temps de la lutte contre le terrorisme d’extrême gauche, à l’importance des textes invoquant la légitimité du marxisme que produisaient ces mouvements? Alors, pourquoi aujourd’hui faut-il prendre tellement au sérieux les textes ornés de versets coraniques dont se parent les terroristes qui se placent sous une bannière islamique? Ce n’est pas l’analyse du lexique idéologique religieux qui est importante dans la lutte contre la violence terroriste, mais celle du malaise sociale et politique qu’elle exprime.”*⁸³

⁸² F.Mernissi, *Islam e democrazia, paura della modernità*, Giunti, Firenze 2002, p. 112.

⁸³ G.Corm, *La question religieuse au XXI siècle*, La Découverte, Paris 2006, p. 196.

It is precisely by commencing from an examination of the narratives of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism that we were able to uncover a series of political-historical and theoretical problems, and we are now trying to redefine some of the categories encountered along the way.

One of these relates to nations and more precisely their borders or frontiers. I shall tackle this problem taking as my point of departure the essay by Thomas Nagel with the title: “È possibile una giustizia globale?”.

Nagel argues that a *political* conception of justice (in the “non-comprehensive” sense of John Rawls) is made possible by state sovereignty, because this implies an institutional relationship between citizens. If however the state is no longer based on nationhood (that is on a cultural identity, on an “imaginary” community to use Castoriadis’s word), or on a specific comprehensive doctrine, whether metaphysical, religious or philosophical, how can one determine the borders that delimit the institutional bond which imposes a duty of obedience to justice? Is it simply a question of “what works”, a merely “technical” problem so to speak of the range of operation of a particular sovereignty? Or is there here a coercive vision of the institutions? Even in this case, the border would appear to be a purely external limit to a particular dominion. It is no accident that Nagel cites Hobbes.

What I wish to say is that once the *cultural* justification of nationhood has collapsed, historically and philosophically, the very idea of frontiers appears problematic. Either these are the expression of some dominion or else they have no justification as currently understood. We shall examine these ideas more closely in the final part of the present thesis.

Let it suffice at this point to venture a generalisation: if up to now asymmetries of power and resources have been hidden behind the veil of cultural, national ethnic or religious allegiances, then today it is not the enlargement of justice that has to be justified against such “local” manifestations, but the burden of justification is now reversed. If earlier one might consider divisions between countries or discrimination between ethnicities or suchlike matters to be entirely natural, this is no longer possible in our world. Given the equality between human beings, it is up to those who want

to restrict universality to explain and justify any form of discrimination. This aspect too will be examined more closely later, but two questions immediately arise from this generalisation: what does *local* mean in today's world? - and hence also, what meaning can we ascribe to the word *foreign*? (at least from an anthropological point of view). Are we not perhaps all foreigners today? We can turn round the famous question posed by Amartya Sen "Equality of what?" into its opposite, "*Diversity of What?*"; for in a world of diversity what does that diversity consist of? What is the statute of diversity?

If, as we have argued, the veil has fallen that made some institutions appear as natural rather than artificially created - institutions that separated the local from the global, the foreign from the native - then the "imaginary institution" of human society (to use Castoriadis's terminology), which has always existed even though concealed, must today become explicit. And if democratic politics, as defined by Castoriadis, lies in the questioning of established institutions, then we can say, as hinted above, that current history offers us the possibility of inaugurating a new epoch, a democratic epoch.

Politics must rise to this immense opportunity, and I shall seek to show that liberal political philosophy is the one best fitted to inspire this task, despite the criticisms that many make against it on the basis of the resurgence of cultural and religious identities everywhere in the world. But this resurgence does not demonstrate that liberalism is not pertinent in today's world, on the contrary it only confirms the absolute urgency of this approach, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz proclaims:

*"Lo sviluppo di un liberalismo capace di coraggio e competenze sufficienti per affrontare un mondo di differenze non solo è possibile, ma altresì urgentemente necessario (...)."*⁸⁴

⁸⁴ C.Geertz, *Mondo globale, mondi locali, cultura e politica alla fine del ventesimo secolo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1999, p.73.

We therefore need a type of politics that avails itself of the appropriate categories that are necessary, both historically and normatively; a type of politics that, among other things, restores to individuals their identity in all its complexity, recognising that identity is the result of a multiplicity of factors, not least of which is individual choice.

This new style of politics must pose the problem of *integration*, no longer limited to the integration of traditional migrants, but directed at global integration, because we are all dislocated foreigners, in search of belonging and meaning. This integration must lay the foundations of a new equality, all the more so since we have traced in fundamentalism and terrorism the unmistakable signs of failed equality and failed integration.

One of the claims of this thesis is that, as in the case of the French *banlieus* in revolt, the subtext of terrorism and the flaring up of particular local identities is not “less integration, less citizenship”, but quite the opposite - *more* integration, *more* citizenship; except that this time integration and citizenship for everyone should be taken seriously.

Todorov in “La paura dei barbari” notes that:

“La cultura, scrive Bronislaw Malinowski, è ‘un vasto apparato (...) che permette all’uomo di affrontare i problemi concreti e puntuali che gli si pongono.’ ”⁸⁵

At the basis of a global culture therefore there must be a new concept of citizenship, a sort of “meta-identity”, that which is proposed in this thesis: the *Sustainable Identity*.

⁸⁵ T.Todorov, *La paura dei barbari, oltre lo scontro di civiltà*, Garzanti, Milano 2009, p. 42.

3. Diagnostics

a. Freedom and responsibility.

As examined so far, at the time of globalization individuals are forced to be free. Now, I wish to briefly analyze this condition of freedom because, on the contrary, it appears that in the world it occurs an advance towards new constraints, new inability to communicate with others, perhaps willingly adopted, as it is the case of fundamentalism and tightening of identity, in addition to new violence.

Therefore, there would appear to be a problematic relationship between men and new freedom available to them. This is the very point I wish to analyze starting from the famous parable of “the Grand Inquisitor” by Fedor Dostoevskij.

In the fifth book of the second part of the Karamazov Brothers, the great Russian writer precisely describes this ambivalent and problematic relationship between men and freedom. The parable takes place in Seville, Spain, at the time of the Inquisition. The whole city is gathered to be present at the stake of some heretics, when suddenly Jesus, arisen from the dead and back on earth, comes into sight among the crowd. The crowd recognizes him immediately and comes near as he passes. The crowd cheered him and asked for miracles. And, all miracles were performed. “The Grand Inquisitor” views the whole event, loses his temper and commands the guards to arrest Jesus. The guards take him to the Holy Court prisons and lock him in. During the night the Grand Inquisitor pays the special prisoner a visit and starts his famous soliloquy.

The prelate blamed Jesus for having offered men freedom and virtue which they are not able to take. Men are willing to become slaves as long as they can have the “earthly bread” giving up the “heavenly bread”.

*“Non c’è nulla di più ammaliante per l’uomo che la libertà della propria coscienza: ma non c’è nulla, del pari, di più tormentoso.”*⁸⁶

In this way Dostoevskij signifies the full anxiety in human minds caused by the action of making a choice, and the will, for the most part of them, to get rid of such freedom as soon as possible, and look for someone to whom they can delegate their own freedom. To look for an institution to whom they can delegate it, i.e. the Church.

The Grand Inquisitor maintains that having Jesus refused bread in the desert, in the name of an absolute freedom, Jesus himself denied:

*“quella universale e perpetua angoscia umana, sia d’ogni uomo in particolare sia dell’umanità nel suo complesso, che si esprime nella domanda: - A chi genufletterci?- Non c’è preoccupazione più assillante e tormentosa per l’uomo, non appena rimanga libero, che quella di cercarsi al più presto qualcuno innanzi al quale genuflettersi. Ma l’uomo pretende di genuflettersi dinanzi a ciò ch’è ormai indiscutibile, talmente indiscutibile che innanzi ad esso tutti gli uomini in coro acconsentano a genuflettersi. Giacché la preoccupazione di queste misere creature non consiste solo nel cercar qualche cosa di fronte alla quale io o chiunque altro possiamo genufletterci, ma nel cercare una cosa tale, che anche tutti gli altri credano in essa (...) Per bisogno di questa generale genuflessione gli uomini si sono massacrati l’un l’altro a colpi di spada.”*⁸⁷

This appears to be an exact description of the fundamentalist phenomenon and of a more generic reaction to freedom caused by globalization. The matter, though, is complicated. Here, in fact, freedom is described as a extremely difficult condition to be supported and as a condition which can be accepted only when specific conditions are granted. The famous Dostoevskij’s “earthly bread”.

⁸⁶ Fedor Dostoevskij; I fratelli Karamazov, Einaudi, Torino 1979, p.340.

⁸⁷ ibidem, p. 339.

In this way, the before said problem of the context in which the individual has to face his own liberty is to be emphasized . In other words, the problem of conditions in which man has to make his choice and his being responsible for it. It is only when these conditions are met that the individual feels able to take his freedom instead of doing away with it. We have to put ourselves a basic question : When is a man able to accept and exercise his freedom? This question is followed by another one: when can we regard a man as responsible for his own choices? Are there specific conditions without which we cannot really expect a man to seize the opportunity of his own freedom and be responsible for it? These questions are strictly connected to our way to face some leading subjects of domestic and international politics, beginning with the above mentioned issues covering religious terrorism and fundamentalism.

Being free to make a choice means to have the opportunity for reasoning. It means to have a chance to keep a distance from the condition in which we are and from ourselves in order to be able to operate a selection. We see how our time forces us to make this selection continuously.

Freedom may also be understood in the way Hannah Arendt has described the “capacity to think”. This very aspect makes us refer to the fact that in some circumstances man loses or refuses such capacity. This is the condition the world experienced during the second world war, with particular reference to the Nazi extermination. This is what Arendt looked into in her well known essay “ The triviality of evil” referring to the Nazi bureaucrat Otto Adolf Eichmann.

Taking into account all the nuances shown by the various historical contexts, we need to understand when an individual, otherwise regarded as “normal”, gives up his thinking and his personal judgement capacity. As indicated by Sen, this happens when an individual gives up the identity plurality of which he is made up.

In comparison with fundamentalism, we have already seen how a bewilderment and a humiliation feeling may lead to the search for a superior certainty and for a meaning leading to a total explanation thus freeing men from the imperative of being responsible and able to select.

In this way, it is possible to trace analogies between the totalitarian and the fundamentalist thought. In fact, under the stimulus of a Logic taken to its extremes, both remove all nuances and complexity of reality. They create clear and Manichean opposition. We have then to understand, as we have already started to do, how an individual can easily slip in this dimension. In order to deepen this aspect we referred to Arendt's essay "The origin of totalitarianism".

Erich Fromm's very telling essay titled "Escape from freedom", rotates on this question. The psychoanalyst investigates further all underground movements that allowed the coming of Nazi.

"Siamo stati costretti a riconoscere che in Germania milioni di persone erano ansiose di cedere la loro libertà quanto i loro padri lo erano stati per conquistarla; che invece di volere la libertà, cercavano modi di evaderne; che altri milioni di persone erano indifferenti e non credevano che valesse la pena di combattere e morire per difendere la libertà. (...)

Quali sono nella società i fattori sociali ed economici che promuovono l'impegno a favore della libertà? La libertà può diventare un peso troppo pesante da portare, qualcosa da cui l'individuo cerchi di sfuggire? E allora perché la libertà è per molti una meta preziosa e per altri una minaccia? Non c'è anche, forse, oltre a un desiderio innato di libertà, un desiderio istintivo di sottomissione?"⁸⁸

In the feeling of belonging to a clan or a religion, Fromm traces the reassuring essence a man looks for to escape loneliness and uncertainty. The loneliness which follows the loss of those "primary ties" which the child experiences with his own parents. From this loss, a regular development course towards one's own personality starts.

Nevertheless, Fromm warns, and what we examined so far can confirm it, that if economical, social and political conditions, from which the individualization process derives, do not give ground to an achievement of personality, then freedom becomes an unbearable burden and is denied.

⁸⁸ Erich Fromm, *Fuga dalla libertà*, Mondadori, Milano 1987, p. 14-15.

“Il risultato di questa sproporzione tra la libertà *da* qualsiasi vincolo e la mancanza di possibilità di realizzazione positiva della libertà e dell’individualità ha portato, in Europa, ad una fuga allarmata dalla libertà verso nuovi vincoli o almeno verso la completa indifferenza.”⁸⁹

Does not, this situation, reflect closely the condition of the majority of mankind who did not receive all instruments and opportunities needed to face this new freedom, after the loss of security granted by the old and familiar social, cultural, religious, etc., ties, cut by globalization and dominium experiences (colonization, military occupation, etc.) ?

Therefore, it is comprehensible that this majority of world population looks for security through the set up of secondary ties that could replace the lost ones. Religion, especially in its fundamentalist version, offers precisely this kind of assurances, just like the assurance offered by dictatorial movements during last century. Fromm reminds us that it is not fortuitous that from such a perspective the definition of the religious experience, as the experience of absolute power, be the definition itself of the masochistic experience.

Leaving psychology apart, not being the subject of this work, what really matters here is to highlight how talking about freedom, and the responsibility attached to it, does not make sense if even the issue of a real possibility for such freedom is not dealt with, as well as the context in which an individual has not only the needed instruments to his own freedom, but the same availability to be free.

This is a crucial question to face and for understanding the problems of our time and try and give an appropriate solution. It is also an essential point for politics suitable to an interconnected world. For we need to understand under what circumstances persons of different kinds, having free access to this diversity, are also willing to let others enjoy the same freedom they have kept for themselves. From what it was indicated so far, we see that freedom requires conditions of opportunities, a background from which to stand out. Moreover, we understand that the set up of such background,

this being the aim of this thesis, is the responsibility of politics. Now, we will examine the correct way.

Therefore, at the time of late modernity and globalization, freedom denied to the eradicated individual is crossed by Insecurity. Bauman in his essay titled “The loneliness of the global citizen” states:

“Nel caso di Sicherheit la lingua tedesca è singolarmente parca: riesce a sintetizzare in un solo termine fenomeni complessi, per rendere i quali l’inglese ha bisogno di almeno tre termini: security (sicurezza esistenziale), certainty (certezza) e safety (sicurezza personale, incolumità). (...) Le tre componenti della Sicherheit sono le condizioni della sicurezza di sé e della fiducia in sé, da cui dipende la capacità di pensare e agire in modo razionale. L’assenza o l’insufficienza di una delle tre produce pressoché lo stesso effetto: il dissolversi della sicurezza di sé, la perdita di fiducia nelle proprie capacità e nelle intenzioni altrui, ciò che alimenta l’inettitudine, l’ansia, la circospezione, la tendenza a incolpare, a trovare capri espiatori, e all’aggressione. Tutte queste tendenze sono sintomi di una tormentosa sfiducia esistenziale.”⁹⁰

And without security freedom becomes unbearable. The politics, meant as an opening to others and as a collective action, becomes impossible. The personal identity retreats and escapes. In this survival logic man turns into a “minimal myself”. Christopher Lasch writes:

“In queste condizioni l’identità personale è un lusso (...). In stato d’assedio l’io si contrae, si riduce a un nucleo difensivo armato contro le avversità. (...) Mettendo in atto una sorta di ritirata emotiva di fronte agli impegni a lungo termine, che presupporrebbero un mondo stabile, sicuro e tranquillo.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibidem, p. 39.

⁹⁰ Z.Bauman, La solitudine del cittadino globale, Feltrinelli, Milano 2009, p.25.

⁹¹ C.Lasch, L’io minimo, la mentalità della sopravvivenza in un’epoca di turbamenti, Feltrinelli, Milano 2004, p. 7.

As we have seen, it does not surprise to witness happenings such as the phenomena of the fall back on narrow communities and the consequent violence it can generate.

A liberal theory, aimed at freedom, must require the conditions in which such a freedom is realized, otherwise it runs the risk of making such a term simply formal and gives ground for one of the typical charges brought against it. For instance, it can be said that the freedom to select, if merely in the abstract, is a hidden conservatism. Under this aspect, for example, we reach again the subject of the “exit right”, personal, as a complement and a validation for the entrance inside a collective form of identity. Generally speaking, the subject of freedom in a globalized world. Politics have to look at the various dimensions which set up, all together, the freedom of individuals. The premise to their responsibility. Cornelius Castoriadis writes:

“L’objectif de la politique n’est pas le bonheur, c’est la liberté. La liberté effective (je ne discute pas ici la liberté philosophique) est dans ce que j’appelle autonomie.”⁹²

And this substantial freedom, the autonomy, is realized through the equal participation of the single individuals in the drafting of the law to which they will be subject.

“Il en découle immédiatement l’absurdité de l’opposition entre égalité et liberté (...). Les deux notions s’impliquent réciproquement. L’égale possibilité effective de participation exige l’octroi effectif à tous des conditions de tout ordre de cette participation. Les implications de cela sont visiblement immenses; elles embrassent une partie considérable de l’institution globale de la société (...).”⁹³

⁹² C.Castoriadis, La montée de l’insignifiance, les carrefours du labyrinthe 4, Editions du Seuil 1996, p. 274.

⁹³ Ibidem, p. 276.

We will return to Castoriadis. But it is sufficient, at this point, to stress how this idea of freedom also implies a notion of *agency*, and we have seen how it is precisely the absence of control over one's destiny, the closing of the channels of political and social expression, that are, for example, among the reasons behind terrorism. And how a very large part of the world's population ends up suffering the consequences of its identity, without the possibility to actually choose. Passively. In spite of the fact that today those destinies (not chosen), which were the cultural, ethnic, religious, and national identities, "no longer exist".

So we are forced to be free, without, however, having the means. In fact, some have many identities. Others have none at all. And if an identity is a complex group of dimensions that are different from and complementary to one another (material and not material), doesn't *a redistributive policy of identity* perhaps become necessary? We will discuss this further.

And this aspect leads to another fundamental point in the economics of this paper: the distinction between *choice* and *chance*. In other words, the heart of the liberal political conception that we are proposing. So I will refer to the assumption of John Rawls according to whom whatever is not chosen *is arbitrary from a moral point of view*. This is a point we have touched on several times. In other words, the "natural lottery" cannot determine people's lives completely because one does not choose to be born into a certain family or with specific natural gifts. In this sense, it is the duty of the institutions to correct, at least within certain limits, what chance has determined. For example by achieving, through public education, the principle of fair and equal opportunity. A principle whose purpose is the achievement of an equal condition of free and equal citizenship.

Therefore it is not a matter of a utopian prospect of eliminating chance, but rather, insofar as it is possible and within the limits of the current human knowledge, of critically approaching it. Of enabling people, all people, to not be victims (at least within a certain threshold) of chance.

In this sense, Nietzsche's famous aphorism holds true: *become what you are*. And we believe that not everyone, indeed very few, has the real possibility to become him- or herself. Authentically. And that most people remain, instead, prisoners to conditionings, denied opportunities, economic

and cultural constraints, and even prejudices and violent impositions. Public institutions cannot define the identity, the moral visions, of individuals. Otherwise they would not be liberal. They can help each individual to build his own comprehensive doctrine. By broadening the horizon that chance has placed before him with his birth. By offering alternatives. By warding off the outcomes that are contrary to the freedom and equality of each. For example by guaranteeing for every human being that set of rights, knowledge, and resources... only starting from which it will be possible for every human being to consider himself as free and therefore responsible. By removing, moreover, the worst forms of coercion, both explicit and hidden, material and spiritual, which may distort the result of any possible choice from the beginning.

It is the opposite of an ethical perspective. Or, if anything, it is a minimal conception of ethics which judges positively the fact that each individual may really build, access, and drastically change his own, personal, value perspective. At the same time guaranteeing similar opportunities to everyone else as well. In this sense it could be said that there would be something like a *heretical state*.

Assuming as their foundation the universal values of freedom and equality of all human beings, the institutions must not choose a specific culture, religion, or morality. Instead they must guarantee, for all, proper access to the different moralities, religions, and cultures. Or to water, nutrition, etc. In other words, it's not the Truth that counts, but the path by which each individual determines his or her own truth. And a similar path consists of the notion of "*political identity*".

b. Political identity: a procedural conception of identity. That is, the symptoms have a disease.

We have defined Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism as two symptoms for which we have sought the origin, the *disease*. Initially we hypothesized, on the basis of Huntington's theories, that this might be found in the religion with which those symptoms were related, Islam. We then discovered that not only the sacred scriptures of the Muslim religion, but also the *broader concepts of religion, culture, and identity*, said nothing about the disease, explained nothing, or did so only marginally. And we realized that, if anything, even those concepts were *part of the equation to be solved*.

We thus had to abandon the reassuring idea of a single explanatory variable, because various dimensions seemed to interact with one another in determining an explanation of the phenomena studied. In short, we found ourselves in front of an equation without an independent variable. Or rather, the independent variable seemed to be made up of the group of dependent variables, so to speak. That is, a group of individual, institutional, social, economic, environmental, etc. dimensions in an interactive relationship amongst themselves. However, all together, they seemed to form the outlines of the disease we were seeking.

In other words, the real problem, the disease of which terrorism and fundamentalism are just two of the symptoms, is the unjust conditions of access to identity in the areas where such phenomena take place. This is one of the theories put forward here.

Therefore, from this standpoint, we must broaden our conception of identity, including in it all those factors on which politics may intervene to guarantee that the individual is truly free and responsible.

It is a problem of justice.

In this sense, it is not sufficient to say, as rightly done by Sen, that identity consists of a plurality of belongings, because we have seen how some situations lead the individual to give up that plurality and close himself up within a single dimension, for example that of religion.

The notion of identity that I intend to propose corresponds, in a certain sense, to that *right to have rights* of which Hannah Arendt spoke. A sort of *metaidentity*, as I mentioned above. In the sense that it turns out to be the basis, the preliminary condition starting from which the individual may self-determine himself, supplementing the arbitrary natural lottery numbers allotted him. But he may also not do so.

So this notion, which I call *political identity*, is not all the identity of individuals, but only the platform, the foundations on which the broader identity of each will be built. The assumption is that if the foundations are built badly, the whole building will be too, and will thus be potentially prone to collapsing. Or vice versa, if they are solid and sound, whatever is built on them will also be sound.

The notion of *political identity* thus implies a *procedural conception* of identity. In fact, according to this perspective, the conditions through which the individual accesses his identity determine the “*rightness*” or “*wrongness*” of the outcome achieved, that is, the “final” identity. If such conditions are, so to speak, inadequate, the outcome will be inadequate also. The duty of the institutions should be that of preparing the political identity space in such a way that the worst outcomes can be avoided. But without predetermining the content of the final identity.

From this viewpoint, terrorism and fundamentalism are interpreted as the outcome of a procedure at the basis of which there is an “unjust political identity”.

It is an intuitive idea. And yet it is rarely rendered explicitly. What is attempted here is the proposal of a normative version. To better explain what I mean, I will refer to the concept of “good reasons” which John Rawls ties, however, to the stability of the institutions. And I will use the by now familiar example of religious terrorism.

We do not know deep down why a single individual becomes a terrorist. We have certainly established several significant connections, but since this is not a psychology thesis, we are devoting our attention to the political aspects, to the political identity.

What we can know with certainty, and which falls within the domain of political philosophy, are the reasons why one should *not* become a terrorist.

In other words, we do not only want each individual to achieve his identity, but we want him to achieve it for *good reasons*. That is, through a series of factors, rights, opportunities, resources, etc., to which all people are entitled.

If one or more of these good reasons are lacking, the outcome of the procedure is, in a certain sense, distorted, unjust from the start. The idea is that being a tolerant, open, non-violent person must not be the exclusive domain of saints or martyrs or heroes. But that even a weak person must be provided with the conditions for avoiding becoming violent, intolerant, or even simply indifferent.

With this, whatever behaviour or virtue one must have is not determined a priori (from a liberal perspective that would be intolerable). There is simply an indication of the starting conditions from which each individual may fully assume responsibility for his choices and actions. And this responsibility is achieved through a procedure, a path that is not distorted from the start.

If, for example, in the procedure leading to identity, feelings of humiliation (for example, as a result of colonization) are caused, how can we expect the outcome of that procedure to be fair and just, undistorted?

Or how can we consider the identity of a youth who grows up in the Gaza Strip the outcome of a just procedure?

We have said that political identity is made up of various, interwoven dimensions. And, for example, we established above a connection between security and the need for religion, between religiousness and demographic trends, between the suppression of political and social rights, on the one hand, and violence on the other, etc.

More in general, we can assert the necessity to combine different disciplines and perspectives, if we want to really grasp, in all their complexity, contemporary phenomena such as those connected, for example, with identity themes.

It is a very difficult challenge, but it is the human facts themselves that are complex, and if we want to understand them, we have no choice. On the other hand, simplistic or one-dimensional explanations certainly do not help solve the problems (see Huntington's theories which, indeed, accentuate them). And we do not see how it could be possible to have a reductionist approach to human identity, which is not simple at all.

Therefore sociology, economics, ecology, philosophy, medicine, psychology, etc. must contribute all together to casting a light on the phenomena of our contemporary world.

In fact, the scientific community is moving toward such an integration of the outlook on the world. An example, among numerous others, of this interaction among dimensions of human knowledge which have been separate up to today can be seen in the study conducted by Wilkinson and Pickett on the relationship between economic inequality and a series of aspects usually not associated with problems of economic justice: from violence to obesity, from adolescent pregnancies to drug use, etc.

“ (...) una delle cause più comuni di violenza, che contribuisce in larga parte a spiegare perché i comportamenti violenti siano più diffusi nelle società con forti disparità economiche, è il sentimento di vergogna e umiliazione che si prova quando ci si sente trattati con disprezzo e mancanza di rispetto.”ⁱⁱ

In short, today mankind can afford to deal with the complexity of the real. It already has the tools, or is starting to construct them.

The above is just an example, but what must be said is that within the political identity, there must be a series of integrated dimensions referring to different disciplines. Establishing exactly which is not the task this work proposes for itself, also due to the obvious lack of technical skills. In any case, they must all render those dimensions significant for the purposes of a correct interpretation of the procedure leading to the identity of individuals. Moreover, all these dimensions are intrinsically

important. Here we have only mentioned, through the study of fundamentalism and terrorism, several relationships, which are certainly not exhaustive. And thus some of the dimensions that must be included in the notion of political identity. The idea of political identity approaches, albeit standing apart from it, Nussbaum's capability approach. In common there is the assumption for which at the basis of a correct and balanced process of development of a person, considered in his or her complexity, there is a necessity for a series of resources, both material and immaterial. While Nussbaum proposes a specific list, here we wish to simply establish a principle, which has emerged thanks to the study of terrorism and fundamentalism, but which is not limited to them: political identity is the path of access to the broadest identity of people, the basis which determines the outcome. Just conditions (autonomously evaluated as just) will lead to a just outcome. Unjust conditions will result in the opposite.

The field of this work is political philosophy and the objective is therefore to propose a normative principle to guide outlook and action, one which defines the boundaries and internal thresholds within the space of the political identity. We will present this regulatory principle in the last part of the thesis. It is the concept of *sustainable identity*.

In other words, political identity is the space in which, in our case, we have identified the disease or, more precisely, the diseased organ. Sustainable identity is the therapy proposed for treating it.

To describe what has been said through one of the classic distinctions of liberalism, we can say that the Right is the way to the Good: its precondition, in a relationship of continuity between one and the other, not of a split. That is, the political dimension makes the ethical dimension possible. It opens it up as a possibility, therefore a choice, and no longer as an arbitrary constriction imposed by external circumstances, as in the past. Even while the dimension of the Right incorporates a minimal conception of the Good. A conception such that it judges as positive the possibility (and with globalization, the inevitability) of building, seeking, and manipulating one's view of the Good. But without indicating how to complete this search, or what particular conception of the Good it is necessary to have. In the best liberal tradition.

4. Therapy

For a sustainable identity.

We have found in the distortion of one or more dimensions of the political identity the origin of certain phenomena such as fundamentalism and terrorism. More in general, we have stated that the identity of a person depends in a crucial manner of the conditions in which such identity is formed. It is a procedural conception according to which it is only starting from just conditions, those present in the age of the preliminary political identity, that a just result will be obtained, i.e. a “complete identity” actually chosen, consistent with the principles of equality and freedom of each person. Also the responsibility derives from the justness of the procedure. In this sense, freedom and responsibility are complementary. The political identity represents the whole of the conditions of freedom itself. The content of such freedom is left to the individuals.

The distortions that we have found at the origin of violent or fundamentalist constructions of identities represent, therefore, the causes of that illness which we have been looking for throughout this study, the illness which we have referred to as a “freedom gone bad”, a failed procedure.

The context in which we are facing this illness is that of late modernity and globalization, which imposed of each one, for the uprooting of the traditional horizons of sense, the task to choose one’s own identity. Not everybody has, however the means for sustaining such imperative and this determines, in addition to an injustice *per se* (if we care for equality of human beings and their freedom), also of the negative consequences of the type described: terrorism and fundamentalism. But not only that. One witnesses different forms of flight from freedom. The objective of this work was to understand the reasons for a similar flight and prepare a background that prevented it, which would allow conversely an actual enjoyment of freedom.

In other words, we are in the horizon of what Beck calls individualization:

“L’individualizzazione, vista in questo modo, è una dinamica sociale che non si basa su una libera decisione degli individui. Per dirla con le parole di Jean-Paul Sartre, gli uomini sono condannati all’individualizzazione. Essa è un dovere, il dovere paradossale di creare, di progettare, di mettere in scena autonomamente non solo la propria biografia, ma anche i suoi legami e le sue reti di relazioni (...) in un continuo processo di armonizzazione con gli altri e con gli imperativi del mercato del lavoro, del sistema formativo, dello stato, ecc (...). Chance, pericoli, insicurezze della biografia, che prima venivano definiti nell’ambito dell’unione familiare, della comunità di paese, o attraverso il ricorso a regole corporative o alle classi sociali, devono oggi essere percepiti, interpretati ed elaborati dai singoli.”ⁱⁱⁱ.

The needs derives, therefore, from such changed horizon of re-defining certain concepts (anthropological, political, etc.) through which we had described till now reality and therefore, we had formed it. It is necessary to find a new interpretative paradigm that describes the present world and proposes a solution to the possible illnesses of this same world. The proposal of this work is to find this new paradigm in the idea of a *Sustainable Identity*. The basic idea is that if we must build our identities and decide of our institutions, then we must find the normative principle that gives a direction to such construction and determines its limits.

The fall of the traditional scenarios imposes a critical re-consideration on the justifications to put at the basis of the new political constructions. In other words, the shattering of cultures, of the integral identities of the past (religion, nation, ethnic group, etc.) imposes the need to establish voluntarily, so to say, the bases on which to build different institutions and identities around the world. Nothing can be presupposed any longer. Presumption that did not belong only to those forms of social and political constructions structured around ethic, religious, etc. visions, but even from those visions that were ethically defined as “neutral”, as the liberal theories *à la* Rawls.

As a matter of fact, also Rawls theoretical building , which presents itself as neutral with respect to the different visions of the Good existing in society, was in reality made possible by the presence of such liberal basic culture that each one, albeit having different comprehensive doctrines, respected, made possible by a shared nucleus of liberal basic values. One could say that Rawls himself presupposed the existence of something like a political identity, in its meaning presented above, whose content would generate a rough liberal result. Maffettone writes in “I fondamenti del Liberalismo”:

“Alla fine della storia, ciò che ci lega di più reciprocamente, e da cui dipende un impegno morale condiviso, è l’orizzonte culturale in cui siamo cresciuti, che spazia per così da Dante alla fisica teorica. A questo orizzonte non sapremmo infatti facilmente rinunciare senza cambiare il nostro modo di essere. Ma allora –io dico- è questo orizzonte che garantisce quel “noi”, senza il quale la soluzione di Rawls non funzionerebbe.”^{iv}

In other words, if being *reasonable* (in the sense meant by Rawls) is possible only within a liberal democracy, then this means that it is a liberal political identity (the Right) that enables a moral reasonable identity (the Good, regardless of how it is declined). The point is that, if such a scheme is valid, and today we cannot assume any particular basic culture as given, it is then the case of *explicitly establishing* a similar liberal basic “culture” meant as premise to reasonable ethical visions. In other words, we must create and promote a determination of such (partial) political identity as to promote the emerging of (complete) reasonable moral identities. And this is possible, is maintained, through the concept of sustainable identity. In addition to this, it is necessary to distinguish the historical level from the normative level. Even if a liberal basic culture such as the one implicitly presupposed by Rawls, remained, we should consider it , according to the view of those individuals who are accidentally born in it, as being morally arbitrary, since it is not chosen,

even though a hypothetical consent was assumed in the form of the original position. We shall briefly see this aspect.

It is maintained that the basic institutions of liberalism (and above all of the critical liberalism and certain aspects of cosmopolitanism⁹⁴) are the most suitable to our time, to the horizon of choice in which we are without being able to run a way: a time in which freedom is mandatory and in which people who are different from one another must find a way of living together. Given the inter-relation that derives from globalization, in fact, it is not indifferent how each one lives his freedom since this will have consequences on the life and on the freedom of all the others, and vice-versa. Moreover, the ideas of equality and freedom of all the people have autonomous value.

We can say that the historical conditions and liberal regulatory intuitions have for the first time the opportunity to meet, an opportunity that we should be able to catch if we want to avoid the alternative: the multiplying of violent identities, of the kind that we have just described with fundamentalism and terrorism.

We must find, at least at a theoretical level, a vision that safeguards freedom and equality in a horizon of inter-relation and choice. We must ask ourselves (being no longer able to take it for granted or implicit, neither historically nor morally and not even avoid) the question: how can people so different the one from the other live together under conditions of equality and freedom? The answer to this question is: making this diversity what makes them equal, i.e. building “equal” procedures, paths, albeit always situated, which enable and lead to plural results (freedom), i.e. sustainable, from several standpoints.

We must give to everybody the possibility to *become what they are*. A liberal vision in the form of the sustainable identity goes towards that direction, safeguarding at the same time, not only the

⁹⁴ Cito da A.Taraborelli, *Il cosmopolitismo contemporaneo*, Editori Laterza, p. XIV: questi sono punti condivisi dalle varie forme di cosmopolitismo “In base al primo assunto l’unità ultima di attenzione morale è l’essere umano, le singole persone, piuttosto che le famiglie, le tribù, le comunità etniche, culturali, religiose, nazionali, o gli stati. In tale prospettiva, i soggetti collettivi possono costituire un’unità di attenzione solo indirettamente, in virtù dell’importanza che assumono per la vita e l’identità dei loro membri o cittadini. In base al secondo assunto lo status di unità ultima di attenzione morale è attribuito a ogni essere umano in modo eguale, e non in quanto appartenente ad un sottoinsieme (ad esempio uomini, aristocratici, ariani, bianchi o musulmani). In base al terzo assunto, infine, questo status speciale vale globalmente, le persone sono unità di attenzione morale per tutti, non soltanto per vicini e compatrioti.”

conditions of such outcome, but guaranteeing also the harmony, the coordination among the different possible outcomes. We do not simply want to be free, but we want to be free in a way that is compatible with the same freedom for all the others. And this imposes certain limits. The sustainable identity tries to define such limits.

This is based on the principle of sustainability, considering that this must be applied to the political (institutional) and cultural sphere, and no longer limited to merely economic or environmental dimensions. In this sense, the economic or ecologic idea of sustainable development would only be a part, a subset, of a broader principle, i.e. that of the sustainable identity. An empirical confirmation is given, inter alia, by the study of fundamentalism and terrorism, and by the genealogical analysis of the traditional concepts of culture (and of ethnic group, nation, religion, etc. ...), on other words that the identity depends on a large number of variables and all of them must be taken into consideration. It is the notion of political identity that collects all these variables and defines them as all the conditions of our broader identity, as the premises to our choice and our freedom. The principle that must form, then, the space of the political identity is exactly that of the sustainable identity, the only one that is compatible with the values of freedom and equality at the time of globalization. In this sense, the sustainable identity represents a limit to and an explanation of the construction of identity forms that violate the equal value of each person and his freedom, and considers that the identity of each one is in relation with the identity of all the others, and interacts with it in several ways. Such relation having exceeded today the local scope, had a global, universal import, both on an empirical level and at a normative level. The equivalent, in the latter (normative) dimension, of the actual (historical) uprooting, is given by the principle mentioned above whereby what is not chosen is morally arbitrary. The sustainable identity incorporates such principle. The choice implies the taking of a distance, the possibility to take a critical reflexive attitude, with respect to the situation that is being evaluated and decided and with respect to oneself. Without this distance, with the alternatives that it entails, the choice is an empty

word. What does it mean, for example, freedom of religion if we cannot abandon the religion or change it, and to do this even before evaluating it, taking a distance with respect to it?

Let's define then the concept of sustainable identity starting from the famous Brundtland Report, which in 1987 was drawn by the United Nations for handling the themes of development:

“Lo sviluppo è sostenibile se soddisfa i bisogni delle generazioni presenti senza compromettere le possibilità per le generazioni future di soddisfare i propri bisogni.”^v

The principle of sustainability states that we must not consume the resources that are available today to such an extent as to compromise the same possibility for the future. The limit to exploitation is established by the consideration of two factors, described as follows in the ecological language:

“Natural Critical Capital and load capacity. ‘Natural critical capital’ means the minimum level that is necessary to the biological reproducing capacity of the ecosystem. ‘Load capacity’ means, conversely, the quantity of pollution (in a broad sense) and waste that the plant is able to bear. The two concepts are obviously related, in the sense that when a system exceeds its load capacity, it goes below the limit of the natural critical capital.”⁹⁵

If the choice is not only the inevitable horizon of our world (choice of the identity, of the institutions, of the rules, etc.), but also that what does not derive from a choice is morally arbitrary, then we must find a principle that governs such choice, safeguards its conditions, determines its limits. Such principle is found in the logic comprised in the definition of sustainable development just mentioned above. The sustainable identity, in turn, coordinates and summarizes in itself the

⁹⁵ A.Lanza, *Lo sviluppo sostenibile*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2006, p. 17.

various scopes within which the logic of sustainability is to be applied, of which the economic development is only a part.

Not all the forms of identity are, therefore, acceptable, but only those that abide by the above-mentioned principle. The sustainability constitutes, therefore, a measure of political judgment and legitimacy starting from which to proceed with comparisons between different institutional organizations and between different individual identities. In the same manner, such principle represents an explanation of the birth of violent identities or in contrast with the values of freedom and equality.

Sustainability, in other words, affirms the following principle: we must be able to be who we “want” to be (freedom) today, compatibly with the same possibility for all the others (equality), without jeopardizing the very same freedom in the future, both for ourselves and for the others. The sustainability summarizes, therefore, in itself the values of freedom and equality, and articulates then in such a manner as to make of the man evaluation criterion and of political action. It incorporates the value of the choice as “counter-proof” of the morality of a certain organized system. From what we have just said the absolute priority derives that must be ensured to the individual with respect to any collective entity or identity, which results, in turn, into an unavoidable “right of exit” to the benefit of the individual from the same collective identities, with all the consequences that derive in terms of cultural collective rights or defense of minorities for being minorities. But we shall revert on this issue later.

From what we have just said we can derive the following maxim: if the choice (as an expression of freedom and equality) has value (in addition to being concretely unavoidable), then no choices will be permitted that prevent the future possibility to make choices, whilst all the others will be permitted within the perimeter (load capacity, of ecology) of this limit, just within the logic of sustainability. We found an example of this aspect in the reading of the holy texts given by fundamentalists. They prohibit the human interpretation of the texts, i.e. they prohibit that same possibility (the choice) that enabled them to prohibit the interpretation. Therefore, sustainability has

also an epistemological valence, to the extent that it is anti-dogmatic. In other words, it prohibits that the outcome of a research, the interpretation, is the prohibition of the free research, i.e. again, of the interpretation. This same logic must be applied to all those dimensions (to be defined technically) that we have established that they are integrated parts with one another of the idea of political identity. The task of the institutions shall be, therefore, to cause the limits so justified to be respected, to provide the means for satisfying them, conforming themselves with such logic.

Let's make the example of a Constitution. At the time it is drawn, the constituents have at their disposal a certain quantity of resources (freedom and equality, condensed in the possibility of the choice). The principle of sustainability does not say which content the Constitution must have, and in this sense it is a liberal principle, but it establishes a limit to the discretionality of such contents. The limit is that of compromising in a significant manner the resources that have initially enabled the drafting of the Constitution. Therefore the possibility must be safeguarded, for example, for the future generations to amend the constitutional text, i.e. the choice (the resources of freedom and equality), of which the constituent fathers benefited at the time they wrote it; such future amendment will find, in turn, a limit in the safeguard again for the subsequent generations to be able to do the same, and so on. In this sense, a constitution that denies freedom and equality, i.e. the choice, contradicts such principle and also the conditions from which it emerged. The limit to the possible choices is the very same possibility to choose.

This aspect of sustainability corresponds exactly to the democratic theory of Cornelius Castoriadis, focused on the idea of autonomy:

“Dans une démocratie, le peuple est souverain, à savoir il fait les lois et la loi, à savoir encore la société fait ses institutions et son institution, elle s’auto-institue. Mais comme toute société s’autoinstitue, nous devons ajouter: elle s’autoinstitue, du moins en partie, explicitement et réflexivement. (...) Cette autonomie, cette liberté, implique à la fois et présuppose l’autonomie, la liberté des individus, elle est impossible sans cette dernière. Mais celle-ci, affirmée et assurée par

la loi, la constitution, les déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, repose en dernière analyse, de jure et de facto, sur la loi collective, formelle aussi bien qu'informelle. La liberté individuelle effective – je ne parle pas de liberté philosophique ou psychique- doit être décidée par une loi qu'aucun individu ne saurait poser ou sanctionner. Et dans le cadre de cette loi, l'individu peut à son tour définir pour lui-même les normes, les valeurs, les significations moyennant lesquelles il essaiera d'ordonner sa vie propre et de lui donner un sens. (...) marque la rupture qu'entraîne la création de la démocratie avec tous les régimes social-historique antérieurs. Dans ceux-ci, régimes d'hétéronomie institués, la source et le fondement de la loi, comme toute norme, valeur et signification, sont posés comme transcendants à la société; transcendants dans l'absolue, come dans les sociétés monothéistes, transcendants en tous cas relativement à l'actualité effective de la société vivante, comme dans les sociétés archaïques. L'assignation de cette source et de se fondement vont de pair avec un clôture du la signification ; la parole de Dieu, les dispositions établies par les ancêtres sont indiscutables et établies une fois pour toutes. Cela vaut aussi pour les individus: le sens de leurs vies est donné, réglé d'avance, de ce fait assuré. Pas de discussion possible sur les institutions – donc aussi, pas de discussion possible sur les croyances sociales, sur ce qui vaut et ne vaut pas, sur le bien et le mal. Dans une société hétéronome – ou simplement traditionnelle- la clôture de la signification fait que non seulement la question politique comme la question philosophique sont fermées d'avance, mais que le sont tout aussi bien les questions éthiques ou esthétiques.”^{vi}

We can find, inter alia, in this text of Castoriadis, many of the aspects highlighted in our itinerary through fundamentalism and the concepts of culture, religion, identity.

The idea of sustainable identity implies a *monistic* vision, i.e. it provides for the same principles for individuals and institutions, just like the *autonomy* of Castoriadis. Such solution is authentically liberal in the sense that it does not prescribe a specific doctrine of the Good Life to individuals and institutions. It limits itself, inevitably, to express a minimal vision of the Good (considering as

positive freedom and equality, therefore, the choice, in the exigent sense described above), which coincides with the space of the Just. A space of the just, no longer separated from the space of the Good then, but its premise. In other words, the individual through the Just (rights, education, health, etc., i.e. all the variables comprised in the political identity and declined in the form of sustainable identity) , is found in the necessary conditions to the formation of one's own conception of Good in a manner that is not distorted by circumstances or events that exceed a certain threshold of sustainability. There is continuity. And also here, there is a procedure that permits and ascertains a legitimate result. Therefore one does not fall in the accusation of "schizophrenia" addressed by a few to the theory of Rawls. "The rest of ourselves" (Dworkin) is not separated, our vision of the Good, of the most restricted "political us", for accepting, sharing a nucleus of basic political values. *The overlapping consensus.*

This is a fundamental aspect of the notion of sustainable identity which, albeit having with them an important debt, distinguishes it from the liberal theories of Rawls and Habermas, at least as far as the notion of *Public Reason* is concerned and, for Rawls only, from that of *Overlapping consensus*. It is also distinguished from that of Sebastiano Maffettone of *Pluralistic integration from below*. The former two presuppose (ideal situations) which are, conversely part of the problem to be solved. And involve also some of the concepts that were reviewed above: appurtenance, culture, identity, nation. Also the third one makes reference to the logic of the Public Reason even though at a different level and makes recourse to the notion of cultural identity.

In the traditional identities of the social contract, to which Rawls makes, for example, reference, some capacities (to make rational moral choices) and situations (even just hypothetical ones) are prerequisites for having the right to be free. But is it not, maybe, the contrary? As we have seen, as a matter of fact, only when one is in conditions of freedom and equality one has the possibility to make moral choices. It is our idea of political identity. Only after giving these political premises (Just) one arrives to the ethical dimension. And this applies also for the *Reasonable* of Rawls. We must ask ourselves what are the conditions of the Reasonable, and not assume them. The political

problem, in an uprooted plural world, is all here. So, we not start from moral identities and in part, we sacrifice them around basic political values, the overlapping consensus. We postulate that the contrary happens.

In the Rawls type of visions an individual is assumed, who possesses an essentialized given vision of the world, regardless of the political and institutional context in which it evolves⁹⁶. This is, on the other hand, an authentic prejudice of the liberal theory with its insistence on the radical separation between public dimension and private dimension. A separation that is no longer sustainable today, due to several reasons. First of all, the individual no longer merges from a cultural context already given and which would enable his vision of the world, forcing him then to find a compromise with the pluralism present in society. But we have then seen how, conversely, the political context, what we have referred to as the political identity, determines the ethical vision of the individuals and of the groups. In other words, the appurtenance can no longer be considered as a starting point, but must be conceived as the landing of an individual course under given conditions. The identity and the ethical vision of the individual must be built thanks to and starting from the political identity and this appears to be more consistent with the liberal principle whereby, what is not chosen with a real choice, it is morally arbitrary. In this sense, also the ethical vision that an individual possesses by birth appears to be arbitrary if the individual has no possibility to re-negotiate it critically, even if it was a liberal vision, unless he has a reasonable exit option.

An example, through the title of a essay by Renzo Guolo about Muslim religion: "*L'Islam è compatibile con la democrazia?*". This type of questions is the exact expression of an essentialist vision and of the prejudice of which we are speaking according to which ethics precedes politics, because it is only in a real democratic context that the Muslim religion can be lived democratically. This applies to any other ethical vision of the world.

⁹⁶ Almeno inizialmente, dato che Rawls suppone che col tempo le istituzioni plasmeranno le condotte e gli orientamenti dei cittadini. Come crediamo nel presente lavoro.

The political identity structured around the principle of the equal value of each human being and of his freedom, therefore the sustainable identity, is the premise and the access way to a reasonable ethical identity.

The individual, as we have mentioned, must not waive a deep part of himself for living together with the others. He shares with the others (political identity) the conditions of his own diversity. Diversity, however, that will be no longer structured on given collective identities but on the individual himself.

The refined conception referred to as “pluralistic integration from below” by Sebastiano Maffettone is not different. On the basis of such conception one should look for a consent, at an international level, around a group of universal values, grossly identified with fundamental human rights. Such consent must be justified, however, in non imperialistic terms, or according to western values imposed on other cultures. It is considered that each culture possesses a critical potential that it is necessary to activate. In other words, the universal must be justified from the inside of each culture. In so doing, a sort of dialogue is established between normative level (freedom and equality), on one hand, and descriptive level, cultural identity, on the other, until a balance is reached.

From our premises, and only from our premises, this vision appears to be problematic. On one hand, the cultural identity appears to be itself as a normative concept if, as we have seen, it is not historically possible today to find in the fragmented unquiet reality of our world something like a given, clearly describable cultural identity. But even if one could exactly define it, it would reproduce on a local scale what one wants to avoid on a global scale, and victim of imperialism would be, this time, the individual. Or, and this is the problematic aspect of the more general logic implied in the idea of Public Reason, it means that the cultural identity, the comprehensive doctrine, are not really different, but essentially already liberal.

The idea of public reason provides that, in a pluralistic context, the arguments that can be used in the public justification of the valid rules for everybody are arguments that may be shared by everybody. It is not possible, within the public sphere, to justify and then impose a law that makes

reference to a comprehensive specific doctrine, a religion etc. A filter is necessary that translates in terms acceptable by everybody the claims that are born from a specific perspective. Therefore, just like in the case of the “pluralistic integration from below”, in an ultimate analysis the idea of public reason admits only arguments that are already liberal or, however, compatible with a specific universalistic vision. Freedom and equality. If it was so, that between cultural identity and universal values of freedom and equality would not be a dialogue, but a monologue reproducing that “separation” to which Dworkin was making reference. All that is not compatible with such universal values, inside the already problematic notion of cultural identity, must be repealed. If this certainly comforts us thinking to traditions such as the women genitals mutilation, it reduces, however, the perspective under review to a “mere translation exercise” of certain principles into the different languages and cultures, almost a communicative strategy, which is certainly, however, necessary.

This perspective reproduces, then that circular vision already ascribed to Rawls herein above: the purpose that one wishes to achieve is presupposed, i.e. if inside each culture we must sustain the compatible visions with typically democratic values, then one asks oneself how this is possible outside an already democratic context, unless the neoconservative strategy is adopted of exporting democracy through the use of military forces. Democracy is the mean or the purpose?

The question, then, should rather be, in line with the idea of political identity, how a context is determined everywhere, which favors a democratic interpretation of one’s own identity. Politics is here a premise to ethics. The answer is: by adopting the perspective of the sustainable identity.

In conclusion, the political identity describes to us the place where to look for the problem, the injustice, the illness. It shows us where to look. We need, however, a political normative principle that suggests a solution, an adequate therapy, a principle of justice that determines the limits, the threshold of the political identity. Such criterion is offered by the concept of *sustainable identity*.

At the basis of such concept there are, once again, universal values of freedom and equality. The sustainable identity assumes that it is possible and necessary, in a world of absolute inter-relation, to

establish the space of the freedom of each one, putting it in relation with the freedom of all the others. If we are forced to make a choice, then we must know that not everything is available to us, not all the choices are permitted to us. In the same way, we must imagine that the same opportunities and the same limitation will be offered also to all the other inhabitants of the Earth. We must know which will be the conditions inside of which we will conduct such choices.

We have said that the environmental and economic sustainability is only a subset of the broader principle given by the sustainable identity, the most evident among them.

The notion of sustainability has the advantage of implying, in the construction of its own individuality, not only the conditions (political identity) of such construction, but also the time and relation of the individual with the others. If until today the political categories were fundamentally filtered from the past, except in the utopias, with the notion of sustainable identity the problem of the future is raised. Liberalism has always been looking forward, the condition is so assumed of the globalized subject.

Integrating in one single vision the different economic, cultural, environmental, social, medical, etc. aspects, the notion of sustainable identity reconciles certain classical dichotomies: the dispute between recognition and re-distribution is solved in the coincidence of the two terms in the sustainability; the same applies to the citizen-consumer opposition⁹⁷. It then puts some limits to the national sovereignty, or determines the threshold below which it is necessary to reason in cosmopolitan, universal terms, exactly in the logic described up to here whereby it is starting from “equal opportunities” that one arrives to the diversity, therefore also to the nation. Below such threshold the resources, the borders, the rights must be considered as property shared by mankind, implying strategies of global re-distribution. Above such threshold, conversely, each entity is fully sovereign and determines its rules autonomously. In other words it is reproduced at an institutional level what was proposed at individual level. The same citizenship should have to be considered as

⁹⁷ Robert B. Reich, *Supercapitalismo*, Fazi editori.

the result of the choice (reflexive), therefore of a procedure that provides, at least, for a right of exit. One shall not be born Italians, one can become Italians.

In other words, the normative potential included in the idea of Rawls' Original position, is saved and translated into a concrete political objective and into the possibility of not having to adhere to the social contract proposed in the place of birth. The mental experiment aimed at the justification is transported into a real level, it is transformed into the possibility of adhering to other social pacts, or of becoming citizen of other countries, through a choice, and it is even more so of one's own country of origin which does not offer minimum conditions of legitimacy, given by the inferior threshold of the sustainable identity. The State must be function of the citizen, so as the group must be with respect to the individual. Historically, however, it has always been the contrary. It will no longer be possible to justify it morally.

Shading the idea of nation through that of sustainable identity we avoid, like for all the other collective categories, those exclusive and potentially violent aspects of the national integration. Sustainability at a political and cultural level means, therefore, that an identity or institution that provide since their own establishment (now requested as explicit and contained by any new re birth, in the meaning of Arendt whereby each birth is a new starting and politics is the power of giving such starting) the violation of the two reference resources, freedom and equality, to such an extent as to preclude its present use for the others or its future use for anybody, is not acceptable. An identity, for example the Taleban one, which implies the discrimination of women cannot be upheld. Just like in its economic and environmental aspects, the political and cultural sustainability implies the idea that certain constructions generate a pollution that cannot be managed, *negative externalities* that cannot be re-absorbed. The colonial identity, in this sense, is a non-sustainable identity to the extent in which it is defined through the violation of freedom and equality of the colonized people. We have seen that. And it produces, in the long term, its own pollution in the form of additional non-sustainable identities, distorting the political identity of the offended persons, also in the very long run. The same could be observed for the Nazi experience.

For this reason the sustainable identity, other than to the future, is projected into the past, in an attempt of “decolonizing” the present from the wounds, of purifying it, in the logic, for example, of the truth committees, reconciliation committees, or of material and moral remedies for past injustices. In synthesis, everywhere, man is born in chains, just to use the wording of Rousseau, but, everywhere, he can reach freedom.

The idea of sustainable identity is inserted in the liberal tradition because it does not say what should be its deep conception of the Good. It provides the context and the limits in which each should choose its conception of the Good. In this way, it upturns the concept, reviewed before, of “overlapping consensus”.

Establishing a minimum threshold, that of sustainability (in its different aspects), under which our equality of human beings must be considered violated, the sustainable identity does not start from different individuals, like in Rawls, who must meet around the constitutional values of the society. In the opposite direction it establishes the space of the freedom of each and to which each one accesses through the same course, provided that it is adjusted (it is implied in the very same idea of sustainability, suffice it to think to environment) to always specific circumstances.

One starts from equality, therefore, for arriving to diversity (freedom). To Sen’s question: Equality of What? The answer is: of the equal equality of the opportunities to be different.

To have the same opportunity of being each different, of being oneself. The opportunity, not the obligation.

Finally, rather than having an “overlapping consensus”, we obtain an “*overlapping dissensus*”. We want to dissent for the *good reasons*, as we have seen with regard to terrorism. It is a very important point.

If a pure religion is arising, why could a “pure politics” (that mean, universal) not emerge as well? The sustainable identity is liberal since it implies only a minimum conception of the Good, i.e. that conception which identifies in the possibility of its autonomous research a preliminary form of justice. The sustainable identity is a concept to be probed into, and it takes up a very exigent idea of

citizenship and analysis of reality. But in a complex integrated world such as ours, simplification is a luxury that we cannot afford. In our flesh and in our spirit, then even less.

Let's close with the words of an essay devoted to the life of the great writer Romain Gary:

“ De même que Rousseau disait: - Notre vrai moi n'est pas tout entier en nous -, Gary aimait à affirmer que –personne n'est dans sa peau sans être aussi dans la peau des autres-. Si bien que s'inventer une vie – ce que déjà très peu réussissent à faire – ne revient pas du tout à renier ses origines. S'inventer une vie, varier sa vie, multiplier les identités, les noms d'auteurs, les états civils, les métiers, les nationalités, tout cela ressort à la création et donc à la jouissance; s'inventer une vie, c'est vouloir jouir et se réjouir de la métamorphose, mais c'est aussi prouver que l'identité comme telle n'est un problème que pour tous ceux qui ne connaissent de la liberté que la place, assez nulle, qu'on fait à celle-ci dans le monde. Sans compter que s'inventer une vie, dix vie, cent vies, signifie que ses origines, quelle qu'elles soient, ne suffisent jamais à expliquer la réalisation de soi d'un être humain; qu'il faut toujours plus que des origines; qu'il faut même plus d'une simple origine, pour justifier que l'on soit devenu celui que l'on est ou que l'on devienne celui que l'on est pas encore. Et qu'ainsi ce qu'il faut encore, ce qu'il faut toujours, c'est associer au “fond réel” une dimension de pure irréalité, à forte teneur de phantasmatique, qui ne contredit pas forcément mais enrichit à coup sur les données de la provenance.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Paul Audi, *Je me suis toujours été un autre, le paradis de Romain Gary*, Christian Bourgois Editeur 2007, p. 83.

ⁱ L. Pellicani, Jihad: le radici. Luiss University Press.

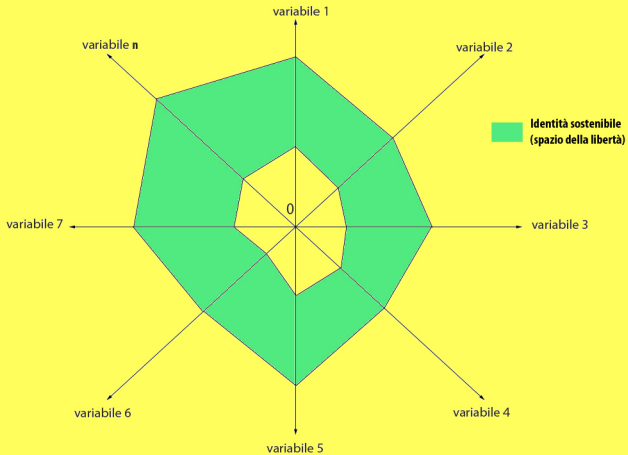
ⁱⁱ R.Wilkinson, K.Pickett, La misura dell'anima, perché le diseguaglianze rendono le società più infelici, Feltrinelli, Milano 2009, p. 53.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.Beck, I rischi della libertà, l'individuo nell'epoca della globalizzazione, Il Mulino, Bologna 2000, p. 8.

^{iv} R.Dworkin, S.Maffettone, I fondamenti del liberalismo, Laterza, 1996, p. 234.

^v A.Lanza, Lo sviluppo sostenibile, Il Mulino, Bologna 2006, p. 15.

^{vi} C.Castoriadis, La montée de l'insignifiance, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1996, p. 238-239.



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