

Abstract

For a sustainable identity

In an attempt to understand Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism we started from a *culturalist* approach. Culture in this sense is presented as an independent variable starting from which it is possible to understand the contemporary political phenomena.

We analyzed Huntington's theory on the *Clash of Civilizations* as a paradigm of similar interpretations. Here religion is considered as the essence of the individual and collective identities. An unchangeable closed essence, necessarily conflicting. And so it seemed reviewing the thesis of Qutb, the ideologist of Islamic radicalism. In that sense, we asked ourselves: is Islam the problem?

We then analyzed the theory of the *Dialogue of civilizations*, according to Khatami vision and approached a different Islam, more open, and we asked ourselves, therefore, whether there was a solution in it, and it appeared so in reviewing the reading of the Koran given by Benazir Bhutto.

We concluded that speaking of *an* Islam as an homogeneous entity is misleading. Many different Islams exist and we do not possess a criterion of truth that tells us what the *true* Islam is. Religion cannot be the only variable able to determine the entire equation (political, economical, cultural, etc.), The Koran must be distinguished from the interpretations that are given of it. It is necessary to consider the human factor, therefore history. Between the transcendent dimension and the immanent dimension a gap exists that cannot be reduced. Therefore, Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism must be defined as *specific interpretations of Islam*.

We then tried to better understand this specific reading of religion that is fundamentalism, and we described it as a *political phenomenon*, rather than religious, which questions itself on the ultimate foundation of society, meant as a totality of believers. Fundamentalism is a product of modernity and, at the same time, it opposes it. Any religion may be interpreted in a fundamentalist sense.

Therefore, one must go *beyond the text*. What is politically important is the consensus around an idea, not its truth. It is necessary to adopt a *genealogical perspective*. Knowledge and power are bound to one another. Orientalism and the colonial experience have proved it. We then asked ourselves whether it is possible to *translate the religious discourse into a political discourse*, and discovered that the interpretation of the holy texts is a political matter and that, as well, political is the strategy that overlaps the two discourses presenting them in terms of “security”.

We then analyzed terrorism: *an improper form of political expression*, whose actors have a tendency to come from middle-upper classes, with good levels of education. What is important, however, is the *quality* of their education. We then studied the relationship between poverty, ignorance and terrorism. Among the principal causes of terrorisms we found the suppression of *civil and political rights*, foreign military occupation and an asymmetry in the *distribution of global power*. *Resentment* appears to be, in general, conclusive, also when generated by the *memory of past humiliations*.

Religion offers a *transformative vision* of the human potential and becomes violent only in the presence of certain *political and social circumstances*, *i.e.* when politics fails in solving real problems, when fundamental dignity and identity are threatened, when ordinary political options are denied. In religion an explanation to disorder is found.

If the present is humiliating, then one finds shelter in a mythical past, even more when the image given by the enemy is interiorized (e.g. colonized).

All these elements can be found in the Muslim world, a world that has experienced western imperialism. It is starting from this experience that we approached the notion of culture. We asked ourselves, moreover, whether a non-colonialist knowledge was possible, *i.e.* not intrinsically hierarchizing. Thanks to *orientalism*, we have described the foundation of the modern western subject, a subject established on the denial of alterity and of the dominion relationships, ontologically defined, structured around *re-inventions of tradition*, whose purpose is to create cohesion, legitimize and socialize communities. We described culture as a work of immunization

from entropy. We questioned the very same utility of totalizing concepts such as: culture, nation, ethnic group, religion. At the time of globalization. The most recent anthropology suggests abandoning a vision of *culture* as an internally homogeneous and closed entity. It is necessary to replace them with an *open, hybrid and plural conception*. In this sense “cultural fundamentalism” appeared to us as an ideological fiction, even more so when, as it is happening now, *a split up occurs between birth and appurtenance*.

We then adopted a *constructivist vision* of the social and cultural world, and defined culture a network of meaning ordered by man for solving specific problems.

We then analyzed *religion* and questioned the paradigm of secularization. We established an empirical link between insecurity and strength of religion, between politics and religion.

We proposed a minimal definition of religion as the relation of man with Disorder, with *the Research of a Sense* that escapes.

We underlined the cross-border nature of universal religions, as having always been so, and their epistemological advantage with respect to the categories of political and social sciences, closed in the “methodological nationalism”.

In an age of individualization and cosmopolitanization, forms of *pure religion* are born, since disconnected from the culture of origin. Fundamentalism is the religious form that is more suitable to our time, that of *globalization*, when a separation is created between those who create new meanings and those who are condemned to insignificance, closed in a local disorder that shatters them. A time when power and politics are increasingly separating from one another. And global problems receive local answers. A time of inter-dependence and retrocession of the traditional channels of political expression, starting from the Nation-States. The *welfare state*, which bound responsibility and freedom, security and democracy, is progressively disposed of. The expulsion of alterity beyond the borders is no longer possible, and not even economic and cultural autarchy. It is necessary to live together with the difference, to share costs and benefits.

From this globalization process identities are re-defined, starting from the impossibility to subdivide them, as suggested by Sen, into categories through a single criterion. Identity is plural. The individual makes choices, even though sometimes others prevent him from making such choices. In other words, we do not have a predetermined destiny as communitarist and multiculturalist theories would like us to have. Identity is transformed into a task. However, not everybody has the tools therefore, and this accentuates the specter of exclusion.

On the basis of what analyzed, we rejected the recourse to concepts such as culture, religion, ethnic group etc. as single explanation and single solution to many of contemporary problems (starting from fundamentalism and terrorism). These not only do not enable an adequate understanding of reality, but confuse the enigma to be explained with the explanation.

No field of knowledge (and action) is autonomous. It is necessary to redefine notions such as appurtenance, authenticity, culture, identity, local, alien, and integration.

If a destiny is failing, we must build it. The idea of Castoriadis of an explicit self-institution of society. If a destiny is failing, the individual is forced, explicitly or implicitly, to ratify his adhesion to the collective entities in which he participates.

Communitarists, fundamentalists, nationalists, multiculturalists confuse a preferred normative option with an empirical data: the priority of the collective dimension over the individual. Okin, for example, has underlined the dangers of a similar vision (women and multiculturalism). So we challenged that individual authenticity must necessarily pass through a collective form of expression (Benhabib), and established then a relation between authenticity and freedom. On this basis, finally, we claimed for the individual an “exit option” from the collective identities.

If everybody, in our global horizon, is forced in a certain way to make a choice, not everybody has, however, the means for making it. The “uprooting” can be transformed into an opportunity, since individualism as a value, today, meets with a compatible historical situation. Fundamentalism and terrorism say, paradoxically, exactly this. But we must also add that this is a failure in the distribution of opportunities: “*an autonomy that went wrong*”.

Therefore, if thousand alternative *narrations of self* are possible, we must exclude the worst violent ones, providing for a sort of procedure, acting on the context in which they appear.

Starting from the definition of borders, we tried to cause the *burden of justification* to fall on those who want to fragment spaces and rights, which are, conversely, universal. We asked what was the meaning of such concepts as alien and indigenous and, more in general: *diversity of what?*

In a world that is assisting to the re-birth of cultural and religious identities, we suggested that *liberalism* had must to say.

A liberalism that recognized the complexity of identity, all the factors that play a role in it and puts itself the question of *a global integration*, of a universal access to an effective, substantial, citizenship.

The individual is forced to be free, today, but with Dostoevskij, we asked the question: is man always willing and able to exercise his freedom? Are there any conditions without which he may wave such exercise? And with Fromm and Arendt we investigated such conditions.

Freedom and responsibility cannot be separated, but freedom without the (material and not) necessary means to face it is unsustainable. Politics must create the conditions of freedom, even more so if globalization destroys the old certainties (material and not). Under the logic of survival one becomes “minimal self”. Freedom has many dimensions and politics must consider all of them, for reaching a sort of *redistributive policy of identity*, also starting from the principle that *what we do not choose is morally arbitrary*. Everybody must have the possibility of *becoming what they are*. Truth is not as important as the path that each one must follow towards it.

We proposed to call such path *political identity*: the set of conditions starting from which one accesses one’s own broader identity. It is a *meta-identity*. It implies a procedural conception of the very same identity. The right conditions will give the right results. It is necessary that each one arrives to its identity and that this happens for *good reasons*. If the good reasons are failing, the procedure is invalidated. Terrorism and fundamentalism. Such procedure is then the premise to freedom-responsibility.

The political identity underlines the need of integration among different disciplines (economics, medicine, ecology, philosophy, pedagogy, etc.). The scientific community is going towards that direction. The various dimensions that constitute the political identity have also value *per se*. Separately.

If terrorism and fundamentalism are two symptoms, the political identity is the sick organ. The therapy that we are proposing is the *sustainable identity*. A new interpretative paradigm and a principle of political legitimacy. It incorporates a minimal version of the Good and the values of freedom and equality and, therefore, of the choice.

Also the theory of Rawls presupposed something implicitly similar to the idea of political identity: the basic liberal culture, *the reasonableness*. We believe in the need to build *explicitly* the conditions of the Reasonable.

The concept of sustainable identity recovers the basic intuitions of liberalism (in particular the critical one and certain aspects of cosmopolitanism) and it considers them the most suitable to our time. Freedom. Interdependence. Difference. In synthesis, we asked the question: how can people who are different from one another live together in conditions of freedom and equality? Making of diversities what they have in common. The sustainable identity describes the paths, equal (and always particular) through which one accesses plural results. It describes the conditions of our freedom, but also its limits.

The sustainable identity defines the environmental and economic sustainability as two sub-groups of the general principle of sustainability, which also includes the cultural, political, institutional, medical, pedagogic, etc. dimensions. It integrates all these dimensions. It represents the set of all the conditions for the right access to the broader identity. It considers that the identity of each one is, historically and normatively, in relation to the identity of all the others. It includes the idea that what is not chosen is morally arbitrary and establishes, therefore, critical and reflexive courses.

Starting from the notion of sustainable identity we can judge, comparatively, collective institutions and different individual identities. We are in a *monistic* optic. The limit that is put is the following:

each choice is possible, except the limits that prohibits the choice itself. The autonomy of Castoriadis.

Through the principle of the sustainable identity we have re-discussed certain classic concepts of contemporary liberalism: the idea of *Overlapping consensus*, that of *Public Reason*, and that of *Pluralistic integration from below*. We propose to upturn the logic underlying these notions. The sustainable identity is that of the reversal. The “political” dimension of the Right is the access condition to the dimension of the Good. Its premise. One arrives to describe in this way an *Overlapping dissensus*. The dissensus for the good reasons.

Moreover, the principle of sustainable identity reconciles some classic dichotomies of the contemporary discussion: re-distribution/recognition; citizen/consumer; nationalism/cosmopolitanism. And it orients in establishing the limits among the various dimensions.

The sustainable identity “re-cycles” the normative content contained in the *original position* of Rawls and translates it into reality. It establishes the priority of the individual over the group and of the citizen over the nation.

Not all the identities, in this perspective are legitimate. Some identities generate *negative externalities* that are very difficult to be compensated. The colonizer is an example. The Nazi, as well. Freedom and equality (therefore, choice and responsibility) are two resources of which the present consumption (beyond the so-called threshold of “critical capacity”) must not jeopardize the future availability.

Sustainability, however, also extends to the past: it is necessary to de-colonize the present from the “wounds”, mentioning the example of the re-reconciliation committees, of the remedies for the damages suffered (e.g. colonialism).

To Sen’s question: equality of what? The logic of the sustainable identity answers: of the equal equality of the opportunity to be different.

On other words, the sustainable identity questions itself about freedom: on its conditions and its limits. Each individual will know how to determine the content of such freedom.

