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Radicalized Religious Fundamentalism – Identification with an Ideal Object and Destructiveness¹

1. Introduction

Since the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, terrorism has been on the increase, culminating in its present-day variant in the form of the Islamic State (ISIS) which has instilled fear and dread throughout the world by way of its savage acts of violence. It has sought to revive the Caliphate, and to erect an Islamic nation on the basis of an ideal Islamic society, the roots of which purportedly reach back to the early period of Islam in the seventh century. Whereas, in 2001, it may have been possible to dismiss the idea of a “global Jihad” as a mere pipe dream, today we are now confronted with the impact of its murderous acts in several locations around the world.

The religious and social sciences have long been addressing the question of the renaissance of religions in contemporary modern society. In this connection, the various manifestations of religious fundamentalism, along with its terrorist offshoots have shifted into the foreground of attention since 2001. The objective was to undertake an examination of a world of imagination the centre of which was occupied by an ideal society in which the faithful live together in harmony in compliance with God’s commandments. The dark side of this world of imagination is the hate it directs at the non-believers. This idea is religiously radicalized in terrorist fundamentalism, and sanctions the killing of non-believers. Consequently, we are faced with the question as to how certainty of faith and the affect of hate belong together psychologically. One question to which psychoanalysis can provide important answers is how religious certainty – as a narcissistic fantasy of an identification with an ideal object – and murderous violence intermingle and mutually reinforce one another on the psychological plane.

The present lecture is concerned with just this question. I will start by throwing some light on the structures of fundamentalist thought before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the deep structures that constitute the foundations of this

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thought by way of the example of Islamic fundamentalism. I will begin with the question as to whether the exclusive claim as raised by the God of monotheism is in any way connected to violence.

2. Monotheism and Religious Violence

In his investigations on the Aton religion, the figure of Moses, and Jewish monotheism, the Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2003) has been particularly active in foregrounding the links between the exclusive claims of monotheism and violence. At its heart, monotheism does not revolve around the belief in only one God, since polytheism also held the belief that all the various deities could ultimately be traced back to one god. The specific difference in monotheism is, in fact, the distinction between the true god, on the one hand, and false gods and idols on the other. Assmann calls this the "Mosaic distinction." By contrast, polytheism is cosmotheism: the divine is inherent in the cosmos and cannot be separated from the world. This, however, is precisely what monotheism does. It not only sets God Himself apart from the world; the human individual is also extricated from his/her symbiotic relationship with the world and exhorted to enter into a partnership with the extramundane One God, thus becoming an autonomous individual with accountability to God. Rightful action and justice thus become theological categories; this is the advent of ethics in religion. For Assmann this is the great civilizatory achievement of monotheism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But he also discerns another, darker side of that same phenomenon: it ushered a new species of hatred and violence into the world, the hatred of the old gods - now relegated to the status of idols - and the rites associated with them, and the abomination of heathens and heretics. The reaction to this was the hatred of those marginalized by the Mosaic Distinction and of all others declared heathen. A heated discussion has meanwhile erupted between theologians, scholars of religion and philosophers around Assmann's thesis. Just to clear up any prior misunderstanding in advance: while the cause of the problem of violence in present-day religions cannot simply be relegated to historical origins, neither can it be maintained that violence is inherent to monotheism; and yet the question still remains as to the extent to which monotheistic thought contains the "risk"

(Assmann) of an unconditional claim to exclusivity which is linked to violence against dissenters. This question, moreover, is one which has become particularly relevant in the context of ultra-religious, fundamentalist societies since the 1990s. One such example is the original title of the group that was to later call itself ISIS, namely, "Tauhid w'al jihad", which translates as "monotheism and Jihad" (Schirra 2015).

Monotheistic world religions raise a universalist truth claim purporting to be valid for all human beings. Whereas, in previous historical epochs these religions would have been native to geographically distinct regions, today, in the age of globalization, world religions clash with one another. In other words, while individuals are rooted in their own religious or atheistic community, in the eyes of the religious other they fall into the category of the unbeliever. Thus, religiously-informed universalisms are confronted by their own non-universalisms. The faithful find themselves in an irreconcilable position if they do not negate or reject the religious other, but rather seek to acknowledge them. The social scientist Ulrich Beck has given a detailed account of this contradiction: whereas the believer must acknowledge the claim to absolute truth since it is this that constitutes the core of the truth of the religious other, he is compelled, on the other hand, to deny the absoluteness of his own truth, as well as that of the other (2008, 242). In pragmatic terms, the various religions have come to an arrangement with this situation beyond dogmatic standpoints. However, this clash of religions may also threaten the collective identity of the single monotheisms. The anxieties triggered as a consequence of the above, induce some religious groups to adopt ideologically totalitarian orientations. The increased popularity currently enjoyed by globally operating religious fundamentalist movements is a symptom of this. Political conflicts can also be religiously charged through this, and lead to explosive violent outbreaks (Beck 2008, 208). American sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt has pointed out that in the highly charged and volatile atmosphere of present-day global society, in which multiple notions of the modern compete with one another, belief in an exclusive God has the effect of a combustion agent constantly fanning the flames of conflict².

² Conference of the Max-Weber-Kolleg in Erfurt. Report in DIE ZEIT No. 29, 2008.

Religious violence is grounded not only in monotheistic claims to exclusivity. It also assumes a different form, related to the first, but fuelled psychologically by different sources. I am here referring to the religious conceptions of community and group cohesion (“Vergemeinschaftung”). At its core, religion is not a private matter. It implies a community of believers committed to their faith, the Holy Scriptures and the ethical commandments set down in them. These believers uphold their faith through the religious rites that they perform together. On the one hand, religious community is virtual, e.g. the Church of Jesus Christ or the Ummah of the Moslems, while on the other it manifests itself in real communities or congregations. In this tension between virtual and real community the inclusion/exclusion problem poses itself with far greater trenchancy than in the monotheistic idea; and modern fundamentalist religious movements take it a stage further. In his major study on violence and tolerance in Christianity, church historian Arnold Angenendt (2007) indicates that the most dangerous problem besetting the religions of the world, arises when they proclaim a truth revealed to them through God, a revealed truth, moreover, which has been exclusively awarded to them, a single people, a single group, but which at the same time lays claim to universal validity for all human beings. The danger is that the conviction of being God ordained as a collective generates a feeling of superiority and an aggressive impulse to engulf others, both in religious and political terms. In the course of history this danger has turned into reality often enough. Upholding the idea of universality is so difficult precisely because it requires acknowledging and respecting the otherness of others. The problem we are addressing here is how a religious message and the specific form of group bonding and cohesion (“Vergemeinschaftung”) that it implies stands in a causal relationship with violence. The mediating forces in the idea of a virtual, imagined community of believers are unconscious group fantasies which can, to varying degrees, exercise power over the mental world of the faithful. Providing a detailed account of these fantasies can elucidate the connection between the ideas of ideal harmony and unity, with radicalizing, destructive violence.

3. Essentials of Fundamentalist Thinking – Community Formation and Violence

Fundamentalist movements have evolved not only in the three monotheistic religions but in all the major religions of the world. In addition, a number of fundamentalist currents have conjoined with nationalist ideologies to form religious variants of an ethno-nationalist nature. Present-day research in the social sciences (Armstrong 2000; Marty u. Appleby 1991; Riesebrodt 1990) proceeds on the assumption that there are certain characteristics and structures common to all groups of a fundamentalist religious persuasion. Almond, Appleby & Sivan define fundamentalism as follows: “ ‘Fundamentalism’, in this usage, refers to a discernible pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviour”(2004, 17).

The following is a brief summary of the most important properties involved.³

1. Fundamentalist movements take shape as a defence against the processes and consequences of secularization, modernization, and liberalization that have penetrated the major religious communities and are perceived as symptoms of decline or decay. The basic motive is not so much hatred of modernity as the fear that their religious convictions and fundamental values might be discarded and threatened in their very existence. Fundamentalism is the militant attempt to reverse these developments. The striving for rock-solid personal and communal identity draws its militancy from a heightened sense of immediate danger. Fundamentalism thrives in periods of crisis, whether actual or imagined. Subjectively, this crisis is not experienced as a social or political emergency but as a crisis of identity threatening to bring about the obliteration of the respective religion or its dissolution in a syncretistic culture. Crises are understood against the background of God’s salvation plan giving meaning to decline and decay and holding out prospects of the imminent end of an era and a turn for the better. Apocalyptic thinking is a property of almost all fundamentalist movements.

³ Here, I follow Almond, Appleby & Sivan (2004)

2. Those fundamentalist movements that do not retreat from the world but resolve to intervene actively in the course it is taking aim at replacing existing societal and political structures with an all-encompassing system derived from religious principles and providing regulation for all spheres of life - politics, society, the economy, and culture. All institutions must be subject to divine law. Invariably, thus fundamentalism has a totalitarian impetus.
3. The central traditions of the religion involved are selectively appropriated and functionalized for explicit political purposes. Fundamentalists combat all forms of historical awareness interfering with the absolute validity of their holy scriptures. They are against any form of hermeneutic thinking. The holy scriptures literally come from God and are hence infallible. The religious identity rooted in them has a quasi-ontological grounding and is impervious to historical and social change.
4. Fundamentalists draw a strict line of demarcation between believers and non-believers. This divide protects the group from contamination and adulteration and guarantees group purity. The contradictions of the world and the ambivalence of psychical reality are dissolved. The world outside is sinful, doomed, and impure. The world inside is redeemed and pure. Conversion rites make this boundary a critical frontier. The affective power of strict societal and moral rules of behaviour makes for uniformity and conformity. Membership is voluntary, and a fraternity ethic and the principle of equality for all members reign within the enclave. Hierarchies are kept as flat as possible. The ultimate authority is invested in the religious scriptures that contain an answer for all questions that might conceivably arise. The scriptures have to be interpreted, though, and this is where some charismatic leader normally has the last word. The internal homogeneity of the group and equality in purity preclude all ambivalence or inner opposition. Any hint of the latter is immediately branded as betrayal. The offending member is harried or excised from the community. This results in splittings that demand energy but serve a salutary purpose by preserving the equality of the members and group cohesion.

These properties define fundamentalism as “strong religion” (Almond et al. 2003) characterized by purity, where purity is equated with uniformity of belief and

practice. Fundamentalists have nothing but contempt for the compromises of the religious establishment with secular powers. Inherent in this fundamentalist dynamic centring on purity and conformity is an extremist form of intolerance and latent violence, which does not, however, necessarily manifest itself as such.

Strozier, Terman & Jones (2010) work on the assumption that a fundamentalist mindset constitutes the basis for all contemporary fundamentalist movements. The chief characteristics of this are dualistic thinking; paranoia and rage in a group context; an apocalyptic orientation with distinct perspectives on time, death, and violence; a relationship to charismatic leadership; and a totalized conversion experience. While this mindset manifests itself in single individuals, it is bound into a group psychological context. The core of this mix of experiences, ideas and affects is defined by a propensity for violence.

I would now like to turn to a closer examination of the interdependency of these elements by way of Islamic fundamentalism.

4. The Mental World of Islamic Fundamentalism and its Deep Structures

A psychoanalytic perspective requires previous historical and sociological analysis to indicate where it can be brought to bear on the subject. Accordingly, I should first like to summarize a number of historical and sociological analyses.

Fundamentalist currents began garnering increased support, most notably from the Muslim brotherhood and the Salafist movement established in Egypt around 1920⁴ in the wake of the collapsed Ottoman Empire. This fundamentalism conceived of itself as a form of political theology and as a “third way,” an alternative to Western capitalism and Eastern communism. Their goal is to restore the link between religion and politics, to do away with secular regimes, and to return to a unified religious-political world view. They idealize recourse to the beginnings of a supposedly idyllic and unspoiled era of Muslim community in 7th-century Medina. It would be erroneous, however, to regard this as traditionalism. Sayyid Qutb, one of the most important thinkers behind this radical movement, was a religious revolutionary (Qutb 2001; Bergesen 2008). For him the Oneness of God is the sole and supreme principle of true monotheism. In his eyes

⁴ See Lewis (1994; 2003); M.Qutb (1964); Armstrong (2000); Schäfer (2008); Roy (2004).

the axiom “There is no deity except God” means that the true Muslim owes obedience to no one and nothing except God, so that submission to a political power or other authority is out of the question. Rules and laws can only come from God Himself, as set down in the Quran. Qutb urges a return to the religious and political system of the first Muslims. They were the true and pure Muslims because they derived the guidelines for politics, business, economics and all aspects of their actions from the Quran. Thus the aim is also to work toward radical social change in order to create an ideal world in which the authority of God alone reigns over human hearts and consciences as over all matters of social and political life. Everything must be purified for God so that all obey Him alone and no other human can rule over them. This, for Qutb, is true freedom. But it also means destroying all secular systems that stand in the way of true Islam. Accordingly, the Jihad is inevitable. Standing up for God’s cause requires not only sermons and advocacy, but also military resources. To establish the sovereignty of God, purification must begin at home, in the Islamic countries, and then be extended all over the world. Today, it is above all Jihadist Salafists who seek to execute in practice that which Qutb had earlier elaborated in thought. Similarly, the former seek to once again realize in a contemporary modern context an extreme, idealised notion of life characteristic of the early Muslims. They claim to be the only true community of the faithful, since it is only they who live Islam as commensurate with God’s will. The purification of the self is the central construct of this religion. The everyday life of the individual is determined by an entire range of rules and behavioural regulations that are to be strictly observed. Islam is to be cleansed of all secular influences. Any deviation from the principle of God’s rule is an act of apostasy. Whereas, for some Salafists politics is an impure field of activity to which they maintain a distance (purist direction), the Jihadist Salafists pursue the construction of a true Islamist society and an ideal Islamic nation, which is to be cleansed of the faithless and from anything impure by violent means. The objective is a homogenous society capable of living in harmony under the mandate (tauḥid) of God. Through globalization, the notion of the Umma, the community of Muslims is no longer culturally confined and bound to specific territories, but the entire earth has become the virtual land of the Umma. It has thus mutated into an abstract,

virtual religious community, fashioned to a far greater degree by imaginary elements than is the case with more traditional versions. The Jihadist Salafists see themselves as being involved in an upheaval occurring on a worldwide scale, and dream of a future in which the West and its degenerate civilization will one day be conquered, and all human beings unified under the rule of Islam.

The Salafist movement has increased in popularity worldwide, above all, among Muslim youth and has become the most important field of recruitment for radical Jihadist groups.

5. Unconscious Group Fantasies

I should now like to investigate how such an idealized and dualistic, or Manichaeian view of the world ordered according to the categories of good and bad can have such a strong appeal among modern Muslims. My concern is not restricted to making the appeal of such fundamentalist ideologies more transparent. I also set out to point up the tendency of radicalization inherent in them. Psychoanalysis is capable of tracing back the attraction of religious ideas and of religious group ideologies, along with the extraordinarily strong affects associated with the latter, to factors operating in the unconscious, and to provide psychological explanations thereof. My aim is to identify the unconscious group fantasies that come into play here.

Methodologically and conceptually, I draw on the concept of ubiquitous unconscious fantasies (see Bendkower 1991). These are fantasies shared by all people to some degree. They are ubiquitous in that they revolve around the fundamental facts of life, the connection of bodily needs to mental and psychic development, especially psychosexual maturity, caretaking by, and dependence on the mother, sibling rivalry, the primal scene, and the Oedipus complex. These fantasies are derivatives of the unconscious, but they find their way into the conscious realm and materialize in reality and social life. While, in this externalization process, they adhere to and shape the perception and formation of societal events, institutions, and cultural value systems, they are also pressed into service from the outside; in other words, by societal agents shaping and

channelling them through objective structures such as institutions, social conventions, and linguistic traditions.

In an earlier study (1997; 2010) I use the example of German nationalism and anti-Semitism to examine the emotions, affects, and associated unconscious phantasms activated in the mind when imagining the nation. A comparison of the ideational worlds of radical German nationalism after 1918 with Islamist fundamentalism reveals some amazing similarities. One might challenge the validity of this comparison by arguing that western-style nationalism did not achieve the same degree of phantasmatic potential in Islamic nations, where older and more deeply rooted religious loyalties held sway. But this objection fails to take account of the fact that nationalism has often been an heir to religion and, especially in its extreme and totalitarian forms, has assumed the character of a political religion (Bärsch 1998). With all due caution in the light of the differences involved, it still strikes me as valuable to look to the level of deep psychic structures when comparing the ideational worlds of nationalism and politico-religious Islam. I have found support for this comparison in the work of Benedict Anderson (1988), who assumes the existence of a subterranean connection when he defines the nation as an “imagined community” based on the cultural systems of “kinship” and “religion.”

The following unconscious ideational complexes have proved significant in the analysis of radical nationalism and will serve as a heuristic basis from which to examine the deep structures of religious-political visions in Islamist fundamentalism:

- caretaking fantasies and sibling rivalry,
- purity and the ideational conception of the other,
- visions of group unity and fantasies of fusion.

Caretaking Fantasies and Sibling Rivalry

In the first fantasy system, involving unconscious care-taking fantasies and sibling rivalry, the alien Other is perceived as an intruder who enters a sphere taken to be one’s own rightful property, displacing the native inhabitant, robbing him of his possessions (in the unconscious this means: the possession of the primary object)

and ensconcing himself as a parasite and freeloader. Unconsciously, this alien is the sibling rival who disrupts the narcissistically idealized union with the collective mother figure. One's own avaricious and possessive desires are projected on to the intruder. In Islamism, however, this seems to be the least conspicuous fantasy system. The available evidence shows that it does not pack the same phantasmatic power as one finds in German anti-Semitism, where Jews were thought of as gluttonous vermin. One example from Islamism will suffice to illustrate the point. In Bin Laden's declaration exhorting all Muslims to participate in the holy war against the Americans and their allies, he refers to the latter as crusaders descending on the Arab peninsula like locusts to devour its riches (cited by Kippenberg 2008, 164)

Purity and the Vision of the Other

As has become apparent, this fantasy system is prevalent in fundamentalist thinking. Compared to the projection of forbidden instinctual impulses onto the Other, the connection between visions of purity and group identity are more complex. As Freud indicated (1921), members of a group block out individual differences in their narcissistic identification with each other. They assure themselves of their mutual ties and their identity by being like all other group members. Difference and otherness thus emerge as something impure. As Mary Douglas has shown (1966), dirt has long been defined in a cultural-historical sense as something that is in the wrong place. Accordingly, dirt is something that cannot be included if a symbolic system is to continue to exist. Uncertainty, insecurity, and ambivalence are intolerable. Such impurities must be eradicated for a homogenous, symbolically consistent universe to exist.

Ritual purity plays a significant role in Islam, so it comes as no surprise that fantasies of purity have extraordinary significance for self-identity in Islamism. A major Islamic political newspaper has this to say about the incursion of western ideas and ways of life: "Islam is like fresh, clear spring water, unbelievers are like water dredged up from the bottom of a suburban sewer. If even a drop of that filth enters the clear water, its clarity will be dimmed. Likewise, it takes only a drop of the filth of disbelief to contaminate Islam in the West" (cited by Raban 2002, 32).

Sayyid Qutb, one of the intellectual authorities of Islamism, attributes this defilement of purity to the Jews: "The Jews free sensual desires from their constraints and destroy the moral basis upon which belief is based. They do this so that belief is sullied by the same filth that they so freely spread around the world" (Nettler 1986, 104)⁵. There are numerous other examples of such beliefs. Alongside pollution, images of poisoning also play a significant role. The female body is charged with a particularly strong power to pollute, seduce, and destroy. It also serves as a metaphor for the situation of a society that sees itself threatened by seductive, evil powers (Riesebrodt 2000, 121).

Here I would like to enlarge upon one further point: the perception of the alien other is reciprocally connected to the perception of oneself. As René Spitz describes it (1965), the child's stranger anxiety is not a consequence of the strangeness of this person, but rather a reaction to the perception that the face of the stranger is not the same as the memory of the mother's face. In this way, the perception of the stranger leads the child back to the mother and heightens its attachment to her, always assuming that the child feels secure in the mother-child relationship. Subsequently the child can enter into contact without anxiety and get to know the stranger. By contrast, the pathological form of this relationship seeks to block out the stranger and to reassure oneself by means of narcissistic mirroring in the mother. If a fantasy of homogeneity dominates at group level, mirroring and self-reassurance operate in connection with the group members who are like oneself. The unavoidable ambivalence is deemed intolerable, and leads to an aggressive charge stimulated by the differences within the group, which then have to be obliterated and projected outwards. Such a world of narcissistic mirroring and purity results in massive, persecutory aggression toward those who are different and thus pose a threat to internal cohesion. This kind of narcissism has a tendency to become progressively more radical. Purity can only be achieved via exclusion. In this way, membership of an idealized, pure community and persecutory violence are closely connected and mutually dependent. Sometimes, all it takes is a small crisis to trigger an explosion of violence. Ostow (1996) speaks

⁵ I would like to thank Matthias Küntzel for calling my attention to this and giving me access to the partial English documentation of Qutb's essay in Nettler's (1986) study.

in this context of a “pogrom mentality” (1996), while Adorno refers to “psychic totalitarianism” (1950).

Visions of Unity and Fantasies of Fusion

Recent psychoanalytic research on groups has shown that regression in a group or at a mass level goes well beyond the Oedipal level Freud described, extending to different and far profounder narcissistic identifications (Anzieu, 1975; Bion, 1961; Jaques, 1981; Kreeger, 1975; Money-Kyrle, 1951). When members regressively fuse to form a group, that group turns into an illusionary substitute for the lost object, the mother in infancy. The group fantasy as a collective ego-ideal acts as a substitute for the individual and brings about manic elation. This research is highly significant for extensive group fantasies about the nation, but also about religious homogeneous communities, like the Ummah or an Islamic state. At the core of national or religious collective identification lies the spuriously omnipotent sense of elation at being part of a greater whole. If it comes to power and merges with fantasies of superiority, the reality testing of the individuals involved and the demands of their own conscience are suspended, while the sense of self is enormously heightened by the fusion with the national or collective sense of self. The upshot is an inflation of narcissistic feelings. For these people there exists both a world of great symbiotic unity, and a world split off from the first – a world of rivalry, competition, and plurality.

The Islamist conception of the Ummah as a community of all Muslims is one of the most vivid examples of this fusionary and unitarian brand of thinking. It is especially true of the Salafist version of a minor Ummah of the only true Muslims. In this case it involves a virtual, imaginary community, de-territorialised and beyond all ethnicity, race, language and culture (Roy 2004). All members are equal and the affective power of strict moral rules of behaviour fuels the fantasy of unity.

A Muslim belongs to the Ummah as the community of all Muslims, a membership that defines him and, like some irrevocable tribal affiliation, is something he can never shake off (Tibi 1993, 42). Thus, the Ummah figures as a homogeneous and egalitarian community without division or social stratification. The pilgrimage to Mecca is idealized as a union with the Ummah that overcomes the

self-referentiality of the individual. An Iranian philosopher describes the sevenfold circling of the Ka'abah as follows: "You are sustained by the wave of enthusiasm and the attraction of the community; you are no longer. The community is all. ...Now you have become part of Creation. You are in the orbit of this solar system, you revolve around God and gradually you stop feeling yourself" (Armstrong 2000, 360). With her concept of identificatory love, Ruth Stein (2004) sought to determine something similar, namely, the desire of the individual to merge, or be bound to an idealized object. It is a form of submitting or abjecting one's self to God as a superhuman entity.

The community of the Ummah is, however, by no means homogeneous. It is full of division, argument, and discord. Unity is a fantasy vision that acquires more and more power over people's minds as destructive tendencies and hostile impulses are projected onto ethnic and religious minorities in the world of Islam or onto the unbelievers who have conspired against it. This engenders a phantasm of a pure and unified Muslim community. As part of such a collective, one cannot see the threatening, alien other as an independent individual, but solely as an enemy agent seeking to destroy the homogeneity of which one is a part. Relations with the outside world are perceived in a Manichaeian way. The imaginary Ummah stands on the one side, the demonized world of the enemies on the other. Discord, problems, and errors are not one's own doing but the result of the evil and satanic machinations of the West and the perceived victimization at the hands of the Jews. A Muslim who thinks otherwise can be easily branded a traitor. Such conspiratorial thinking is widespread in the Arab world. The imagined conspiracy of the West against Islam is thought to be part of a long-standing plan that began with the crusades, which brought about the dissolution of the Caliphate and the separation of religion and state, and which seeks to destroy Islamic religion and culture. In an interview in 2015⁶, head scholar at Al_Azhar- University and Imam of Al-Azhar mosque, Ahmad Mohammad al Tayebb, referred to the chaos incited by "major international regimes" on the Arabian Peninsula. When asked about ISIS, he claimed: "These groups are currently gaining in strength because, whether in the form of ISIS or others, they are backed by major international

⁶ Published in Cicero, 5, 2015, 66-68.

powers seeking to destabilize the Middle East ... The easiest thing to do is to abuse religion”.

As Bassam Tibi has demonstrated, these conspiracy theories employ a radical rhetoric that “no longer serves to communicate or share knowledge; its sole function is to psychologically and rhetorically bolster one’s own unrealistic perception against an outside world that stands in contradiction to it” (Tibi 1993, 43). Today, such groups as ISIS disseminate huge amounts of propaganda videos on the Internet on the subject of the oppression of Muslims and crimes perpetrated against them in western societies. Here, Muslims are invariably presented as innocent victims of foreign powers (Kaddor 2015). These videos serve as means for recruiting new adherents.

In this way, Islamic fundamentalism becomes a closed, religiously totalitarian system, governed by imaginary conceptions that feed on unconscious phantasms. An imaginary community is idealized in order to shield it against reality. Harmony and peace, the final state one longs for, require the abolition and destruction of rotten western civilization. As we know, ideality and terror are indeed interrelated.

6. Conclusion

My intention has been to indicate the inherent connections between forms of religious group constitution and cohesion, on the one hand, and violence on the other. These connections are forged by unconscious fantasy systems activated by religious ideas of a fundamentalist nature. I have tried to show how these inherent connections between narcissistic notions of purity, unity, and equality with massive violence are based on the fantasy of a pre-ambivalent narcissistic ideal condition. In this world of imagination the alien Other is experienced as the infidel intruder and troublemaker. This phantasmatic ideal condition can only be maintained if all the so-called “bad” parts of the group members have a chance to be projected on the external Other and persecuted there. In the final analysis, this is a denial of the infeasibility of ambivalence and the irrevocable contradictions of finite life. The danger inherent in this world of ideas is its propensity for violent radicalization. Affiliations are religiously or politically essentialized, above all in cases of ongoing, unsolved social and political conflict. The significance of the

collective identity connected with this, gains enormously, and activates the longing for such a pre-ambivalent narcissistic ideal condition. It can be used by charismatic religious leaders, so as to gain power over the minds of the group members.

According to estimates, ISIS has already been able to recruit 12 000 foreign fighters (Schirra 2015). Does not the power of attraction which ISIS exerts over young Muslims and converts throughout the world consist in activating such a utopian, ideal Islamic state – a state which carries out ethnic cleansing, which constitutes a homogenous society living in brotherly harmony according to the principles of an original Islam? If so, we begin to get an idea in this case of how such ideological notions and the unconscious fantasies behind them can be used to activate a capacity for aggression that generates immense destructive potential.

Yet the path from this world of ideas to terrorism is by no means linear. It requires further individual motives and additional indoctrination. We will turn to this set of problems in the second lecture.

One final point: Purity can never be positively defined out of itself. It always requires a counter-image, that of the not-so-pure. Purification phantasms have a tendency to become increasingly radical. This, and the cumulative paranoid charge they display, may lead to the employment of increasingly massive exclusionary or destructive violence. As we know, revolutions end by devouring their own children. This is one way that things may turn out. The other way derives from the fact that the world can never be completely engulfed by such a totalitarian fundamentalist system, however radically the community in question may sequester itself. The Other and alternative views can never be completely disempowered in this way. Accordingly, the psychologically fundamentalist purification process can never come to an end. Nor can it rule out the eventuality of self-reflection and critical self-imposed restrictions, both of which are sources of revision and compromise.

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