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'We two will never twin': fundamentalism and the politics of security

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In a German film from 1913, *The Student from Prague*, a poor student comes across the devil, who offers him a pile of gold in exchange for his mirror-image. A deal is struck. The devil removes the image from the mirror, rolls it up, puts it in his pocket, and leaves. In virtue of his wealth the student is happy, and hardly considers that he can no longer see himself. But a day arrives when he sees himself in the flesh. Frequenting the same social circles as he, his double begins to follow him and give him no rest. This double is of course his image, which the devil put into circulation. The alienated double is angry because he has been sold and wants to take revenge. Consequently the double starts to shadow him everywhere, destroying the student's social

life, even committing crimes instead of him. One night, the mirror-image chases the student into his room. In a violent confrontation, the student pulls the mirror from the wall at the moment when the double passes before the mirror from which he was rolled up. The mirror shatters, and the double, becoming once again the fantasy he was, disappears. But at the same time the student collapses: he is the one who is murdered. For in killing his image, he kills himself, since, imperceptibly, it was the image who came to be living and real in his place (see Baudrillard, 1998: 187-8).

The alienation at work in *The Student from Prague* mirrors, we argue in this article, the paradoxical relationship between fundamentalism and the politics of security in contemporary society in which it is a "moral duty" to wage war against fundamentalist terror, whose definition, however, remains obscenely indistinct. For instance, is not Bin Laden, the incarnation of the "evil", a creation of the CIA, that is, an image that has fallen outside of American international politics? But the image avenges, it haunts; it is as if Empire, for all its technologies of "light travel", cannot escape from it. The threat is, however, Janus-faced: terrorism *and* the politics of security, which is, reducing all politics to a matter of security, fast becoming a new religion. Indeed, the politics of security unavoidably contains in itself an originary risk: "a state which has security as its sole task and source of legitimacy is a fragile organism; it can always be provoked by terrorism to become itself terroristic" (Agamben, 2001). When the police and politics merge, they start to justify each other, terrorizing the political itself. Hence the dyadic structure of the relationship between fundamentalist terror and the war against terrorism; of twinning between enemies despite the absence of immediate resemblance.

The word "twin" shares the same root with words such as "twilight" (the zone of indistinction where light and dark become indistinguishable) and expresses a contradictory situation, denoting both separation and union, a close but troubled alliance. In Middle English to "twin" meant split or divide; hence "we two will never twin" meaning we will never be separated (Lash, 1993: 6). For all their differences and enmity against each other, fundamentalism and the politics of security reveal a self-contradictory, a non-resolving duality and share the same logic on the basis of disparity, simultaneously expressing convergence and divergence, similarity and difference, without, of course, perfect identity.

Bin Laden claims to have inflicted a blow not just against American economic and political power but also against its atheism. The attacks were part of a *jihad* against the Christian and Jewish infidels. This conception of Americans as either atheists or infidels has found its counterpart in the popular American depiction of world politics as a clash between McWorld and Jihad (between secularism/capitalism and religion/tribalism), or, between different civilizations defined mainly with reference to religions. The key figures here are Benjamin Barber (1996) and Samuel Huntington (1997), both re-popularized by 9/11. Something essential is missing in both views of "clash". Barber fails to see that religion does matter on the American side; Huntington searches for religion in the wrong place. Both understand American power as being essentially different from and opposed to Islamic fundamentalism. America is either understood as a secular regime obsessed with brands, goods and consumerist culture (Barber) or as a humanistic version of Christian faith (Huntington): it is, in

both cases, a civilized, non-antagonistic, and non-crusading civilization that counters a barbaric version of Islam. The difference between Barber and Huntington is a difference that does not make a difference. They share the idea of a clash between cultures, and both overlook the importance of hybridity, peaceful exchange and interpersonal encounters; Huntington even more so than Barber. Even if the concept of a clash is accepted it must be acknowledged that what we are witnessing is not a pragmatic religion defending itself against a perverted version of Islam, but two "perversions", two "fundamentalisms", countering each other. So, where to look for the American parallel to Islamic fundamentalism?

This parallel is not to be found in the Christian Right's influence on American foreign policy, even though such influence certainly exists (Martin, 1999: 66-80). Certainly, a few of the most extreme exponents of the far right have used terror against abortion clinics and the like, and their techniques and the way they legitimize their acts do have much in common with Muslim fundamentalists' practices and rhetoric (Juergensmeyer, 2000). Yet such focus is of minor importance compared to the fundamentalism of Bush and his men. What is crucial in this respect is the political processes through which 9/11 is sacralised and thus elevated to the level of something beyond discussion, thus serving as the ultimate legitimacy for the practices perceived to be necessary to in the defense of America.

The claim is not that Bush is as rigid a thinker as Bin Laden (he might be, but that's another story), but that the politics of security can be understood as a new church – as the way faith is practiced in the West. The politics of security speaks in absolutes. So does religion. Religion sacralizes certain objects, endows them with a special divine aura, and thus sees defending them as an essential part of practicing faith. So does the politics of security: it defends a territory, a way of life or something else. And like fundamentalism, the politics of security employs offensive strategies to secure what would otherwise be lost. And finally, it has its own priests: an exclusive group who have the authoritative right to decide how the scriptural logics and arguments must be implemented in action. Just as the priests, the security council(s) have a monopoly on interpreting current affairs. At this point, however, we must elaborate further on the nature of fundamentalism to be able to move further into Bin Laden's world and into the political theology of contemporary American politics of security.

1. Fundamentalism and terror

Fundamentalists differ from conservative and orthodox believers by emphasizing that commitment to religious dogma is not enough to sustain the power of religion in times of hardship. Whereas the conservative and orthodox believers (e.g. the Amish people) restrain from using modern technology, fundamentalists stress the need to use whatever means necessary to defend true faith. For fidelity to the dogma is not enough – the fundamentalist stance can be taken as an explicit critique of not only unbelievers but also those "lukewarm" believers who are not ready to do whatever it takes to fulfill God's will. Hence fundamentalism operates in a conflictual mode: "Its mentality considers those who advocate moderation, understanding, or dialogue to be

even more detrimental to the cause than the 'real' enemy" (Belge, 2001: 3). At best, the lukewarm believers postpone the unavoidable clash between believers and unbelievers; at worst, their lack of decisiveness lets the right moment for victory pass away. Too much is at risk just to wait and see how things evolve.

Fundamentalism is commonly understood as an ideology regarding the proper place of religion in society. In the same way, Islamism is seen as a modern form of fundamentalism through which not only the shari'a but a whole Islamic state is imposed: "Islamists see Islam not as a mere religion, but as a political ideology which should be integrated into all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy, etc.)" (Roy, 2001). To see secularism and fundamentalism as two political ideologies about the role of religion in political life – the first ideology denying religion any place in the political realm and the other rejecting the difference between the political and the religious life altogether – is however highly problematic. The use of both concepts must be questioned. Secularism is a religious concept with roots in the concept of two regimes: the idea of separating the state and the church from each other is already conditioned by Lutheran Protestantism. One could argue that the religious connotations have been erased over time and that the present use of the concept is culturally, rather than religiously, embedded. Certainly, there is some truth to this claim. The more serious problem, however, is the use of the second concept. Fundamentalism is considered to be something awkward and extreme, a distortion of a proper religious mode. Well, fundamentalism is extreme: fundamentalists treat faith as offering insight into a timeless essence that exists beyond proof and scientific questioning. Nothing is wrong in this "descriptive" use of the concept. It is its political use we want to question; to be more specific, the inability to see and accept that a certain dose of fundamentalism is present in all religions, at least in those that build on scriptures. To imagine a religion that is not conservative, fundamentalist, dogmatist or orthodox is, in other words, to imagine a religion without religion.

This invites another conceptual distinction, one between fundamentalism and terror. One can be a fundamentalist without being a terrorist and a terrorist without being a fundamentalist. This is not to deny that fundamentalism and terror can be closely linked. Holding some values, objects or practices as absolute can easily transform into an argument for the need to defend these values, objects and practices with violent means against a perceived danger. Different means can be used in such defense, terror being, however, generally the least likely. Both Bin Laden and Bush go further than just holding certain values, objects and practices sacred. As Bin Laden, Bush is also prepared to use whatever means to protect his values (including torture, imprisonment without a trial, interception of phone calls and emails et cetera and on an international sphere the acceptance of "collateral damage" on a massive scale). What is of special interest in this respect is the link between the fundamentalization of values and their securitization.

A distinction between totalitarianism and fundamentalism (or between ideology and religion) is here helpful. While totalitarianism refers to a worldview in which everything fits together and negativity is denied (unless it is projected towards an enemy), fundamentalism can be seen as an equally all-encompassing world view, which is however always to be doubted: there is

always a distinction between man's limited insight and God's superior insight and will. The difference between fundamentalism and totalitarianism is thus the absence of a true transcendence within a totalitarian worldview. The Nazi ideology, for instance, might refer to a divine kingdom (The Reich of Thousand Years), but this would still be a Reich, which can be realized on earth. Along the same line, the divine power to distinguish between good and evil was assumed by the Nazis, whose Final Solution became the equivalent of the concept of judgment day (Rogozinski, 1993).

In the totalitarian mind, this bridging of the earthly and the divine is guided by a desire to overcome the separation of the transcendent and the earthly and thus to achieve certainty, or, in a political context, a final victory. The gap is no longer to be mediated but traversed. The human and divine are reduced to the elements of the same continuum and a paradoxical form of certainty replaces anxiety. Thus terrorists can conflate the personal, political and cosmic levels, as a consequence of which the struggle for one's faith is linked to a violent battle for political goals, which is in turn sanctioned through a reference to the cosmic battle between good and evil (Juergensmeyer, 2000: 145-163). Situating oneself in a religious cosmos, the path towards the rhetoric and practice of warfare lies ready at hand (Ibid. 158). Whereas an existential struggle is an ongoing process with no easy way out, war makes things simple in giving the struggle the firmness of a battle between two sides who cannot reach a compromise. Defeat would imply losing everything, even one's dignity and faith, which is why the war is carried on until one side achieves absolute victory, a situation of all or nothing (Ibid. 149).

Here we must return to the distinction between true and lukewarm believers. The first group is not just defined as those who are ready to go to war. Equally important is the feeling of being in a vanguard of faith (Moussalli, 1999: 38). True faith allows for access to a superior insight and urges one to act on behalf of God and the community of believers. What is most worrying about the present moral depravity is that it has not only affected the enemy but also been disseminated among fellow believers. It thus becomes the task of those few uncontaminated to fight its cause. Hence, terror has two addressees: the immediate enemy and the "would-be-interested third", "those socially, ethnically, religiously, or culturally defined masses in whose interest and name the terrorists conduct their attacks" (Münkler, 2002: 70-71): in other words, the lukewarm believers.

In most religions a cosmic battle between order and disorder is at the forefront. God (or the Gods) incarnates order. The earthly realm is characterized by the fallen-ness of people, by their devilish desires, by the existence of evil, and by the presence of a chaotic state of nature. The prime task of a vanguard of faith is thus to install order where there is disorder, empower the good where there is evil, and encourage faith where there is a lack of it. The terrorist situates himself on the side of order (by obeying the divine commands), on the side of peace (by fighting for it), and on the side of the good (by trying to represent it). Acts of terror are thus commonly seen not as the beginning of a war but rather as a response to it. "The world is at war", Bin Laden claimed in a fatwa against the US, delivered in February 1998 as a response to the American involvement in the Middle East (Juergensmeyer, 2000: 145). The same idea resurfaces when Christian activists consider

themselves as “soldiers of war”, claim that “the Lord God is a man of War”, or stress that the Bible is “a book of war, a book of hate” (Ibid. 145-146). Religiously motivated terrorists thus act on the assumption that the world is already violent. In other words, terrorists paradoxically perceive terror, a strategy of chaos, as a necessary evil aiming to establish a divine order on earth.

2. Jihad

Islamic discourse is namely a discourse and, like other discourses, full of essentially contested concepts, which function as objects of struggle. Concepts such as *fatwa*, *mullah*, *shari'a* and recently *jihad* have all entered media discourses and politics as essentially contested concepts (Noor 2001). Following the *fatwa* issued against Salman Rushdie, in the Western media *fatwa* came to mean “death penalty”, even though in Islamic jurisprudence it means “judicial ruling” and concerns everything from “grave matters like the death penalty to mundane everyday concerns like the proper price of sheep in the market” (Ibid.).

A similar ambiguity can be found in the use of the word *jihad* (Euben, 2002: 21). *Jihad* is not only divided into the lesser (*jihad asghar*) and greater *jihad* (*jihad akbar*) but also contrasted to *qital* which is the concept of a physical fight. In contrast to *qital*, *jihad* designates those acts that “bring religion into practice” (Euben, 2002: 12; Firestone, 1999: 17-8). On the basis of sacred texts, one can distinguish between four major forms of *jihad*: the *jihad* of the sword, that is, the lesser *jihad*, and the three forms of greater *jihad*: *jihad* of the heart (moral reformation), *jihad* of the tongue (proclaiming God's word abroad) and *jihad* of the hand (works in accordance with God's will) (Johnson, 1997: 19). *Jihad* is derivative of the verb “*jahada*” meaning “to exert,” “to struggle,” or “to strive” (Firestone, 1999: 16-17). In Lane's classic definition from 1865, *jihad* is taken to mean the practice of “exerting one's utmost power, efforts, endeavors, or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation or striving towards a worthy goal” (Euben, 2002: 12). It is a personal struggle against “one's own mortal failings and weaknesses, which would include battling against one's pride, fears, anxieties and prejudices” (Noor, 2001). It can however also be given a more collectivistic interpretation, that is, as an action undertaken in the pursuit of a legitimate *umma,* that is the Muslim community (Euben, 2002: 10).

Uncertainty about one's faith is a defining aspect of Islam just as fear and trembling for Kierkegaard defined a proper Christian attitude towards faith. This interpretation of *jihad* is justified with reference to the distinction between *jihad al akbar* (the greater *jihad*) and *jihad al-asghar* (the lesser *jihad*). Whereas the greater *jihad* is the existential struggle in the context of one's faith, the lesser *jihad* is the struggle for self-preservation and self-defense (Noor, 2001; Firestone, 1999: 17). Not only is *jihad al-asgar* a secondary form, it is also strictly regulated with ethical sanctions and prerogatives such as the prohibition against killing women and children and destroying harvest and livestock. A further restriction is that *jihad* cannot be waged for the sake of territorial expansion (Noor, 2001). This existentialist understanding of *jihad* differs greatly from the way the phenomenon is portrayed in American social

science. Barber, for instance, understands *jihad* as a short-hand for "atavistic politics of retribalization, balkanization, fanaticism, and tyrannical paternalism – a largely pathological orientation associated with violence, intolerance, and little respect for human life" (Euben, 2002: 6). He is aware that this version of a bloody holy war on behalf of a partisan identity is a highly selective one, but still he uses it to organize his argument, which reifies and de-historicizes the concept of *jihad* and erases its contradictions and ambivalences (Euben, 2002: 8; Johnson, 1997: vii). Barber fails to see that the very concept of *jihad* is what is at stake in the struggle between Muslim modernists/democrats and Islamist hardliners (Hefner, 2001; Johnson, 1997: 36). The clashes within civilizations, so to say, are more important than those between them.

However, things are more complicated than distinguishing between a proper and an excessive understanding of *jihad*. The conflict is not just one between different interpretations of Qur'anic verses but equally one of emphasizing different parts of the Qur'an. Euben distinguishes between the parts dealing with Muhammad's early life in Mecca where *jihad* is equated with the persuasion of non-Muslims, and the Medina period where *jihad* is the "*jihad* of the sword". It goes without saying that the moderate Islamists take the early verses as the primary ones, while the radical focus on the later. In both cases, however, *jihad* expresses an encounter between Muslims and non-Muslims, between *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) and *dar al-Harb* (abode of war) (Euben, 2002: 13).

Dar al-Islam basically means the territory in which Islamic law reigns supreme. Hence it is a territory of peace although the existence of apostasy, dissent, schism, rebellion, robbery and alike is admitted (Johnson, 1997: 67). *Dar al-harb* on the contrary is a "law-less" territory characterized by a permanent state of war. The divine commands are not heard and the result is eternal human strife (Ibid. 48-49). *Dar al-harb* is not just characterized by conflict (in contrast to the umma which is given independently of race, ethnicity, nationality etc.); it is also perpetually in conflict with the *dar al-Islam* (Ibid. 51). Following the distinction between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, *jihad* for the radicals is the relation between the Muslim and non-Muslim world (rather than describing a reflective way of relating towards ones faith). Important in this context is the concept of *tawhid*, that is, monotheism, the doctrine that there is only one God: Allah. For radicals such as Abu A'la al-Mawdudi (1903-1977) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), this doctrine basically implies a demand for a *jihad* against all non-Islamic systems (Moussalli, 1999: 27). *Tawhid* calls for an Islamic revolution and cancels any possibility of dialogue or compromise (Ibid. 35).

Jihad for the neo-fundamentalists also signifies an internal relation among Muslims themselves, that between those of true faith and those who open their doors to foreign corruption and thus betray the essence of faith, that is the lukewarm believers (Euben, 2002: 14). The Qur'anic concept of *al-jahiliyya* (paganism) is here given a new interpretation. Originally, it was taken to mean an ignorance of Islam in areas unaware of the Prophet's revelations. However, Mawdudi and Qutb take the concept to apply to a "condition" rather than a particular historical period. Whenever there is a deviance from the path of true Islam (*al-hakimiyya*, that is, divine rule), there is a condition of *al-jahiliyya* (Moussalli, 1999: 27). Human beings have diverted from their *fitra*

(their godly revelations and the moral laws which resides herein) and replaced it with paganism, nationalism, materialism and abstract philosophy (Moussalli, 1999: 24). *Al-jahiliyya* condenses all these ills of modernity (Euben 2002: 15). Unsurprisingly, Al-Mawdudi saw *al-jahiliya* everwhere:

Humanity today is living in a large brothel! One has only to glance at its press, films, fashion shows, beauty contests, ballrooms, wine bars, and broadcasting stations! Or observe its mad lust for naked flesh, provocative postures, and sick, suggestive statements in literature, the arts and the mass media! And add to all this the system of usury which fuels man's voracity for money and engenders vile methods for its accumulation and investment, in addition to fraud, trickery, and blackmail dressed up in the garb of law […] (Quoted in Ruthven, 2001: 3).

The cure for this deprivation is to eradicate evil and prevent the spreading of "wrong Islam". Through jihad, evil is to be defeated and Islamic law introduced (Euben, 2002: 18). It is important to emphasize here the shift from a legal to a moral discourse. Islamic fundamentalists take the distinction between the *dar al-Islam* and the *dar al-Harb* as being one between good and evil and not as a primarily legal distinction (Johnson, 1997: 68). The peace of the *dar al-Islam* is impossible to sustain under the conditions of Western crusader spirit. Evil is everywhere. As a consequence, Qutb "transcendentalizes" the *umma*. It no longer designates the existing Muslim world but instead an "ahistorical ideal waiting to be actualized at any moment in history", or, in Qutb's own words, "a demand of the present and a hope for the future" (Euben, 2002: 18).

3. Bin Laden

The similarity between al-Hawdudi, Qutb and Bin Laden's discourse is not just one of homology. Bin Laden studied under the guidance of Sayyid Qutb's brother Muhammad (Ruthven 2001: 4). Joining radicalized Islamic forces and teachers, he saw himself as a representative of the legitimate *umma*, of the people of faith. Because it is a "decentralized" religion with no supreme leader, Islam is full of self-proclaimed leaders such as Bin Laden (Noor, 2001). In striving for leadership within the Muslim world Bin Laden has constructed what Al-Qattan (2001) calls a Disneyland Islam. In this, Bin Laden literally attempts to resemble the Prophet. Like the Prophet, he is a wealthy man who has forsaken his hometown in trying to escape the infidels and the unfaithful members of his tribe. And like the Prophet's flight, his has been "arduous and perilous" (Gerecht, 2002). Amongst the "fundamentalist" movements in the Middle East there has been a strong urge for purification, in striving for which one adopts a way of life resembling the way of life in the first years of Islam (Al-Qattan, 2001). This is Bin Laden's strategy, too: "Thus Mohammad's Cave at Hira, where he received the first revelations, is echoed by the image of Bin Laden emerging from another cave; the dress-code, the archaic language, the strange sexual politics where Bin Laden marries his son to his companion's teenage daughter – all these vulgarities are supposed to bring us back to a primordial state of 'true', 'real' Islam" (Ibid.). The message here is not just the purity and strength of Bin Laden's faith but also the expectation that he, just as the Prophet Muhammad, will be victorious (Ibid.). Finally, like the Prophet, Bin Laden claims that he has not chosen his life out of any

personal consideration (Bin Laden, 2001c). He did not choose but was chosen by Allah (Bin Laden & Miller, 2001); he even describes himself as a slave of God (Bin Laden, 2002a).

Bin Laden's worship of Allah includes carrying out a *jihad* against Americans (Bin Laden & Miller, 2001). *Jihad* is "a religious duty of every Muslim if they haven't got an excuse. God says fight, for the sake of God and to uphold the name of God" (Ghaith, 2001). And God has demanded that Bin Laden attacks America. The one who is guided by God will never be misguided (Bin Laden, 2001b). There are no signs of doubt in Bin Laden's discourse: "We have done what God has ordered us to do. God called on us for '*jihad*' and we complied" (Bin Laden, 2002a). The attacks are legitimised as a response to American hostilities: "What America is tasting now is something insignificant compared to what we have tasted for scores of years. Our nation [the Islamic world] has been tasting this humiliation and degradation for more than 80 years" (Bin Laden, 2001a). It is a revenge for the killing of innocent children in Palestine, Iraq, southern Sudan, Somalia, Kashmir and the Philippines (Bin Laden, 2001b). Among other incidents mentioned is the bombing of a mosque where *ulemas* were praying, an act taken to illustrate the hatred of crusaders (Bin Laden, 2001c). Americans and their allies are in fact the biggest gangsters and butchers of this age (Bin Laden, 2002a). The "raids" on New York, Washington, the killing of Germans in Tunisia and French in Karachi, British and Australians in Bali, and Russians in Moscow are "only reactions and reciprocal actions" (Bin Laden, 2002a).

Still this does not legitimize the killing of women and children, which the Islamic tradition explicitly forbids. Bin Laden avoids this critique by claiming that Allah has given permission to take revenge when attacked. "Whoever has destroyed our villages and towns, then we have the right to destroy their villages and towns. Whoever has stolen our wealth, then we have the right to destroy their economy. And whoever has killed our civilians, then we have the right to kill theirs" (Bin Laden, 2002b). He has not attacked women and children but the icons of American military and economic power (Bin Laden, 2001c). America does not distinguish between infants and military, which is a reference to the bombs against Nagasaki (Bin Laden & Miller, 2001), and thus Bin Laden is in his own view justified in doing neither.

Bin Laden understands himself as a moral person who strikes against the enemy only because he has to. It is crucial here to distinguish between the employment of an offensive strategy (America and its allies) and a defensive (the Muslim world). The 9/11 attacks were "carried out by the zealous sons of Islam in defense of their religion" (Bin Laden, 2002a). This emphasis on defense is even more clear in an earlier interview: "The mission is to spread the word of God, not to indulge in massacring people. We ourselves are the target of killings, destruction and atrocities. We are only defending ourselves. This is a defensive *jihad*. We want to defend our people and our land" (Bin Laden, 2001c).

Western imperialism is here paralleled by a grave moral depravation. And here it is not difficult to recognize Qutb's teaching: "We call you to be a people of manners, principles, honor, and purity; to reject the immoral acts of fornication, homosexuality, intoxicants, gambling, and trading with interest"

(Bin Laden, 2002b). In this ongoing struggle between religion and infidelity, morality and depravation, one has to choose sides. For radical fundamentalists everything derived from God is good and everything derived from the human is evil. It is a struggle between God (*Hizb Allah*) and the Satan (*Hizb al-Shaytan*) (Moussalli, 1999: 54).

Equally worrying is the behavior of the rulers in Islamic nations who have "anesthetized the Islamic nation to prevent it from carrying out the duty of *jihad* so that the word of God will be above all words" (Bin Laden, 2001b). When people like Bin Laden attempt to take revenge against the crusaders and to protect the lives of innocents, "the rulers' *ulema* and the hypocrites come to defend the clear blasphemy" (Bin Laden, 2001b). Islamic leaders have imitated the paganism of the West in its worst forms: destruction, degeneration, sectarian divisions, civil wars, and racial discrimination (Moussalli, 1999: 56). As a consequence, Bin Laden describes the people carrying out the 9/11 attacks as vanguards of Islam, as true martyrs (Bin Laden, 2001a). Muslims are anesthetized and it is thus up to the few true believers to awaken those asleep. "It is our duty to lead people to light" (Bin Laden & Miller, 2001), to make the common people arise against its ungodly leaders and their "paganism" (Moussalli, 1999: 21).

We are used to Islam being associated with martyrdom, but there is no concept of original sin in the Qur'an. Rites of self-flagellation, sacrifice and martyrdom were much later introduced into the Shi'ite brand of Islam. Here, Hussein's martyrdom is remembered and taken as the utmost example of faith. The hijackers, however, were Sunnis like Bin Laden himself (Kermani, 2002: 8). It is also worth noting that suicide is strictly forbidden in Islam. Bin Laden's plea for martyrdom is accordingly not based on the Qur'an but rather on the writings of Abdullah Azzam, his mentor, and Tamim al-Adani, Azzam's right hand. For Azzam, the corpse of a martyr is one which never rots, but exudes delightful scents (Ibid. 10). Martyrs are promised a heavenly reward in the form of a manifold of sexually willing virgins who, after the act of intercourse, miraculously regain their virginity. These descriptions are kitsch and long comments could have been made on the economies of desire that are manifest in them. Suffice it to mention that the man who traveled through the US to recruit martyrs for the war in Afghanistan never became one himself. Of all places, Al-Adarni died of a heart attack in Disney World (Ibid.).

To conclude, Bin Laden's rhetoric follows the pattern of radical militant fundamentalism. His world is a world in a state of war. The hostile West (the *dar al-harb*) is attacking the peaceful *umma* whom he claims to represent. The Islamic world (*the dar al-Islam*) is however in a state of decline (due to *al-jahilyya*). Terror then serves a twofold purpose as the necessary means to counter the foreign crusaders and to awake the anesthetized. This is the task of the vanguards of faith. So far so good; the line of argument is easy enough to follow. The question emerging is what will happen if we re-use the same framework to analyze Bush's rhetoric.

4. Bush

The concept of holy war has, since the peace of Westphalia, been rejected as a threat to civilization itself: to the secular state, to reason, to freedom, to humanity etc. (Johnson, 1997: 15). At least that's the story the West likes to tell about the advent of modernity in the West. The only wars left for religion are acts of terror. However, all governments need to rally their citizens to the cause (Firestone, 1999: 10) and, in the ongoing war on terror, religion has certainly been strongly emphasized by Bush.

> And we're thankful to God, who turned suffering into strength, and grief into grace. Offering thanks in the midst of tragedy is an American tradition, perhaps because, in times of testing, our dependence on God is so clear. […] Lincoln asked God to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as it may be consistent with the divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony tranquility. We pray for this goal, and we work for it. (Bush, 2001k)

Bush claims that the American nation is "one Nation under God" (Bush, 2001c) and on the day of the attack cited Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me" (Bush, 2001a). Bush is, in his attempt to be reelected, depending on votes from the "Bible belt." He considers himself a born-again Christian, and the puritan tradition finally explains this strong emphasis on Christianity. Although religion for both Bush and Bin Laden is important, their religiosity differs considerably. Bush's Christianity is a kind of private background morality, which finds its way in to a public discourse only in times of emergency. Bin Laden's is a cosmology, which serves as the background for everything he thinks and does. The fundamentalism of Bush has to be found elsewhere, namely, in his stress on absolute values such as freedom, democracy and free enterprise. The US defends these principles because they "are right and true for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them" (Bush, 2002a). "Freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person – in every civilization" (Bush, 2002a). There might be conditions unfavorable to the spread of these values: war, terror, dictatorships, poverty and disease (Bush, 2002a). But when these obstacles are removed, liberalism will reign supreme: "The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise" (Bush, 2002a).

The US welcomes its responsibility as a vanguard for the dissemination of freedom and liberty (Bush, 2002a). It is a nation whose "cause has always been larger than our Nation's defense" (Bush, 2002b), one which does not use its strength "to press for unilateral advantage" (Bush, 2002a). The US was attacked not as the US, but as a vanguard of universal freedom. "They can't stand freedom; they hate what America stands for" (Bush, 2001e). Every freedom-loving nation stands by the side of the US (Bush, 2001b): "We are supported by the collective will of the world." (Bush, 2001g). There is no clash of civilizations. "The people of the Islamic nations want and deserve the same freedoms and opportunities as people in every nation. And their governments should listen to them" (Bush, 2002b). Governments are thus free to choose if and only if they choose what is right for them: liberalism. The Bush

administration cannot understand that people willingly chose what is not best for them (Rhodes, 2002: 144).

The vangardism of the US is, as we expect, contrasted not only to the forces of evil (which we will discuss shortly), but also to the lukewarm believers, that is to most European nations. Europe has faith in the joint pillars of liberalism and capitalism, but are not willing to do what it takes to defend this true faith. Hence, the American critique of the lack of European support of the second Iraq war. Here Europe was only doing the dishes (Kagan, 2002 25). The US is bound to lead and cannot afford to play the game of chicken as Europe does. This criticism can for obvious reasons not be verbalized by Bush. Thus, to understand American exceptionalism/vanguardism we have to turn to other sources, to the policy environment legitimizing and rationalizing American foreign policy. In this context Kagan's article *Power and Weakness* (2002), which was later transformed into a book, has become *the* piece condensing the essence of American vangardism (Balibar, 2003: 1).

The United States *is* a behemoth with a conscience. It is not Louis XIV's France or George III's England. Americans do not argue, even to themselves, that their actions may be justified by *raison d'etat*. Americans have never accepted the principles of Europe's old order, never embraced the Machiavellian perspective. The United States is a liberal, progressive society through and through, and to the extent that Americans believe it must be a means of advancing the principles of a liberal civilization and a liberal world order (Kagan, 2002: 11).

From a European perspective America incarnates an unlimited striving for power and a willingness to use brutal force. In contrast Europe shows an orientation towards peace, diplomacy and intercultural exchange – the values of a great civilization. From the other side of the Atlantic, we get the inverse picture. America are the true idealists who, however, have no experience in promoting ideals successfully without power (Kagan, 2002: 26). It is the Europeans who are acting in self-interest (Kagan, 2002: 11-15). They are not willing to pay the price for the policing of worldwide peace – not even for their own peace (i.e. paying for the intervention in Bosnia). Instead they rely on the Americans under whose umbrella they achieve their safety (Kagan, 2002: 24). The difference between perceptions and abilities could hardly be greater: "Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus" (Kagan, 2002: 3). The Kantian vision supported by the Europeans is conditioned by the rules of a Hobbesian world order. The US acts as a Leviathan (not a behemoth as Kagan wrongly states it) whose overwelming power assures peace.

What this means is that although the United States has played the critical role in bringing in this Kantian paradise, and still plays a key role in making that paradise possible, it cannot enter this paradise itself. It mans the walls but cannot walk through the gate. The United States, with all its vast power, remains stuck in history, left to deal with the Saddams and the ayatollahs, the Kim Jong Ils and the Jiang Zemins, leaving the happy benefits to others. (Kagan, 2002: 25)

The French military analyst Alain Joxe (2002) has labeled the US an empire of disorder. To establish mutual relations of protection and obedience, or to take responsibility for those submitted to one's power is the first prerogative of

sovereignty (Joxe, 2002: 122-3). The US, however, refrains from it. In the absence of a political strategy, things are allowed to follow their own course. The US proclaims: “it is an unfortunate situation but we are not imperialists” (Joxe, 2002: 44). The US wants to act in a sovereign way, but does not want to carry the burden of sovereignty. It is as if, for the US, the world has become chaos, a place where the US no longer attempts to fulfill political aims through negotiation or common projects. Power is no longer exercised according to a classical imperialist doctrine, but rather through a system for managing chaos (Joxe, 2002: 14, 170). The whole globe is considered to be in a state of exception which, unsurprisingly, merely legitimizes American military inventions. It is worth mentioning the US’s new strategy of preemption here. In the ordered world of sovereign states, deterrence worked as the prime means to achieve security. This ordering principle, deterrence, is, however, not working anymore. Terrorists are not deterred, and they use other strategies including wanton destruction and the targeting of innocents, which implies that one cannot allow the enemy to strike first. “The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive action to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction – and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively” (Bush, 2002a).

“The reality of international politics leaves the US with no other option” (Bush, 2002a). “History will judge harshly on those who fail to act” (Bush, 2002a). The “responsibility” of the US is thus clear. It is, as Bush states, no less than “to rid the world of evil” (Bush, 2001d). They are facing “a monumental struggle of good versus evil. But good will prevail.” (Bush 2001b). There is no neutral middle ground. The US will not strike any deals with terrorists (Bush, 2002a) and on the international arena “every nation has a choice to make”. They are either with or against the US in the fight against terror (Bush, 2001g).

The hijackers were instruments of evil who died in vain. Behind them is a cult of evil which seeks to harm the innocent and thrives on human suffering. Theirs is the worst kind of cruelty, the cruelty that is fed, not weakened, by tears. Theirs is the worst kind of violence, pure malice, while daring to claim the authority of God. We cannot fully understand the designers and power of evil. It is enough to know that evil, like goodness, exists. And in the terrorists, evil has found a willing servant. (Bush, 2001i)

Thus, one of the most obvious aspects of the war against terrorism is that the terrorists are depicted not as adversaries or opponents who deserve respect, but as an evil to be exterminated. The soldiers of Taleban are too evil to survive in daylight. Thus the enemy “hides from our soldiers”, (Bush, 2001j); “dwells in dark corners of earth” (Bush, 2001i); “operates in the shadows” (Bush, 2001h); and “hides in caves” (Bush, 2001e). “They” are “an enemy who can only survive in darkness”; “we” are “going to shine the light of justice on them. We list their names, we publicize their pictures, we rob them of their secrecy. Terrorism has a face, and today we expose it for the world to see” (Bush, 2001h). The prime aim however is not just to make these cave men visible for the public eye but to wipe them out all together. Hence the aim of

bombing Afghanistan was, in Donald Rumsfeld's words, "to kill as many Taliban soldiers and Al-Qaeda members as possible" (quoted in Žižek, 2002: 91).

There is one decisive advantage to the "evildoer" metaphor, and it is this: Combat with evildoers is not Clausewitzian war. You do not make treaties with evildoers or try to adjust your conduct to make them like you. You do not try to see the world from the evildoers' point of view. You do not try to appease them, or persuade them, or reason with them. You behave with them in the same manner that you would deal with a fatal epidemic – you try to wipe it out. (Harris, 2002, see also Falk, 2002)

In designating al-Qaeda and the Taliban as powers of evil, any attempts to give a rational explanation of their motives, of course, fails. The politics of security address problems within a "timeless" vocabulary. No causal and historical explanations are found in the speeches of Bush: "They have no justification for their actions. There's no religious justification, there's no political justification. The only motivation is evil". Hence, the terrorists are transformed into irrational agents abstracted form the social and ideological network from which they are formed (Žižek, 2002: 33).

Bush's war resembles a *jihad*, a war legitimized through the highest values. And, as in Bin Laden's discourse, his version of *jihad* is one which pushes critical reflection to the margin. Liberalism, and especially freedom, is Bush's doxa, his *tawhid*. It is a value that stands beyond question; it is a timeless truth that all, in principle, can access. However, due to rogue states, terrorists and the like, the world is in a state of chaos. As in Bin Laden's discourse an abode of war confronts an abode of peace. The only difference is that this abode of war, the *dar al-harb*, for Bush is the East and for Bin Laden the West. The liberal West for Bush stands for peace, while for Bin Laden it is the Muslim East. In both cases there is however a condition of *Al-jahiliya*. Not all are ready to accept and support the leadership position of our two rivals. Bin Laden blames Muslim leaders, Bush European leaders who are unwilling to pay the price of security. For both the condition urges them to act as a vanguard of faith.

5. Ground zero

In an interesting article, Davis shows that the term "ground zero" was put into use, long before 9/11, to single out the epicenter of the first atomic bomb to be able to measure its power and effects (2003: 127). In a sense, therefore, it is perfectly possible to make an ethical link between Hiroshima and 9/11 – does the latter not, after all, signify the uncanny return of the repressed in the American psyche? In other words, ground zero could have paved the way for a fundamentally ethical recognition, for, to paraphrase Derrida, our unconditional compassion for the victims does not and should not prevent us from acknowledging that regarding 9/11 nobody is politically guiltless (Derrida, 2001). Such ethical reflection did not, however, take place; instead, 9/11 became sacralized and elevated to the status of a sublimated fetish object. Why? Why could such an ethical reflection not emerge?

because we have learned to recite, by rote, what has now become a national article of faith: that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified, almost idealistic acts, undertaken with reluctance, as 'the least abhorrent choice' but finally the only way to end the war, thereby saving perhaps a million lives. This explanation was first articulated in an article ghost-written for Secretary of State Henry Stimson by his aide McGeorge Bundy. It is a pretty story, the only problem being Bundy's admission in a book published shortly before his death that the entire thing was a fabrication, a deliberate myth, carefully constructed after the fact to disguise the actual reason why we dropped the bomb: (1) to avenge Pearl Harbor, (2) to justify the amount of money spent developing the bomb, (3) to create laboratories so that our scientific, medical, and military personnel could study the affects of the bomb, and (4) to impress the Russians and the rest of the world with this opening salvo in the Cold War. (Davis, 2002: 128)

This story was the perfect cover up. Why? Because it harbours on a securitized and quasi religious logic according to which purity, innocence and good intensions are safely on our side. We have it all here: the idea of vanguardism, the willingness to accept a huge cost to save a cherished good – what are the innocent victims of two Japanese towns compared to the lives of millions? Finally, we have the idea of the radical act as a desperate last resort. The willingness to carry out a monstrous act is even a proof of the strength of our faith. True idealists are those for whom their dignity and moral worth is second to the cause they are fighting. On the other hand we have the idea of a cynical political strategy using these ideas to create support for acts which might otherwise be subject to moral condemnation. Might this also be the script for American foreign policy after 9/11? And is the war against Afghanistan and Iraq hiding motives no less suspect than those informing the bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Suffice it to emphasize here why such hermeneutics of suspicion seems increasingly difficult to exercise. The reason for this seems to be the sacralization of security (Bush) on the one side and the securitization of religion on the other (Bin Laden).

We have two camps that mimic and justify each other. Two camps, each of which claims to represent the good and to fight the evil. And we have two strategies, which dissolves the democratic habitus in a post-political condition. Thus Bin Laden's construction of the "Americans" perfectly mirrors Bush's representation of Al-Qaeda, and the rhetoric of extermination of the evil is what unites the two poles in spite of asymmetries (Johnson, 2002: 223). A mental experiment might be helpful in this context. What if we universalise the right the USA proclaims for itself. What if Israel claimed the same right against the Palestinians, and India against Pakistan (Žižek, 2002: 125-6)? Žižek mentions one of Bush's speeches where he refers to a letter written by a seven-year-old girl whose father is a fighter pilot in Afghanistan. In the letter she says that even though she loves her father, she is ready to sacrifice him for his fatherland. The question is how we would react if we on TV saw an Arabic Muslim girl who, in front of the camera, claims that she will sacrifice her father in the war against America. We need not think too long to find out that the scene would be received as an expression of fundamentalism or a morbid form of propaganda. The Muslim fundamentalists can even exploit their own children without hesitation (Žižek, 2002: 43). This image of the child wanting

to save the country it cherishes is the depolitizing move *per se*. Who will argue with a small child untouched by the evils of the world, longing for nothing else than doing good? No wonder, Bush replayed the theme in his State of Union Address:

> Dear Beorge W. Bush. If there's anything you know, I, Ashley Pearson, age 10, can do to help anyone, please send e a letter and tell me what I can do to save our country' She added this P.S.: "If you can send a letter to the troops, please put, 'Ashley Pearson believes in you. (Bush, 2004)

On the one hand we have vulnerable children whose security is to be defended at all costs and on the other we have victims, collateral damage, which barely exists within public discourse. Why, then, the "information" on distant deaths caused by the "collateral damage" cannot leave a trace in the West's consciousness? Why has ours become a society that cannot question itself? Boltanski's *Distant Suffering* emphasizes that the relationship between morality and suffering is a political problem, a problem of action. Watching the suffering in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Westerners can be shocked but this does not need to have a consequence; the spectator may still refuse commitment. Considering that people can only consume a certain amount of horror at a time and that indifference to distant others is an easy option in a "war", commitment at a distance has a weak chance (see Boltanski, 1999: 10). If it takes place, however, there are two common forms of commitment: denunciation (e.g. finding indignation by denouncing the perpetrators of the horror) or sentimentalism: "resentment = denunciation + sentiment" (ibid. 132). But there is a third kind of commitment, by which one dares to cast eyes on the unfortunate and look at the evil without the imaginary benefits of denunciation and sentimentalism. This form of commitment, related to trust in the power of speech, is the only realistic basis for political action informed by morality. Pity can be a political issue only through engagement (Ibid. 186). Hence the contemporary crisis of pity in the shadow of fundamentalisms.

> That is the true meaning of Hiroshima. Ground-zero haunts us not because we feel guilt about it but because we don't. Which is why, whenever we are traumatized, we repeat the psychological operation we perfected in Hiroshima in a progressive self-reification that we remain powerless to reverse as long as we refuse to internalize what actually happened on 8-6-45. (Davis, 2003: 130)

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