ETHNO-RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF OTHERNESS
*(*CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES)

MODULE 12. Identity under conditions of globalization

The presentation gives an overview of various theoretical approaches to identity, with a separate focus on the characteristics of Islamic identity. This identity is usually perceived as a menace to European values. The spread of such a notion generates fear, nourishes stereotypical images and prejudices, compounded by the problems arising from globalization. The understanding that radical Islam represents a policy for identification could explain why it is the second and third generation of European Muslims who become radicalized. Wedged between two cultures with which they cannot fully identify, these people find the universal ideology of contemporary Jihadism highly attractive.

While the financial disruptions have divided the EU into creditor and debtor countries, thus creating a split between North and South, the migrant wave brought back a split between East and West. Brussels describes this as a lack of solidarity, but it is rather a clash between different kinds of solidarities: national, ethnic and religious loyalties are in conflict with our duty to other human beings. Many countries in Europe today are marked by social inequality, poverty, breakdown of communities and rising nationalism and xenophobia. The social climate is dominated by fear of the unforeseeable future, and loss of shared values and a shared vision of the future.

Identity as we understand it simply did not exist in medieval Europe. If you were a peasant, growing up in the outskirts of Geneva, Saxony or somewhere in the English Midlands in the year 1500, you didn't worry what your identity was because your identity was completely ascribed to you by your surrounding society, including what your religion was, who you would marry, what your work would be, and under whose sovereignty you fell. These were not decisions that any individual could take for himself or herself. Therefore, the question "Who am I? Who am I really?" never came up for people in this period.

Recognition is extremely important with regard to identity: it is not enough to say, "who am I?" as an inward question unless other people inter-subjectively recognize my

identity and my dignity as I understand it, as – for example – a Ukrainian or as an African-American. Therefore, the struggle for identity is inherently a political act. This is a point that the philosopher Hegel understood well. His philosophy of history held that history itself is driven by the struggle for recognition, by the desire of human beings to have their fundamental dignity recognized by other human beings, and that modern democracy emerges when equal dignity – and not only the dignity of the master – is achieved (Fukuyama 2011).

The twentieth century obviously saw tremendous excesses of nationalism, and the European project was put in place by wise people in recognition of the fact that August 1914 had in some way signaled the end of European civilization: the glorious European civilization of the nineteenth century. Europe could not survive after two horrific World Wars unless – as Jürgen Habermas put it – Europeans moved into a post-national identity. In Europe, the discussion and the promotion of national identity at the level of individual countries became a very politically incorrect subject. Germans were not encouraged to wave German flags at football matches and the like. But it also made inappropriate the idea of nation-building itself on a pan-European level. This is an issue that has now come back to haunt the European Union (Habermas 2001).

Olivier Roy argues that traditional religiosity in Muslim countries is very particularistic. That is to say: your religious identity is ascribed to you; it is not something that is freely chosen. It is a product of your local mosque, family and environment; you have no choice over your choice of religion. What begins to happen with urbanization in Muslim countries and particularly with immigration by people from that part of the world to non-Muslim countries is what Olivier Roy calls the "de-territorialisation of Islam" (Roy 2004). Especially for Muslim immigrants or their children living in non-Muslim countries, the question of identity comes to haunt them in a particularly acute way. They are not living in a society that prescribes a very specific role to religion - one that defines their social role, that tells them who they can marry and how they need to behave. And it is for that reason you have what Emile Durkeim called the phenomenon of anomie. You lose contact with the norms that governed social life – the life of your parents or grandparents – and all of a sudden you are put into a new situation: "What is *haram* or *halal*?", because there has never been a precedent for it back in Morocco or in Pakistan. It is in this context that radical Islam may fill a certain vacuum, because Al Qaeda and other sophist preachers can pose an answer to the question: "Who am I?" They can tell people in this situation in immigrant communities: you are not a traditional Muslim, you are not practicing the Islam of your forefathers nor are you

accepted by the society into which you have immigrated. What your real identity is – is a much purer and more universal form of Islam: you are a member of an umma, an enormous community that stretches all the way from Tangier to Indonesia. That is who you are. It is a more abstract form of Islam and has tremendous appeal, particularly to second- and third-generation Muslims who are no longer rooted in the localized Sufism or saint worship that characterized the religion of their parents, and who do not feel accepted by the European society in which they have been living. This leads to what Olivier Roy describes as the protestanization of Islam because – for this group of people – Islam is no longer a social norm imposed by the outside society; it is something that one believes on the inside. When the rest of the secular society around them does a lot of forbidden things, it is really an internal belief that makes one a Muslim. And this may explain why recruitment into extremist groups has been particularly strong among second-generation Muslims in Europe (Fukuyama 2011).

One of hardest tasks "subsidiarized" to the municipalities by globalization processes is tackling the heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and all together multi-cultural composition of living-and-working space: the result of massive migration triggered by the globalized spread of modernization notorious for its intense production of "redundant people", whom their native lands can't or wouldn't, for one reason or another, to accommodate. There were three different phases in the history of modern-era migration:

The first wave of migration followed the logic of the tri-partite syndrome: territoriality of sovereignty, 'rooted' identity, gardening posture (subsequently referred to, for the sake of brevity, as TRG). That was the emigration from the 'modernized' centre (read: the site of order-building and economic-progress - the two main industries turning out, and off, the growing numbers of 'wasted humans'), partly exportation and partly eviction of up to 60 million people, a huge amount by nineteenth century standards, to 'empty lands' (read: lands whose native population could be struck off the 'modernizers' calculations; be literally uncounted and unaccounted for, presumed either non-existent or irrelevant). Residual natives who survived the massive slaughters and massive epidemics had been cast by the immigrants from "modernized" countries as objects of "white man's civilizing mission";

The second wave of migration could be best conceptualized as an "Empire emigrates back" case. In the course of retraction and dismantling of colonial empires, a number of indigenous people in various stages of "cultural evolution" followed their colonial superiors to the metropolis. Upon arrival, they were cast in the only worldview-strategic mould available: one constructed and practiced earlier in the nation-building era to deal with the

categories earmarked for "assimilation": a process aimed at the annihilation of cultural difference, placing 'minorities' at the receiving end of cultural crusades, *Kulturkämpfe* and proselytizing missions (currently renamed, for the sake of "political correctness", as "citizenship education" aimed at "integration"). This story is not yet finished: time and again, its echoes reverberate in the declarations of intent of politicians, notorious for their inclination to follow the habits of Minerva's Owl, known to spread its wings by the end of the day. After the pattern of the first phase of migration, the drama of the "empire migrating back" is occasionally tried, though in vain, to be squeezed into the frame of the now out-ated TRG (territory, roots, gardeners strategy) syndrome;

The third wave of modern migration, now in full force and still gathering momentum, leads however into the age of *diasporas*: a world-wide archipelago of ethnic/ religious/linguistic settlements - oblivious to the trails blazed and paved by the imperialist-colonial episode and following instead the globalization-induced logic of the planetary redistribution of life resources. Diasporas are scattered, diffused, extend over many nominally sovereign territories, ignore the hosts' claims to the supremacy of local demands and obligation, are locked in the double (or multiple) bind of "dual (or multiple) nationality" and dual (or multiple) loyalty. The present-day migration differs from the two previous phases by moving both ways (virtually all countries, including Britain, are nowadays simultaneously 'immigrant' and 'emigrant'), and privileging no routes (routes are no longer determined by the imperial/colonial links of the past). It differs also in exploding the old TRG syndrome and replacing it with a EAH one (extraterritoriality elbowing out territorial fixation of identities, 'anchors' displacing the 'roots' as primary tools of identification, hunter's strategy replacing the gardener posture) (Bauman 2011).

The new migration casts a question mark upon the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, neighbourhood and belonging. Jonathan Rutherford, acute and insightful observer of the fast changing frames of human togetherness, notes that the residents of the street in London on which he lives form a neighbourhood of different communities, some with networks extending only to the next street, others which stretch across the world. It is a neighbourhood of porous boundaries in which it is difficult to identify who belongs and who is an outsider. What is it we belong to in this locality? What is it that each of us calls home and, when we think back and remember how we arrived here, what stories do we share?

European identity is problematic because the whole European project was founded on an anti-national identity basis. It was intended to get beyond the national selfishness and antagonisms that characterized twentieth century European politics. And therefore, there was a belief that there would be a new universal European identity that would supplant the old identities of being Italian, German or French. But it was also the case that these old identities never disappeared. The ghosts of these old identities really became a problem with the influx of immigrants and the growth of immigrant communities that did not necessarily share traditional European values. What terrorist violence did was to suggest to these people that there are those in the community that do not share basic values that we have grown up with – that they were fundamentally hostile and willing to use violence in order to undermine that sense of community. Therefore, the question of identity and national identity, "What is it that you owe to the community that you live in?" comes to the fore.

There is a deeper failure at the European level – a failure in European identity. That is to say, there was never a successful attempt to create a European sense of identity, and a European sense of citizenship that would define the obligations, responsibilities, duties and rights that Europeans have to one another beyond simply the wording of the different treaties that were signed. The EU – in many respects – was created as a technocratic exercise for the purposes of economic efficiency. What we can see now is that economic and post-national values are not enough to really buy into this community together. So, wealthy Germans feel that they have got a sense of noblesse oblige towards poorer Germans; this social solidarity is the basis of the German welfare state. But they do not feel similar obligations towards the Greeks, whom they regard as being ill-disciplined, very non-German in their general approach to fiscal matters - and therefore, they feel no obligation to take care of them. So there is no solidarity in that broader European sense. (Fukuyama 2011).

Many (most?) observers doubt the feasibility of begetting, cultivating, honing and entrenching a "European identity" – a political identity, not to mention the spiritual – and score low the chances of that effort being seriously undertaken, let alone successfully completed. The sceptics don't believe in the viability of a 'post-national' democracy, or any democratic political entity above the level of the nation – insisting that the allegiance to civic and political norms would not replace "ethno-cultural ties", that went down in history under the name of "nationalism". Jürgen Habermas, arguably the most consistent and the most authoritative spokesman for the opposition to that kind of scepticism, points out however that a democratic order does not inherently need to be mentally rooted in "the nation" as a pre-

political community of shared destiny. The strength of the democratic constitutional state lies precisely in its ability to close the holes of social integration through the political participation of its citizens (Habermas 2001: 76). The essential features of human solidarity need an *institutional* framework of opinion-building and will-formation. European Union aims (and moves – even if infuriatingly slowly, haltingly, sometimes in a one-step-forward-two-steps-back manner) towards a rudimentary or embryonic form of such institutional framework - encountering on its way, as most obtrusive obstacles, the political establishments of existing nation-states and their reluctance to part with whatever is left of their once fully-fledged sovereignty.

"To live with the Other, live as the Other's Other, is the fundamental human task – on the most lowly and the most elevated levels alike… Hence perhaps the particular advantage of Europe, which could and had to learn the art of living with others". In Europe like nowhere else, "the Other" has been and is always close, in sight and at hand's stretch; metaphorically or even literally, the Other is a next door neighbour – and Europeans can't but negotiate the terms of that neighbourliness despite the alterity and the differences that set them apart. The European setting marked by "the multilingualism, the close neighbourhood of the Other, and equal value accorded to the Other in a space tightly constrained" could be seen as a school, from which the rest of the world may well carry out crucial knowledge and skills making the difference between survival and demise. To acquire and share the art of learning from each other is, in Gadamer's view, "the task of Europe" (Gadamer 1989).

To put it in the nutshell, Europe invented *global* solutions to *locally* produced problems – but having invented them and practised for a couple of centuries Europe forced in the end all other parts of humanity to seek, desperately yet to no avail, *local* solutions to the *globally* produced problems. The future of *political* Europe hangs on the fate of European *culture*. Europe's currently composed heritage to the world's future is its (far from perfect, yet relentlessly growing) capacity to live, permanently and beneficially, with cultural difference: profitably to all sides not *despite* their differences, but *thanks* to them. Europe can offer to the globalized planet its know-how of reaching unity while leaving ossified antagonisms behind, its experience in devising and cultivating the sentiment of solidarity, the idea of shared interest and the image of a shared mission – not through the denigration of cultural variety and not with intention to smother it, but through its promotion to the rank of uncontested value and with the intention to protect it and cultivate. Europe has learned (and goes on learning) the art of transforming cultural differentiation from a handicap to cohabitation into

its asset – an art which our planet needs more than any other art, a genuine *meta*-art, the art whose possession enables the development and acquisition of all the rest of the life-saving and life-sustaining arts. Five centuries or so of Europe's early history, to many observers its most magnificent era, the growing segment of Europe lived inside the protective shield of Pax Romana, where equal, unqualified sum-total of citizenship rights was granted to the population of every newly conquered/admitted country, while the statues of its gods were added, no questions asked, to the Roman Pantheon, thereby assuring the continuous growth in the number and versatility of divinities guarding the integrity and so also the prosperity of Roman Empire. That Roman tradition of respect for the otherness of the other and of the state thriving-through-variety (that is, achieving citizens' solidarity thanks to, not despite their differences) was not however continually observed throughout European history (Bauman 2011).

Whereas the emergent absolutist states in the West of geographical Europe were engaged in many decades of gory, devastating and seeds-of-hereditary-enmity-sowing religious wars, leading to the Westphalia settlement allocating to every ruler full right to coerce by hook and by crook his own religious (and so, by proxy, cultural) choices on the ruled, a large chunk of Europe east of Elbe managed however to escape the trend. That part of Europe stood up for its religious (and so, in substance, cultural *avant la léttre*) tolerance and communal autonomy. A star example of such alternative was Polish/Lithuanian "Res publica of Both Nations", generous in the rights of cultural self-governments and identity self-preservation lavished on its innumerable ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities – and escaping thereby the iniquities, bloodshed and other multiple horrors of religious wars that pulled the western part of Europe apart and covered it with spiritual wounds that took centuries to heal. This tradition, however, was to be brought abruptly to an end with the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian fortress of tolerance by its voracious neighbours – the dynastic empires.

We, Europeans, are facing today, in the emergent era of diasporas, the prospect of Europe being transformed into a steadily widening and lengthening "belt of mixed population". Unlike the previous direction of pendulum, this present process is not (state)power-assisted; quite on the contrary, state powers try as much as they can to slow down the process or grind it to a halt altogether – but the capacity at their disposal is ever more evidently much short of what stemming the tide of the fast and unstoppable globalization of inter-human dependence would require. This is precisely the context in which

the prospects of Europe as a political and cultural entity, and the exact location of Europe's "centre", need to be deliberated and debated (Bauman 2011).

To be continued...

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