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**A NON-FICTIONAL APPROACH TO CURRENT MASS MEDIA:
ASYMMETRY BETWEEN VIOLENCE, RELIGION AND CULTURE**

**GÜNCEL KİTLE İLETİŞİM ARAÇLARINA KURGUSAL OLMAYAN BİR
YAKLAŞIM:
ŞİDDET, DİN VE KÜLTÜR ARASINDAKİ BAKIŞIMSIZLIK**

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ABSTRACT

In public discourse, the two typically different concepts “religion” and “violence” are frequently used nowadays in the same context through the agency of mass media. As a result of this process, religion and violence seem so indisputably intertwined that even questioning this combination can be considered meaningless. The conceptual or perceptive connections between religion, violence and mass media as main guiding elements of human perception are illustrated and accordingly discussed in this paper. The perception is managed in such a manner that even intrinsically and ontologically a peace generating institution like religion can smoothly be put and mentioned together with its antonyms such as violence through the medium of mass media. In fact, these two concepts should form the two opposite ends of a dichotomy. However, in this case, the binary opposition concerned is transformed cunningly into the singularity, in which religion is directly equated with violence and terror and vice versa, in which violence and terror can be mentioned in the same breath as religion. The decisive role of mass media in this transformation process is also critically discussed by taking thought control into account. In this respect, probable functions of the use of hard and soft power are brought to the fore in order to exert thought and action control whilst manufacturing necessary consent or dissent.

Keywords: *Religion, Violence, Mass Media, Terror, Culture, Thought Control, Soft and Hard Power*

ÖZ

Kamusal söylemde, tipik olarak birbirinden farklı iki kavram olan "din" ve "şiddet", kitle iletişim araçları vasıtasıyla günümüzde sıklıkla aynı bağlamda kullanılmaktadır. Bu sürecin bir sonucu olarak, din ve şiddet o kadar tartışılmaz bir

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biçimde iç içe geçmiş görünmektedir ki, bu birlikteliği sorgulamak bile anlamsız bir eylem olarak değerlendirilebilmektedir. İnsan algısının ana yönlendirici unsuru olarak din, şiddet ve kitle iletişim araçları arasındaki kavramsal veya algısal bağlantılar, bu makalede gösterilmekte ve bu doğrultuda tartışılmaktadır. Algı öyle bir biçimde yönetilmektedir ki, din gibi özünde ve ontolojik olarak barış üreten bir kurum bile kitle iletişim araçları vasıtasıyla şiddet gibi zıt anlamlılarıyla sorunsuz bir biçimde yan yana getirilebilmekte ve anılabilmektedir. Aslında, bu iki kavramın, bir dikotominin iki zıt ucunu oluşturması gerekir. Ancak, bu durumda, söz konusu ikili karşıtlık kurnazca, dinin doğrudan şiddet ve terörle eşitlendiği ve tam tersinin yani şiddet ve terörün de din ile birlikte bir solukta anılabildiği tekilliğe dönüştürülmektedir. Kitle iletişim araçlarının bu dönüşüm sürecindeki belirleyici rolü, düşünce denetimi de dikkate alınarak, eleştirel bir biçimde tartışılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, gerekli rızayı ya da itirazı üretirken, düşünce ve eylem denetimi uygulamak için sert ve yumuşak güç kullanımının olası işlevleri ön plana çıkarılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Din, Şiddet, Kitle İletişim Araçları, Terör, Kültür, Düşünce Denetimi, Sert ve Yumuşak Güç*

1. Introduction

Mass media has become an undeniably significant social force in the 21st century as a result of rapid advancements in communication technology. It plays a crucial role in guiding people's beliefs, norms, principles, values and actions. In this regard, one can observe easily that mass media can execute soft violence (power) in particular by means of propaganda, if any social, cultural or ethnic group is at target, as a result of the force that it gained in a society of which members are generally not trained to show resistance (cf. Güleç, 2019: 498). As a matter of fact, mass media is one of the most important social elements in a modern democracy. Therefore, it is considered as the fourth social force (Öymen, 2014: 11).

In a modern democratic society, the media fulfills the function of keeping people informed in an unbiased manner of current developments in the world, so that the same people can make right choices regarding public problems waiting on the agenda to be handled. Independent as well as critical and objective media are a *sine qua non* for this kind of ideal atmosphere. However, reaching out to alternative ideas and knowledge by the masses has somehow always been a serious problem throughout the history of mankind. The power, that was accumulated around a person or group has perpetually filtered anything new that found an open access to the understanding of the human masses under the threatening motto "knowledge is power". Rivals who have obtained knowledge are dangerous, as they are potentially shifting the present paradigm.

Censorship is one of the most frequently used techniques for blocking and controlling freedom in the media. States may stop the free flow of ideas in the press or in mass media in general. Social or political pressure or maybe sometimes the use of force is a kind of censorship, that can create an obstacle to disseminating independent news, ideas and

knowledge. Guiding is a special kind of thought control in which the media places stress on purpose and specifically on those aspects of an incident so that the “other unwanted” features and contents of the happening may remain on the dark side. Therefore, the attention of readers / listeners / watchers can be kept on and guided through the highlighted side of that incident. It is such an interesting case to see that receivers of that kind of news never take time to question or investigate the dark side of the message. Thus, censorship, pressure and guidance (or manipulation) are three major methods of controlling human thought.

It would not be something special to suggest that in the 21st century thoughts will be controlled in a much more sophisticated manner than the abovementioned methods. A neurocognitive intervention can yield a frightening perspective on controlling the human mind externally by means of an internal neurophysical touch. This way or another, it is clear that the media serves national or cultural interests in one particular country or in many countries. It behaves as if it is the spokesman of the administration of that particular country and exerts tremendous pressure on the countries on target. When public opinion in a given country should be influenced and manipulated, then media actors in that country are at firsthand transferred and embedded into this propaganda machine.

After two world wars, instability on western labor markets stimulated cheap manpower migration particularly to Western European countries. (cf. Saraçlı, 2019: 131). In soft violence, words or language in general are specifically used as weapons in order to put pressure on a group at target and to keep the group concerned under systematic control.

This paper deals with the constructed relation between religion and violence; and within this process the role of the media in guiding and controlling thoughts in a so-called free, democratic western society. It discusses possible causes of that outcome and proposes that a guiding-free approach is much more effective in constructing a trustworthy administration in the long run than a complex behavior of guiding and controlling led by fear of power loss.

2. Violence versus religion

Theologian William Cavanaugh gives a brief description in his lecture¹ about his book on religious violence, in which he elaborated on the problematic issue of whether religion causes violence or not. Cavanaugh argues extensively that religious violence is actually a myth. However, in the introduction to the lecture concerned, Liesbeth Jansen explains that religion and violence are indisputably intertwined concepts, so even questioning this dual amalgam seems rather preposterous. As an argument, she mentions the historical and actual existence of Holy Wars, Crusades, Al Kaida, Islamic State and other killings in the name of God, in such that the fact that religion is intrinsically prone to violence seems to

¹ William Cavanaugh gave this lecture entitled “Does religion cause violence? The myth of religious violence” on the 17th of November 2022, at Radboud University, Nijmegen (The Netherlands) in the framework of lecture series Radboud Reflects; please watch the lecture concerned on YouTube. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j25qqee61KE>).

be an indisputable and inevitable truth. At that point, Cavanaugh brings to the fore that this type of reasoning and thinking can lead us to the formation of a myth, which obstructs our access to the immediate truth.

He mentions in this context the dichotomy between religious and secular, in which ISIS, 9/11, the Paris attacks, the Crusades, the Inquisition, January 6th, 2021 attempted coup in the United States (the Capitol riot), Hindu nationalist attacks on Christians and Buddhist anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar are on the religious side and politics, economics, nationalism, marxism and atheism are the conceptual categories in the secular distinction. Whether religion causes any violence was reacted to as if it were a redundant question by his audience in his lectures, because a general public tendency tells us that religion does, of course, cause violence.

According to Cavanaugh, some people tried to deny this issue by saying that violence is really economic, political and not of religious source. He believes that this statement is not true, as we can easily trace its truth value in what members of ISIS are saying. It may be argued that Crusaders are not real Christians and members of ISIS are not really Muslims. However, Cavanaugh still thinks that these arguments do not work either, because descriptively or empirically Christians and Muslims cannot excuse their fellow believers, while they perhaps normatively can. He believes that it is true that people use violence in the name of any religion, which he thinks it is indisputable. In this context, Cavanaugh points out that there is a common notion that religion causes predominantly violent behavior in comparison to all other concepts that are not religious. Thus, at the end of the day, it all comes down to the dichotomy between religion and secularism. This duality puts Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Daoism in the column “religious”, while it places politics, economics, nationalism, marxism, atheism, liberalism and capitalism in the other column, which is “secular”. In this setting, Cavanaugh argues that religious concepts are much more frequently associated with violence with respect to those that are secular, because secular issues are more earthly affairs than heavenly or spiritual ones, and because religious matters are absolutist, divisive and irrational, which causes them to be quickly considered violent.

However, one can easily argue that secular affairs too may cause similar problems, because they are absolutist, divisive and irrational as well. If we consider the description of the market in a capitalist economy as a sacred space, then we find ourselves immediately in an absolutist, divisive and irrational context. The artificial debt that grew out of the absolutist character of financial markets and the stock exchange (a debt manufacturing machine) can play at the same time a divisive role because it splits a society synthetically in two as rich and poor (i.e. as haves and have-nots) at the end of the day.

By the same token, we might also argue that it all is quite irrational due to the fact that it is based upon “a holy belief” that the debt that was already created is of a natural kind. As a matter of fact, a huge illusion makes the whole scene seem utterly rational and

natural. The same kind of arguments may be used for the marxism, communism or socialism –which all end obviously with an ism suffix-, as they all reduce the issue in practice to an absolutist, divisive and irrational narrow perspective at the end of the process. It is rather absolutist in the sense that they qualify social problems as oppression of the working class². It is divisive because it creates a different kind of dichotomy within any society based on workers and their employers, which yields a continuous tension between the layers of a society and it is rather deceptive or misleading to call it rational because first of all, something absolutist and divisive can hardly be rational. Also, it is as in religious miracles, expecting a layman or an unskilled worker to initiate a paradigm shift is an irrational act in which a proletarian social revolution could overthrow the hegemony of the governing elites of financial markets at the hands of working-class laborers. This is due to the vicious circle that is permanently producing non-finite debts³ as a result of the fiat monetary system⁴, which makes the change of roles in the setting impossible. While viewing all this from this perspective, capitalism remains a redundant and empty ideology. Thus, arguments for religion concerning being absolutist, divisive and irrational can be easily relativized in the same manner.

As Cavanaugh puts it rightly too, however, recent history presents us enough data to prove the inaccuracy of this classical religious violence⁵ versus secular ideology perspective, as approximately 40 million people (both civilians and military personnel) died under the direct effect of the First World War and its immediate violence. As we know well, the two world wars came to exist under the influence of nationalism, which is a secular ideology by nature. In this case, one can obviously observe that the nationalist, i.e. secular violence, goes far beyond any kind of religious violence. The idea that Cavanaugh brings to the fore in this matter is very remarkable. That includes if there is no force or anything above you that watches over and controls your actions (i.e. if you are an atheist) then you feel absolutely free to do anything you desire to do without any feeling of responsibility or guilt.

² The truth lies actually in the very meaning of this particular expression. If there is a working class, then there is naturally a non-working class too, as in slaves and their masters.

³ The term “non-finite” is specifically used here, as the subject of debts is indefinite, while the object who is burdened with those debts is very clear as a result of the fact that they are settled in time by those objects themselves.

⁴ *Fiat money* is a type of currency that is issued by national governments. This industrial and financial medium of fungibility is not usually backed by a true value or commodity such as gold. This monetary system provides central banks all over the world with huge controlling and decisive power over the overall economy of a country, because they can determine how much money (read the word “money” here as debt) will be printed (or made up) for industrial and financial circulation. Henry Ford once said concerning the overwhelming position of the current system: *“It is well enough that the people of the nation do not understand our banking and monetary system, for if they did, I believe there would be a revolution before tomorrow morning.”* (from: *Introducing The Modern Bank*, by Luke Chittock, October 4, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/migombank>, downloaded on August 17, 2023).

⁵ The specific question that was used in this subject by Cavanaugh is: “Who has killed more people over the last hundred years? Muslims or atheists?”. This example reveals the cover term “religious violence”, which in fact insinuates “the terror that is produced by Muslims in particular” apart from other religious communities.

In this context, Cavanaugh is citing Christopher Hitchens from an atheistic perspective by expressing that religion poisons everything in social life. According to Hitchens, totalitarian regimes are intending to attain human perfection, which is again in its turn a religious impulse and he reckons that marxism, North Korean and Soviet atheism as well as other violent things should be considered religion. In this vision, religion poisons everything, as everything that is violent has to do with something religious. There is no doubt that we find ourselves in complete conceptual confusion about what religion really is. Also, this kind of thinking pushes us inevitably into a full vicious circle, which creates the ancient chicken or egg paradox. In Hitchens' perspective, everything that is peaceful and non-violent ends up automatically on the secular side. In other words, everything that is problematic has something religious and everything that is good and useful has a secular character from this vantage point.

There are also views that describe politics and religion in a similar functional system. Thus, religion and politics both place the stress on the ultimate concerns of a community, which is then again constructed by both of them. Religion and politics generally make use of myths and symbols, which are embedded in standard protocols, procedures, repetitions and behavioral patterns. This approach equalizes the qualitative features of both religion and politics. And they may be side by side if we browse through the historical record of humanity, but they are fundamentally different from one another on an individual level. Religion is basically there to transform and improve individuals, while politics owes its existence to making societies more developed and prosperous in general. When there is only one individual, we cannot speak of the existence of politics. Somehow we should go up to the social level. However, when there is just one individual, we can still talk about the presence of any religious practices. In fact, when those practices begin to occur on a massive scale, one might observe some social tensions, problems and misunderstandings.

In other words, societies cannot interact with one another without the intervention of politics, but they can perfectly get along with each other without the supervision of religion, although historically speaking this was not the case. Interestingly enough, individuals can interrelate with each other in a more sustainable manner and for a longer time in the visible absence of the effects of religion and politics. Because religion may or may not be performed at a communal level, it is an individual practice in an absolute sense and politics is in fact the art of creating a certain perception through bending the truth. Thus, politics and religion do not match structurally with one another. However, in historical perspective they both formed a firm ground of existence and support for one another. Therefore, current discussions on topics such as religious violence, islamophobia etc. can be better understood and analyzed from this viewpoint.

Cavanaugh puts forth a comparison for consideration along the confused assertions of Jürgensmeyer regarding the relation of anything that is violent with religion. Secular nationalism, like religion, adopts "a doctrine of destiny", fatality in such a worse manner than religion that one can easily assert that secular nationalism is also a religion ("the

secular is a sort of advanced form of religion”). This kind of postulate, however, shoots itself clearly in the foot, as they get the dichotomy secular-religious destroyed by their own hand while they were initially trying to demonstrate how bad religious matters were and how good secular issues were for a society.

As a matter of fact, these arguments indicate clearly that religion as a social institution has a huge army of enemies in modern societies. The situation is so severe in such a grade that even totally unrelated concepts with religion can have such an ascribed status as long as they contain bad qualities. Because any person can tell without any effort that secular nationalism does not have anything to do with religion in the classical sense. In this regard, we can easily notice a serious and deliberate attack on religion as an institution. It seems that anything that has gained a political tone by being the central theme of public discourse, can be put on target and be considered bad and detrimental. And these qualities can, of course, be perfectly accompanied by violence, if one wants to demonstrate a particularly vile profile of something that is not loved.

Cavanaugh argues correctly about the impossibility of an exact definition of the concept of religion. When we consider religion as a belief with the concept of god in the center of that belief system, we see Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. clearly on the column religion, while other types of belief systems such as Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism take place on the column secular together with politics, economics, nationalism, atheism, marxism, atheism and capitalism as belief systems without any god. However, Cavanaugh is again right in describing the same phenomena from a different angle: when the same distinction is made on the basis of another criterion such as being transcendent or not transcendent, then the distribution of the phenomena under the dichotomy religious-secular will be different again. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, nationalism and marxism will fall under the column religious/transcendent⁶, whereas atheism, capitalism, liberalism, politics and economics will be under the umbrella of secular/not transcendent. Even this enterprise indicates clearly that belief systems are hard to keep separate on the basis of the concepts of religious and secular, because both of them are grounded in various kinds of faith. Only the religious gets more arrows of criticism over itself, because it contains issues, that are mainly not mundane. If an ideology (it does not matter whether it is religious, secular, transcendent or not) exerts coercive power at the communal level, then it should inevitably produce violence, because it aims at absolute dominance over any population.

⁶ Even though nationalism is placed here under the rubric of religion, Cavanaugh knows well how to differentiate specifically between the concepts under the same column. He gives an interesting example in this context: “Is there any good reason why people are more likely to kill for a god than kill for a nation? Even in the United States you will still find very few people that will kill for Jesus, but everybody assumes that you can kill for your country and that is a necessary and laudable thing to do”. Would that make any difference with regard to the discussion around the concept of violence? No, but that would surely make it, as far as the dichotomy between nationalism and religion is concerned. Thus, ideologies and institutions such as nationalism and capitalism can inspire just as much violence, which can then destroy the abovementioned dichotomy of religious/transcendent and secular/not transcendent.

In our times, the tension between ideology and violence pays the price for the weak link in the chain, which is the religion as a belief structure within a cultural system. Nowadays, religion is used in some cases as a scapegoat or a trash can in order to get rid of anything that is undesirable or negative. Cavanaugh pushes this issue to the extreme by quoting Richard Wentz, who considers Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, consumerism, secular humanism, football fanaticism, faith in technology and all things about which people care, as concepts in the column religion. This categorical expansion leaves the secular column totally blank. There is almost nothing significant left to be put in the column secular. This particular approach of Wentz makes obviously a caricature out of the distinction between religious and secular. Again, this step seems to be a sort of gimmick to give religion a bad name by qualifying anything that has a problematic aspect as something religious. That consumerism and football fanaticism have both religious roots, puts readers through a peculiar kind of enlightenment.

In his lecture, Cavanaugh quotes quite appropriately the statement of a business school director who was interviewed in the New York Times. This dean replied to a question such as: “Why do free markets work always better than state control?” with “I believe that premise is a matter of religious faith”. Cavanaugh perceives this statement as functionalists would have interpreted it. However, he somehow does not take into account the probability that both free markets and state control can be quite illusionary and superfluous concepts. They may be in fact such dynamic and changeable categories that they may swap their qualities as in “free control” and “state market”, which can have an immediate consequence on the very structure of the economy. In this scenario, the so-called free market controls everything on the podium of the economy, while the state prepares all suitable conditions so that the free market runs every phase smoothly.

Cavanaugh determines quite accurately that the myth of religious violence fails, because the divide between something religious and something secular is constructed in different ways, places and times according to the interests of those who are doing the construction. Then he gives a brief historical account of the symbiosis of religion and politics by stating that the head of state was, in historical perspective, also the head of the people’s belief, for which he gives the caesar of the Roman Empire. He also argues, on the basis of a vast literature on the topic, that religion as a discrete category of human activity separate from culture, politics etc. is an invention of the modern west and that the division between religious and secular in the medieval era was a distinction between two different Catholic priests. According to him, the current struggle between church and modern state is due to the war of power between the old authority i.e. the church and the new rising hegemony of the nation-state as a new prominent player in the modern political game.

Cavanaugh puts forward that between the 15th and 17th centuries religion was invented in the west as a universal interior private impulse, that is essentially separate from politics and other secular concerns and so henceforth the church’s proper area of concern would be something marginalized from politics. He adds as well that this is a result of the long struggle between church and state. In the abovementioned centuries, the west underwent

a tremendous religious and cultural tumult, which resulted in a massive revolt across Europe against the exaggerated power of the church. In this period, Europe was torn apart by the religious conflict that divided the Catholic Church in two. Nevertheless, the presence of the church and the Christian faith was diminished in European social life. Only the absolute power of the Pope and the Vatican⁷ was seriously questioned by the leaders of this religious revolt. This uproar had certainly put the positions of almost all church leaders under scrutiny. However, it did not change the value and importance of faith in the eyes of ordinary people. In other words, atheism was not even an issue in those times and it is obviously the product of late modern times, e.g. the 20th century. Also, the very existence of Christian democratic political parties in our times can be taken into account when we think about the aforementioned postulates of Cavanaugh. In a nutshell, it can be said that not the religion itself as an institution of faith was interrogated by people who ran riot in the period concerned, but the very representation of the religion or faith.

Cavanaugh carries on with his discussion by stating that the religious-secular distinction was subsequently exported to the rest of the world through the process of colonization. European explorers had reported that the natives had no religion at all. After European colonization, religion became a powerful tool for the control of native cultures, as something totally different from the handling of government. In the case of India, Cavanaugh qualifies to be Indian as being private and to be British as being public. This particular qualification takes, of course, all religious and cultural features with itself. Therefore, this approach insinuates noticeably that assimilation practices begin by means of some manipulations of conceptual perception.

The assertion of Masuzawa, which includes that “the concept of religion as a general, transcultural phenomenon is clearly groundless; it came from nowhere and there is no credible way of demonstrating its factual and empirical substantiality”, is subject to the criticism of Cavanaugh. He argues that religion is not groundless and that it came from Western Europe with its social, political and economic benefits for the colonizers. What is also important in what Cavanaugh brings to the fore is that the religious-secular distinction is used in westernized⁸ societies to marginalize certain kinds of beliefs and practices and authorize others. The question of why this distinction is so widespread in western societies, even if it is inconsistent, is answered by Cavanaugh with the statement that it is convenient in both domestic and foreign policy. According to him, religion was a unifying element in domestic issues (for instance, in court cases in the United States) until the second world war (till the 1940s) and from that date on it was considered divisive factor in society.

⁷ Consider in this case, for instance, the 6th thesis of Martin Luther: “The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring and showing that it has been remitted by God; or, to be sure, by remitting guilt in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in these cases were disregarded, the guilt would certainly remain unforgiven.”

⁸ It is also significant here to note the word choice of Cavanaugh. He does not say “in western societies”, but instead he uses the term “westernized societies”, which comprise countries geographically and mentally outside the western culture, but yet within the influence sphere of the western culture.

The refusal of Jehovah's Witnesses to salute the national flag of the United States based on religious arguments had been a matter of national cohesion. Thus, by the tribunal's decision they should be forced to pay tribute to the national symbols. Their dissent endangered the promotion of national cohesion and national unity was back then the basis of national security. In this case again, religion was patently the troublemaker and its antidote was evidently national unity and nationalism. As a result of this refusal, Jehova's Witnesses as a separate religious group (minority) underwent a lot of pressure and torture to get down on their knees in front of the coercive power of nationalism.

Quite remarkably, however, Cavanaugh points out that the religion was then again found guilty of all harassment and punishment but not nationalism itself. He gives an example from Martin Marty by pronouncing that it became obvious that religion carries risks, can be perceived by others as dangerous and religion can cause all kinds of trouble in the public arena. For Marty, saluting a piece of cloth cannot be counted as religion, but refusing to do so can be seen as religion (cf. relativity and psychological apostasy in human perception). Thus, religion is what one does not want to do what is generally desired in a society⁹. If a religious minority refuses to do what the majority in a society usually does, then one puts the blame first on religion and secondly that minority is found guilty by the majority and the official administration. The analysis of Cavanaugh is very meaningful and accurate here:

“religion is in this case the dangerous thing, even though it is here the Jehova's witnesses that have suffered the violence rather than perpetrated it. So the myth draws attention away from nationalist violence towards something else... If you invoke God in patriotic sense then it is not religion and if you invoke God in other contexts then it is religion... and that brings me finally to foreign policy; the conventional wisdom helps justify western attitudes towards the non-western world, especially Muslims, right? We are peaceful and secular and our violence is rational; they mix religion and politics and therefore they are irrational and dangerous and so our violence is peace-making, their violence is bad and so regrettably we find ourselves forced to bomb them into democracy, whatever we try to bomb them into, right?.. Hitchens was for example an enthusiastic supporter of Iraq war: 'I think the enemies of civilization should be beaten and killed and defeated and I don't make any apologies for it' and for Hitchens the Iraq war was part of a broader war for secularism... and we can't rest until the rest of the world has been converted to secularism by force if necessary. Fellow new atheist Sam Harris' book *The End of Faith* (this award-winning book remained 33 weeks on The New York Times Best Seller list) uses the same double standard; he condemns religious torture of witches, but he provides an argument for torturing terrorists and he says: 'There is no talking to some people, (meaning religious people)... War is what we and other Western powers are bound to attempt, at an even greater cost to ourselves and innocents abroad, elsewhere in the Muslim world. We will continue to spill blood in what is, at bottom, a war of ideas'. Religious people hold irrational beliefs, so you can't talk to them, you can only coerce them. So the myth of religious violence comes with a justification for violence...”.

This approach by Cavanaugh makes it clear that those who perpetually complain about religious violence are in fact themselves the true advocates of violence. While explaining

⁹ This case reminds us of the famous formulation of Jean Jacques Rousseau concerning freedom: “The freedom of mankind does not lie in the fact that we can do what we want, but that we do not have to do that which we do not want” (<https://graciousquotes.com/jean-jacques-rousseau/>).

the problem with Islam, Harris tries hard to justify violence, which he makes it look like a tool in daily use: "...There is little possibility of our having a cold war with an Islamist regime armed with long-range nuclear weapons... In such a situation, the only thing likely to ensure our survival may be a nuclear first strike of our own. Needless to say, this would be an unthinkable crime -as it would kill tens of millions of innocent civilians in a single day- but it may be the only course of action available to us, given what Islamists believe.". Before going over the use of nuclear weapons, Harris finds some form of benign dictatorship necessary to function as a suitable transition phase. He underlines that benignity is the decisive factor here. If it cannot come out of the self-structure of a state, it must be imposed upon all citizens from the outside of that state. According to Harris, the instruments of such obtrusion are necessarily rudimentary and they come down to economic isolation, military intervention (whether open or covert) or a combination of both. If there is anybody who says that this is an extremely conceited method to adopt, one should react by saying that we apparently do not have any alternatives. The lack of alternatives leads one to necessarily focus on one of the already presented methods and these methods (i.e. economic isolation, military intervention -whether open or covert- or a combination) are in fact certain forms of abstract or concrete violence.

Thus, as a matter of fact, Harris proposes to exert another kind of violence, torture, murder and mass destruction on (i.e. inhumane actions against) innocent people in order to get rid of the so-called religious violence. He is trying to solve a problem by causing a disaster and creating a much bigger problem. He is also humble enough to brag about his natural right to interfere with the internal affairs of sovereign states by helping a dictator rise to power or seize power in those states.

Cavanaugh is ironically describing the related book by Harris, which was on the best-seller book list, won a non-fiction award and was enthusiastically endorsed by academic superstars such as Alan Dershowitz, Richard Dawkins and Peter Singer. Cavanaugh tries to keep the balance towards the end of his lecture by clearly stating that he is not denying at all the virtues of freedom, free society, liberal thinking etc. or excusing the devices of other kinds of social orders. He is clearly pronouncing that the Taliban is bad, ISIS is bad, there is a new form of Christian nationalism in Russia and its imitators in Trump's orbit in the US are also bad. They are all dangerous movements. While stating clearly that such actions in Islam and Christianity simply cannot be excused from responsibility, he poses a significant question:

"Were the Russians any less expansionist under atheist rule in the 20th century? Is Trumpism not less imperialistic than liberal American nationalism? What I am trying to do is to level the playing field so that we can examine the violence behind concepts such as *jihād*, *Russkiy mir* (Russian world or Pax Russica). But we also examine the violence that can be generated by ideologies of free markets, free elections; simply put, my argument is just that people kill for all sorts of things like money, flags, oil and freedom that function as gods in people's lives. So I want to challenge the religious-secular dichotomy, that causes us to turn a blind eye to secular forms of imperialism and violence and I want to challenge the idea that religious people have beliefs, but secular people have only facts, right? I think this puts Christians and Muslims at a disadvantage in western society... Violence feeds on the need

for enemies, it feeds on binaries; us versus them, and the myth of religious violence reinforces one of these binaries: religious is bad, secular is good. So, doing away with the myth of religious violence is one way of resisting such binaries and maybe turning some enemies into friends.”.

During this lecture, Cavanaugh discusses the content of his book about the myth of religious violence with Lucinda Dirven, Christoph Hübenthal and Martijn de Koning. Firstly, Lucinda Dirven agrees with Cavanaugh after his lucid explanation with regard to the fact that secular movements have also used violence in history. However, for Dirven it is of paramount importance to determine which one is more dangerous (religious or secular violence?). It seems as if Dirven had not paid sufficient attention to what Cavanaugh had underlined in his lecture. Metaphorically speaking, her response is similar to assessing the severity of a sickness: which one is more dangerous? A physical (read secular) or mental (read religious) illness? At its inception, it would be a wrong step to put all the blame directly on the human soul, when we try to decipher the nature of any sickness. Because mental discrepancies may cause physical disorders in the short and long run, just as a physical sickness may have an impact on the mental health of a person. Thus, originally, physical and mental disorders can both have an effect on each other and can turn into qualifications for each other.

As a solution to the religious-secular problem, Dirven suggests distinguishing between various types of religion and secular ideologies. Any classification between physical and mental phenomena may help us better understand various categories of sicknesses, but it would still be hard to know more about the ontogenesis and ontology of any sickness. The main question should be here: “What is sickness and how is its structure?”. By the same token: “What is violence and how is its structure?”. Whether it is a mental or physical illness, it destroys the focus on illness and shifts it away from the mind or body features of a person. This issue also touches upon the main problem in the science of medicine today. The cure in the health sector focuses on the remedy or removal of effects but not on the ontology of causes.

Whatever people find important with regard to their own interests becomes, in the process, a god for those people (money, flags, oil, power, authority, fame, glamour, glory etc.). Thus, we can detect in almost everything something related to the belief. Therefore, the amateurish question “which one is more dangerous?” becomes immediately redundant in this and other contexts. In his discussion with Dirven, Cavanaugh accepts that it is problematic to use broader terms like religion, politics, culture etc. Therefore, he suggests reducing the discussion to a specific place and time span to be able to get closer to the cause rather than the effect. Obviously, he touches on the heart of the issue here. According to him, it would be very useful and meaningful to scrutinize for instance the 18th-century Wahabist Islam in order to understand much better some problems in some Islamic communities today and that is where you get the origins of some seriously problematic conceptions of *jihad*.

Unfortunately, this serious and appropriate contribution of Cavanaugh does not suffice to meet the expectations of Dirven, who continues with her questions such as: “Is a religion with a clear doctrine that is advocating one particular way of looking at the world inherently more dangerous than a religion that does not do that?”. Evidently, it is crucial for Dirven to track down what is more dangerous. Cavanaugh disagrees with the idea that monotheistic religion is inherently intolerant. Dirven’s response, which includes that monotheistic religions can then be easily misused, has not been bought by Cavanaugh either. The broadness of this kind of argument makes it difficult to elaborate on related problems in order to find proper solutions. Dirven’s criticism with regard to the absolutism of religious paradigms is quite suitably put into perspective by Cavanaugh, who demonstrates that he is a genuine expert on these issues:

“... The standard sort of argument about absolutism is that if you believe in a god, then you have to do what that god tells you to do and that is inherently dangerous, right? But you can make the argument just on the reverse and say, atheism is inherently dangerous in much the same way, because if you don’t think that there is anything above you that’s stopping you from doing what you want, then if Stalin thinks that he is a god, then that can be just as prone to problems. The problem, in other words, what I am trying to get to is a theory of violence and not a theory of religious violence or secular violence. What is really problematic is violence, so theories about where violence comes from usually devolve on some of these sorts of questions like the tendency to create an us versus them, for example. Those seem to me fruitful sorts of arguments. Under what conditions do you get this kind of antagonistic us versus them, where you think that violence can happen. But trying to split up ideologies, institutions, religion, religious and secular around those questions seems very unhelpful.”

Cavanaugh reveals here absolutely the core of the whole discussion that has been going around the topic of religious violence. However, Dirven is drawing the discussion back over to the politics of state, that is governed by a monotheistic religion. If it is so, then it is difficult for that politics to correct itself, but at the same time, she agrees that there are secular systems that are difficult to correct and to discuss with. This point leads everybody in the hall to declare their love for democracy. Cavanaugh underlines how important it is for modern democratic societies to live in a state where we have separation of church and state (this is good for the state and for the church). But then again, the ongoing dissatisfaction of Dirven comes to the fore and she lets the cat out of the bag: “ So you completely agree with this then. But when we talk about the Muslim world, we can no longer say that it is maybe not a good idea that they have mixed up politics and religion there”. Even though Cavanaugh is a full-fledged expert on these issues, he knows how to keep himself modest and elegant when reacting to Dirven’s argument. As a mentally sound person, he naturally does not feel qualified to judge the way of life in other countries. He does not dare to even suggest (let alone order) that Muslims need to be more like people in western countries in order to have a functioning society. First of all, he probably knows the rule well: if you interfere with other people’s lives, then you automatically give them the right to impinge upon your own life system. The cliché that is used everywhere in the western world is to present two extreme examples (i.e. Canada and Iran) in order to highlight differences in life styles (a very secularized society and theocracy) between the western and Muslim worlds. Cavanaugh suggests that we can

possibly find examples in the middle of this spectrum with two extreme (opposing) ends, for instance, Morocco. At that moment, Dirven tries to keep the balance by declaring that “there are many secular systems as well in the Islamic world, of course, not the best examples nowadays, but (she is laughing) Syria, Iraq”. It is noteworthy that Türkiye with its modern, secular character, is not mentioned in this context. Linguistically speaking, it is interesting to describe countries as Islamic or as a part of the Islamic world and yet to qualify them simultaneously as having secular systems. It is also very remarkable to see that the discussion focuses only on the religious-secular distinction in the Islamic and western worlds, while the main topic of this lecture and discussion is religious violence. From the perspective of human perception, it is noticeable to observe that probably peculiar examples (e.g. violence cases in Israel as a theocratic state and in North Korea which is considered an atheist or secular state) have not been given at all during the discussion.

Christoph Hübenenthal works through the matter of religious violence and begins to discuss it with Cavanaugh by stating that Cavanaugh’s approach creates another myth within the myth of religious violence. Hübenenthal explains that during the birth of the concept of the nation-state, there was a shift of power from the ecclesiastical authority to the state authorities, which needed to have a legitimacy with regard to the use of power and violence. Thus, the main concern of the upcoming modern nation-state was how to legitimize power and how to legitimize the use of violence. The fact that Cavanaugh suggests that religious violence is a myth, creates an obstacle for us to think about how to tackle the problem of violence that is already there. Hübenenthal argues that the approach of Cavanaugh contains a lack of ideas on how to deal with power and violence. His criticism touches upon a significant aspect of the discussion, which needs to demonstrate a way out for us to cope with already existing violence and power. Religious violence can be a myth somehow, but what shall we do, if we delete only the adjective “religious” in front of the concept of violence? The violence will still remain there. This is evidently a very fundamental question that should be asked in this kind of discussion. This behavior pattern makes sure that we concentrate on the mental or physical feature of a sickness rather than on the very nature of the sickness itself, i.e. on the effect rather than on the cause.

In reaction to this question, Cavanaugh prefers to mention the sorts of liberalism, in which Charles Taylor categorizes the forms of secularism, i.e. open and closed. In closed secularism, the public and private spheres are clearly kept separate and isolated from one another in order to stay away from violence (e.g. headscarf bans in public sphere). All kinds of religious symbols are banned in the public sphere. For instance, France has recently banned female Muslim students from wearing abayas in state schools¹⁰. In this

¹⁰Pupils will be banned from wearing abayas, loose-fitting full-length robes worn by some Muslim women, in France’s state-run schools, the education minister has said. The rule will be applied as soon as the new school year starts on 4 September 2023. France has a strict ban on religious signs in state schools and government buildings, arguing that they violate secular laws. Wearing a headscarf has been banned since 2004 in state-run schools. “When you walk into a classroom, you shouldn’t be able to identify the pupils’

way, closed secularism produces a neutral space, which again is trying to deal with the question of violence in a restrictive, coercive and subduing manner. In this setting nobody brings any religious discourse or clothing into this commonly shared neutral space. However, if you are at home, which is by definition a private sphere, then you can wear and say anything that you like. Cavanaugh summarizes the whole issue in a nutshell: “you can be a Muslim at home, but don’t be a Muslim out in public... It is based on the fear that we can’t disagree without killing each other and that is, I think, a really bad idea”. In open secularism, the abovementioned restrictions are replaced by a context in which individuals can behave freely, even in public spheres. You can be a Muslim, a Christian or an atheist in public very easily and you can show it without any obstruction. This is the standpoint that Cavanaugh usually defends. This kind of secularism can make sure that identities are clearly protected, conflicts can be solved and finally, violence can be relatively easily prevented in time.

Martijn de Koning argues that Cavanaugh gives an extensive account of the concept of religion, but unfortunately, he does not do that much for the concept of violence. Cavanaugh claims that he wants to arrive at a theory of violence at the end, but he does not go deep down and interrogate violence as a separate concept. However, he says at the same time that he never claims any expertise on violence issues. Because the definition of violence is very varied according to Cavanaugh. Normally, anybody can assume violence when somebody gets a bullet in his/her head. But Cavanaugh adds that there is something such as psychological violence or gender violence and we can extend it even to the extreme cases of any kind of change in the world that can be perceived as violence (cf. footnote 16). Cavanaugh would like to contribute to the discussion around violence (however that is defined) to obtain a solution concerning the causes and remedies of violence and he suggests that dividing dichotomies such as religious and secular violence are not helpful in our path to a solution.

De Koning states that the analysis of Cavanaugh concerning the religious and secular should also be applied to the rhetoric of the US government, which is related to the war on terror¹¹. His reaction to this statement is that he handles the war on terror in his book,

religion just by looking at them," Education Minister Gabriel Attal told France's TF1 TV, adding: "I have decided that the abaya could no longer be worn in schools." "Secularism means the freedom to emancipate oneself through school," Mr Attal told TF1, arguing the abaya is "a religious gesture, aimed at testing the resistance of the republic toward the secular sanctuary that school must constitute." In 2010, France banned the wearing of full-face veils in public which provoked anger in France's five million-strong Muslim community. France has enforced a strict ban on religious signs at schools since the 19th Century, including Christian symbols such as large crosses, in an effort to curb any Catholic influence in public education. It has been updating the law over the years to reflect its changing population, which now includes the Muslim headscarf and Jewish kippa, but abayas have not been banned outright. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66634890>, downloaded on 29 august 2023.

¹¹ Trump calls Obama, Clinton Islamic State 'co-founders,' draws rebuke, AUGUST 11, 2016, UPDATED 6 YEARS AGO (19.1.2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-trump-idUSKCN10M146>), By Ginger Gibson, Steve Holland, WASHINGTON/MIAMI BEACH, Fla. (Reuters) - Republican Donald Trump called President Barack Obama and Democratic rival Hillary Clinton the “co-founders” of Islamic State, ratcheting up his assertion that they are responsible for the rise of the militant group and sparking renewed criticism of his leadership ability. Clinton’s White House campaign on Thursday called the

not just by condemning Al Kaida, but also by looking at the American intervention in the Middle East. Again, De Koning insists upon the lack of interrogation and analysis in the aforementioned book (for instance, the term crusade, which was used by George Bush after 9/11), in comparison to the analysis of religious and secular violence. Cavanaugh replies that he went through these issues in Chapter 4 by arguing that the speech act of Bush has mainly a secular tendency, in which he mentions perpetually the concept of freedom. The rhetoric of Bush right after 9/11 contains a pivotal question: “Why do the Muslims hate us?”. Cavanaugh reformulates his answer to this question quite eloquently:

“They hate our freedoms. There are just crazy people over there, who can’t deal with the fact that we are over here having a good time.. and so they want to bomb us. You pass this fog of amnesia over American intervention for the last century in the Middle East, right? I quote Colin Dueck and he says that America fights wars for liberal reasons or they don’t fight them at all. He is basically tracing a line from Wodrow Wilson saying ‘we have to make the world safe for democracy’ through the rest of the century into the Bush era. So, even though Bush himself was a Christian, all of his rhetoric is this kind of liberal language of freedom; expanding freedom. And what that does, of course, is that in 1979 there is the Islamic Revolution, we all look at our tv screens and say what happened. All these crazy religious fanatics are chanting ‘death to America!’ and so we say it’s religious and that then excuses us from having to look at the history of American intervention in Iran, right? 1953 The US and Great Britain fomented a coup that overthrew a democratically elected government in Iran and installed the shah, who spent the next 26 years with full American support torturing and murdering people. And then the Islamic Revolution happens in 1979 and overthrows that and we ignore all of that history and we just say oohh religion! What are going to do? Religion is crazy, religion causes problems! That’s what I am after in the analysis of the war on terror. So this language of the myth of religious violence falls primarily on Muslims. Muslims bear the brunt of that both in foreign and domestic policy.”

Yet De Koning is still questioning how we can meaningfully analyze the violence, which is perpetrated by Islamic State, Al Kaida¹² or The Lord’s Resistance Army. The actions

remarks a “false claim,” in Clinton’s latest response to a series of attacks by Trump in which he has sought to portray America as less safe, blaming Democrats and depicting himself as the only one who can restore security. Democrats, in turn, have used Trump’s often hyperbolic statements ahead of the Nov. 8 election to argue that he is unfit to be president and lacks the temperament to be trusted with matters of national security. “This is another example of Donald Trump trash-talking the United States,” Clinton senior policy adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement. “What’s remarkable about Trump’s comments is that once again he’s echoing the talking points of Putin and our adversaries to attack American leaders and American interests, while failing to offer any serious plans to confront terrorism or make this country more secure,” Sullivan said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

¹² America Created Al-Qaeda and the ISIS Terror Group, <https://www.globalresearch.ca>

By Garikai Chengu, Global Research, November 08, 2017, Global Research 19 September 2014

Region: Middle East & North Africa, Theme: Intelligence, Terrorism, US NATO War Agenda

Incisive article originally published by GR in September 2014. Terror attacks in Western cities (Manchester, Paris, Brussels, Nice, Barcelona...) allegedly perpetrated by Al Qaeda-ISIS. Much like Al Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS) is made-in-the-USA, an instrument of terror designed to divide and conquer the oil-rich Middle East and to counter Iran’s growing influence in the region. The fact that the United States has a long and torrid history of backing terrorist groups will surprise only those who watch the news and ignore history. The CIA first aligned itself with extremist Islam during the Cold War era. Back then, America saw the world in rather simple terms: on one side, the Soviet Union and Third World nationalism, which America regarded as a Soviet tool; on the other side, Western nations and militant political Islam, which America considered an ally in the struggle against the Soviet Union. The director of the National Security Agency under Ronald Reagan, General William Odom recently remarked, “by any measure the U.S. has long used terrorism. In 1978-79 the Senate was trying to pass a law against international terrorism – in every version they produced, the lawyers said the U.S. would be in violation.” During the 1970’s the

or violence of these groups are justified by themselves in a religious sense. The response of Cavanaugh is quite significant, because the violence that is produced by those terror groups cannot be totally attributed to the whole religion itself, for these groups are taking some inspiration or using their own interpretation from some strands of Islamic or Christian thought. People may get some inspiration from certain religion, philosophy or ideology and apply it in their specific actions after having read and interpreted any book related to that particular thinking paradigm.

If somebody who reads and feels affinity for the Koran, Bible, Tora, the philosophical investigations of Martin Heidegger, Karl Marx or *Mein Kampf* of Hitler, has the inclination to commit violence, then this outcome should tell us something primarily about the personality and the psychological health of that individual, not about the quality of those texts. If someone from another nation commits a crime in your country, this particular action does not naturally give us permission at all to call the whole of that nation criminal. Therefore, a *pars pro toto* approach cannot work for attempts to correlate issues concerning religion and violence. Its inverse form i.e. *totum pro parte* is also not adequate to hold a discussion on the same topic, in which the cover term religious violence stands as a matter of fact only for Muslim violence. This *totum pro parte* attitude can be easily observed throughout the whole lecture and related discussions of Cavanaugh, who says that some inspiration is taken out of Islam or Christianity by those violence-perpetrating groups. Therefore, we cannot say ‘they are not real Muslims or Christians’ and accordingly, he does not buy the argument ‘Islam is essentially a religion of peace or essentially a religion of war’.

Thus, there are elements within religion itself that promote violence. In this context, his suggestion (i.e. ‘let us just trace where Joseph Kony got this bizarre version of Christianity’)¹³ is interesting and justifies to a certain extent my arguments above. Namely, one particular Christian’s actions cannot provide us with a basis to judge the whole of Christianity. This is particularly the case when someone from a certain religious

CIA used the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a barrier, both to thwart Soviet expansion and prevent the spread of Marxist ideology among the Arab masses. The United States also openly supported Sarekat Islam against Sukarno in Indonesia, and supported the Jamaat-e-Islami terror group against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan. Last but certainly not least, there is Al Qaeda. Lest we forget, the CIA gave birth to Osama Bin Laden and breastfed his organization during the 1980’s. Former British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, told the House of Commons that Al Qaeda was unquestionably a product of Western intelligence agencies. Mr. Cook explained that Al Qaeda, which literally means an abbreviation of “the database” in Arabic, was originally the computer database of the thousands of Islamist extremists, who were trained by the CIA and funded by the Saudis, in order to defeat the Russians in Afghanistan. America’s relationship with Al Qaeda has always been a love-hate affair. Depending on whether a particular Al Qaeda terrorist group in a given region furthers American interests or not, the U.S. State Department either funds or aggressively targets that terrorist group. Even as American foreign policy makers claim to oppose Muslim extremism, they knowingly foment it as a weapon of foreign policy... ISIS is not merely an instrument of terror used by America to topple the Syrian government; it is also used to put pressure on Iran...

¹³ I think we should precisely do the same for the so-called Islamic terror groups such as Al Kaida, Islamic State etc. Then, we could trace the historical ideological and economic origins of those groups. For Cavanaugh it is much more interesting to analyze social, cultural and economic conditions in East Africa, that make the podium ready for the Lord’s Resistance Army to emerge.

group etc. has done something bad. Then, the whole of that religious institution is held responsible for the irresponsible actions of any member of that religion. However, if the same person has done something good, we do not observe much that the religion of that person gets positive marks on its account and that does not much become the talk of the town. De Koning makes the discussion with Cavanaugh much clearer with his specific question: “If the term religious violence is already mainly about Muslims, is the term Muslim violence then really an improvement?”¹⁴. This question of De Koning demonstrates evidently the *totum pro parte* attitude in the discussion on the myth of religious violence. Cavanaugh reacts to that with the statement that he never used the term Muslim violence in print. He wants to keep the topic as narrow and empirical as possible, but he also adds from the bottom of his heart to keep his conscience clear that, as a Christian, one has to be able to say yes, there are forms of Christian violence:

“We can’t excuse ourselves so easily, you can look at Putin now and say Christian nationalism, we can’t just excuse Christianity and say they are not really Christians, it is really political, it’s not Christians and so on, I’m trying to be as honest as I can about that... Normatively, a Christian has to say that Putin and Patriarch Cyrille have got Christianity way wrong, that they do not understand Jesus Christ, but descriptively you can’t just say ohh they are not really Christians, because they are and that is part of our fault is that Christianity has not been very good at following Jesus... Unfortunately, Christianity is made up mostly of humans.”

3. Biased filtered news guiding thoughts

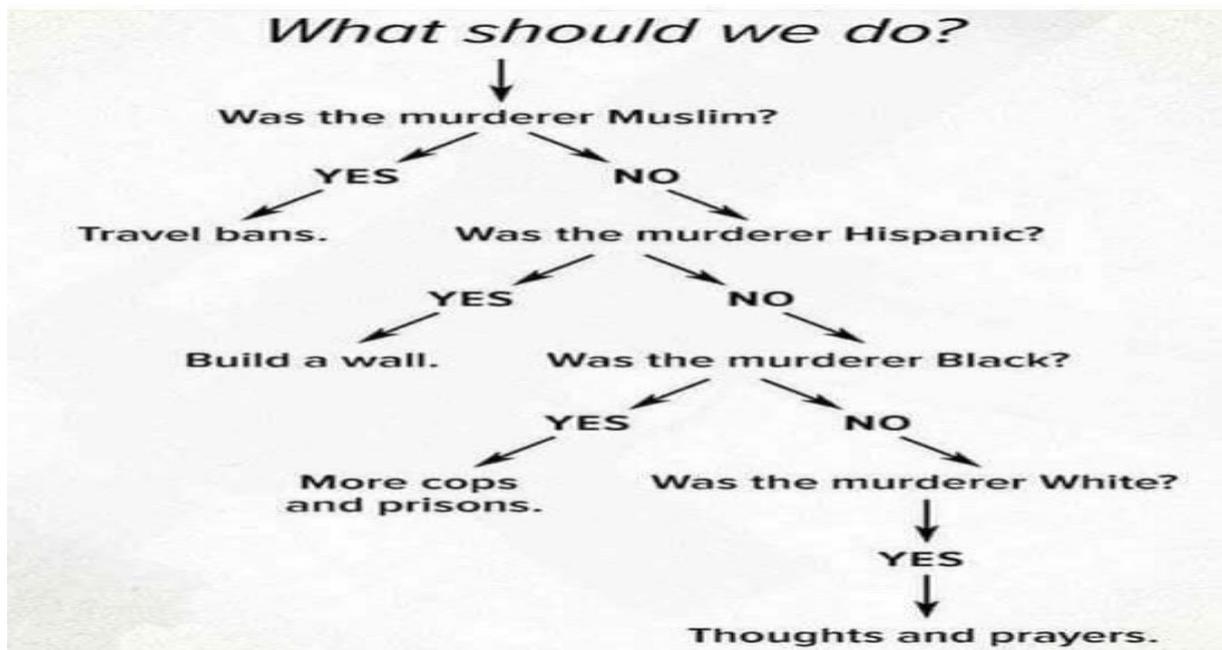
The last sentence of the previous section summarizes the very nature of the long-discussed problems and shows that the human factor plays a crucial role in the creation of violence and in misunderstanding and misinterpreting the message of ideologies and religious and philosophical texts. However, as you probably noticed, the term “radical Islamic terrorism” is easily used almost in the daily discourse of the western media and administrations, while the term extremist or white supremacist is usually pronounced in place of “radical Christian terrorism” (cf. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/christchurch-mosque-attack-suspect-pleads-not-guilty-trial-set-next-n1017466>; for instance, Christchurch New Zealand attacks on Muslims in a mosque during Friday prayers on March 15, 2019 killing 51 people; the

¹⁴ Trump Administration on ISIS, Al Qaeda, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/trump-administration-isis-al-qaeda>, February 6, 2017, in a speech to Coalition Representative and Senior U.S. Commanders

“Central Command and Central [Special] Operations Command are at the very center of our fight against radical Islamic terrorism. America stands in awe of your courage. ...”. “We’re up against an enemy that celebrates death and totally worships destruction – you’ve seen that. ISIS is on a campaign of genocide, committing atrocities across the world. Radical Islamic terrorists are determined to strike our homeland as they did on 9/11; as they did from Boston to Orlando, to San Bernardino. And all across Europe, you’ve seen what happened in Paris and Nice. All over Europe it’s happening. It’s gotten to a point where it’s not even being reported and, in many cases, the very, very dishonest press doesn’t want to report it. They have their reasons and you understand that. ”. “So today, we deliver a message in one very unified voice: To these forces of death and destruction, America and its allies will defeat you. We will defeat them. We will defeat radical Islamic terrorism, and we will not allow it to take root in our country. We’re not going to allow it. ...”

country's worst peace time mass shooting; the attacker broadcast the shooting live on Facebook).

The same thing is the case with the 2011 Norway attacks on immigrants (77 innocent people were brutally murdered) where the attacker Breivik was pictured as a far-right extremist rather than a "radical Christian terrorist". In other words, concepts such as religion and violence can be straightforwardly and without any attention combined together when it comes to Muslims and Islam in the daily western rhetoric. The same procedure is, however, not applied to a crime with a Christian cultural background. This double-standard way of thinking is illustrated in a funny way in the following algorithm¹⁵:



Recently (on January 21, 2023) a politician in Sweden burned the Koran in the vicinity of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm as a part of the protests against Türkiye and Sweden's bid to join NATO. This vile attack too has not been considered religious violence, but furthermore, it has yet again been seen as a freedom of "swearing" at a culture or religion in a "very civilized manner". "Sweden has a far-reaching freedom of expression, but it does not imply that the Swedish Government, or myself, support the opinions expressed," said by Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström on Twitter. One could probably have used the same freedom of expression argument while talking about the Norway and New Zealand attacks. These far-right extremists or white supremacists must, of course, also have their own freedom of violence and expression in a free, democratic, civilized and progressive western society, when it comes to autochthonous people and immigrants (or to humans and insects). One thing is at least clear: maybe you can burn the substance of the book, but never the content! In fact, looking back in the

¹⁵ This algorithm is used on the 5th of August, 2019 on the following twitter account: <https://twitter.com/SteveKerr/downloaded> on 9 september 2023.

history of mankind, book burning has always been a strong indication of fascist and racist regimes. This action is generally a concrete reflection of the fear of that regime for the influential content of the book concerned.

On a large scale, such as a nation, state, society, community or multinational trade corporations, violence seems to be closely related to trade (remember the 9/11 attacks were on the World TRADE center and the response was with WAR on TERROR, but the background decoration and the podium were built on Islam) and (economic) power¹⁶. Violence becomes a tool, that serves to keep your rival constantly under control. Hard power is usually used in the first or final stage of a process of domination. Today, mostly soft power is generally exerted by means of mass media, the press, academic and cultural publications. But that was also the case in early modern European history. In the early seventeenth century, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the Dutch East India Company's Governor General in the Indies, explained that trade and war were inseparably linked: "We cannot make war without trade, nor trade without war"¹⁷.

Hard power paves the way for free trade and obedience, which produce control over the whole economic process (consider, for instance, the coercion that Commodore Perry¹⁸ exerted in Japan in 1853 by using heavily equipped ships). Soft power steps in afterwards to make sure that dominance and obedience preserve their continuity by manufacturing

¹⁶ "On 15 March 1599, the people of Banda Island (Banda Lonthoir), in what is now eastern Indonesia, beheld a foreign ship with an unknown flag. It turned out to be the *Geldria*, commanded by Dutch Admiral Jacob van Heemskerck, spearheading a Dutch merchant fleet. About two decades later, a violent and repressive attack landed on Bandanese shores, organized by Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the Governor General of what had by then become the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, or VOC). Unprecedented in scope and ruthlessness, Coen's 1621 massacre saw the death of more than ninety percent of the Bandanese population. The subjugation of the Banda archipelago marked a key step in the emergence of the VOC as a major force in global commerce; thereafter, it would control the East Indian spice trade for nearly two centuries... In considering corporations as vehicles for the diffusion and consolidation of capitalism, histories such as that of the VOC on the Banda islands provide fertile ground for understanding processes of corporate domination and coercion. These discussions of dispossession often focus on "hard" power and the use of violence – coercion, harm, or injury—by corporations or the governments that sponsored them. However, hard power rarely provided a direct path to corporate accumulation: violence inevitably invokes backlash and resistance. Corporate accumulation was therefore often accompanied by legal, cultural, or academic discourses which sought to "civilize" these actions. Indeed, legal authority often trailed closely behind marauding adventurism in colonial contexts, ready to narrate and legitimize the seizure of goods..." Cited from: *The Dutch East India Company at the Dawn of Modern Capitalism: "Civilized Dispossession" on the Banda Islands*, October 25, 2021, <https://sites.duke.edu/thefinregblog/2021/10/25/>; downloading on August, 27, 2023

¹⁷ See McKenzie, Francine. 2013. "Introduction: The Intersection of Trade and Conflict Since 1500" in: *A Global History of Trade and Conflict since 1500*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁸ "Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, representing the U.S. government, sails into Tokyo Bay, Japan, in 1853 with a squadron of four vessels. For a time, Japanese officials refused to speak with Perry, but under threat of attack by the superior American ships they accepted letters from President Millard Fillmore, making the United States the first Western nation to establish relations with Japan since it had been declared closed to foreigners two centuries before. Only the Dutch and the Chinese were allowed to continue trade with Japan after 1639, but this trade was restricted and confined to the island of Dejima at Nagasaki." From: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/commodore-perry-sails-into-tokyo-bay>

consent with regard to the status quo. The internet, mass (social) media, press, academic and cultural publications and broadcastings repeatedly construct simulacra of, for example, religion and violence, so that the causes behind trade, dominance (i.e. power and influence over others) and control can be simply filtered. After a while, you start to think and associate violence, which is perpetrated by some terror groups such as Al Qaeda, ISIS etc. with a certain religion, even though various government officials have openly declared that those groups were supported and equipped by states for their own political purposes. For example, Hillary Clinton explained on Fox News that the US government has helped to create the problem that they were back then fighting¹⁹. She says openly:

“To be fair, we have now helped to create the problem that we are now fighting. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, we had this brilliant idea that we were going to come to Pakistan and create a force of mujahideen, equip them with stinger missiles and everything else to go after the Soviets inside Afghanistan. We were successful. The Soviets left Afghanistan and then we said ‘great, good bye!’ leaving these trained people who were fanatical in Afghanistan and Pakistan, leaving them well armed, creating a mess frankly, that the time we didn’t really recognize. We were just so happy to see the Soviet Union fall, we thought OK, fine, everything is going to be so much better. Now you look back, the people we’re fighting today, we were supporting in the fight against the Soviets”.

A TV presenter (Reality Check TV series) is commenting on these statements by saying: “Ohh so it’s not a conspiracy theory, it’s history that has been repeated in Libya and now in Syria. But there is a problem here, one that every American should be questioning: we’re fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, but we’re also bombing Al Qaeda targets in Pakistan and Yemen. As we do that, something occurs known as colateral damage. Hundreds of civilians have been killed in the first half of 2012 by US air strikes aimed at Al Qaeda fighters”. Hillary Clinton carries on with her explanation on the same issue:

“The people that we are fighting today we funded 20 years ago. We did it because we were locked in this struggle with the Soviet Union. They invaded Afghanistan and we did not want them to control Central Asia. President Reagan in partnership with Congress, led by Democrats who said that is a good idea, let’s deal with the Pakistani ISI and military, let’s recruit this mujahideen, let’s get some to come to Saudi Arabia and other places importing their Wahabi brand of Islam, so that we can go beat the Soviet Union. They retreated and lost billions of dollars and that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Let’s be careful with what we sow, because we will harvest”.

The same TV presenter is underlining what each American citizen should know then and that is heavy. The US government is bombing various places around the world in an ongoing war with Al Qaeda. He adds that in Iraq Al Qaeda had no presence before the US war, but Al Qaeda is now thriving there too, and that at least 13000 civilians in Afghanistan are dead as a result of that war with Al Qaeda. He argues that every American citizen should be demanding an answer from the president, government and Congress to this question: “Why are we giving Al Qaeda fighters money and weapons to overthrow yet another government in the Middle East?”. He states that the government claims to

¹⁹ Watch on youtube, Hillary Clinton: “we have helped to create the problem that we are now fighting” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwpR6ngoSjQ>

free people in Syria and that tomorrow -if history is not wrong- they will be killing and wounding civilians in air strikes, who will be referred to only as colateral damage in a war with an enemy that they brought to power.

Elsässer argues extensively in his detailed book on the emergence of ISIS, that Islam has been radicalized and used by the West for political purposes and that 11/9 has apparently turned the fronts of the geopolitical struggle between the East and West upside down. The USA and the other NATO allies supported the jihad against the Moscou-backed Kabul government in Afghanistan in the 1980s and in the 1990s they sided with Muslim “guerillas” both in Bosnia and Kosovo (Elsässer, 2015: 311). In this matter, the evaluation of Elsässer and his editor is remarkable:

“Terrorism is an expensive business. Today, terrorist organizations, which are scattered around the world, are recklessly committing acts of hostility to humanity in order to propagate their “ideologies” more effectively. From their training to their basic needs, from the supply of weapons that they use to their other logistical needs, terrorist organizations can only survive with the support of states above a certain scale. They pay the price of this support with their actions. This book by Elsässer, the product of 10 years of journalistic effort, gives a detailed account of the role of western secret services in the rise of ISIS and its present existence. The fog over terror and terrorist organizations disappears once again with the contribution of this book. Terrorism is not the work of a few angry men and religious bigots, but rather the organized crime of “big” states. ISIS is not a jihadist organization; it is the fifth branch of imperialism” (Elsässer, 2015)²⁰.

Taştekin analyzes the European military engagement in the combat against ISIS that has been ensured by dreadful terror (with a religious tint) experiences in major European cities. A forced coalition against ISIS across Europe was formed by the harsh violence with a religious make-up (suicide attacks of ISIS in Europe). For instance, as a retaliatory measure against the Paris terror attacks in November 2015, the French government intensified air strikes against ISIS targets in Syria (Taştekin, 2016: 338-339). And subsequently, France used a discourse of success in combating terror. The French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, declared that the coalition forces killed 22000 ISIS fighters (Taştekin, 2016: 370).

As a matter of fact, no religion on earth aims to promote and propagate violence. On the contrary, all religions come into existence in order to stop and destroy hard and soft power, violence and injustice that have been going on for a long time in a society. Chaos, destruction and annihilation are by no means in the conceptual field of a religion, which is there solely to construct a better, peaceful, just, fair and sharing society and world with righteousness and conscience. Some members of a religion may, however, give justification for their violent actions under the influence of instinct, ignorance, misunderstanding, misinterpretation or a different interpretation (Aydın, 2012: 139). A different type of logic of war is in action in an imperialistic game and it makes use of all kinds of tools in order to reach its targets (i.e. to capture all useful abstract and concrete sources above and below the ground). These tools can vary from hard to soft power such

²⁰ All translations into English are done by me.

as military threats, use of force and coercion, political influence, threats, sanctions and isolation, cultural pressure, the use of huge possibilities of mass media, and embedded intellectuals who behave like spokespersons of imperialism. Some “big” states may therefore help found and fund a terror group that can help those states in return attain their political goals. There is always significant financial, logistical, intellectual and political support from the secret intelligence service of a “big” state or states behind these terror groups and terror actions (Aydın, 2012: 139). Because terror is a large, very difficult, sophisticated and expensive operation that is absolutely way above the level and capacity of individuals. But at the same time, it surely can make use of certain individuals by misusing their social, cultural and religious values.

4.Soft power: thought control through media

Steven Biko said once that the most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Thus, if you take control of minds, you can have absolute supremacy over bodies. In other words, if you grasp the mind of someone, then his or her legs will come along automatically with you. However, if you had to use any hard power (e.g. any weapon), then obedience would not have been guaranteed; there would always be the probability of showing resistance. Presumably, therefore, in our times, mostly soft power is applied in the process of thought control and manufacturing consent.

Herman and Chomsky analyze extensively how thought control can be executed by the mass media, particularly in the USA. A working propaganda system can hardly be seen when the mass media are in the hands of the private sector and when there is no formal censorship (Herman & Chomsky, 1994: 2). It becomes much more difficult to detect any thought control when the mass media regularly criticize the actions of the public and private sectors, exhibit their shortcomings and paint themselves as the indomitable defenders of national interest, freedom and free speech in the eyes of the public.

The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. They provide individuals in a society with all kinds of basic and synthetic needs (because needs are also produced) that those individuals believe they have (amusement, entertainment, information, progress, competition, dominance, fear, anxiety, threat, risk etc.). When they are able to create a trusting relationship with their viewers or better said, followers, by means of their criticism concerning any misconduct in the public or private sector, then it means that the necessary conditions are ripe for thought control and the manufacture of consent in the population of those followers. A human is an accumulation of perception through his or her senses. If skepticism is somehow totally erased and trust relationships are firmly built, then human perception is ready for any kind of guidance and manipulation. In this manner, the masses can easily be deceived and manipulated by the mass media as a result of their guiding human perception.

The propaganda model of Herman & Chomsky is based on the inequality of wealth and power and its multifaceted impacts on mass media interests and preferences. Tremendous

money and huge power behind mass media corporations decide which news and, stylistically, in what form is suitable for sharing with the masses. In this process, this conglomeration of money and power knows how to avoid or isolate possible dissenters who are critically approaching the issue concerned.

The model of Herman & Chomsky contains five decisive factors in the field: the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth and profit orientation of the dominant mass media firms; advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; strong criticism (flak) as a means of disciplining the media and “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism (Herman & Chomsky, 1994: 2). A propaganda model should surely have more ingredients to keep a highly profitable business going and also some factors in the model can be evaluated as outdated from the perspective of today. However, the owner’s wealth and proportion of profit are significant with regard to the dissipation of the planned effect. In actual fact, thought control and the manufacture of consent (i.e. production of soft power) are much more expensive enterprises than the manufacture of terror (i.e. hard power). Usually, hard power is used to give the last concrete, determinative shape to what soft power has been constructing perceptively and fictively for a long time. The use of hard power is the finishing touch in the process of thought control, i.e. the *crème de la crème* in the guiding of public opinion.

In so far as our topic is concerned, we can presume that the mass media (i.e. soft power) can draw a simulacrum or an image concerning any religion in the minds (perception) of the masses. Then the related terror and concrete violence go into action in order to complete the picture in a concrete sense of what soft power has been painting in the imagination of those masses, who automatically and thoughtlessly (because the thought is under control) will talk like Lisbet Janssen (cf. Section 2; arguing that religion and violence are indisputably intertwined concepts so that even questioning this dual amalgam seems rather preposterous). Thus far, what has been achieved in this process? Guiding public opinion, thought control and finally the manufacture of consent have been masterfully realized.

Herman & Chomsky bring to the fore the features of this self-persuasion process, in which people mentally train themselves in order not to be disturbed by the genuinely wicked content of the whole propaganda construction:

“...The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and good will, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news ‘objectively’ and on the basis of professional news values. Within the limits of the filter constraints they often are objective; the constraints are so powerful and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable...” (Herman & Chomsky, 1994: 2).

This analysis refers to a kind of vicious circle in which one deviance from the truth causes another deviance. But the process itself is like a closed circuit, when the news that is fit to dissipate is filtered out, this “fitted” text and its derivatives will be released for free circulation. Any alternative way of thinking can hardly be an option in this streamlined exercise because everything flows on the production line of the news industry according to a fixed procedure of manufacture. If it is decided somewhere that a religion generates violence, then it gives rise to violence; there is nothing we can do about it and alternative views are strictly disqualified where individuals firmly believe (or are truly convinced) that they live in a totally free society. And thought control happens only in those closed, undemocratic, underdeveloped communities that can be called tyrannical, fascist government of FarAwayistan (meaning a faraway, imaginary country) as part of a far-from-my-bed show regarding the news headlines.

Dedeoğlu underlines, however, that it seems possible to define ethical journalism or journalistic ethics as the realization of the function of reporting in a way that includes correct information, protects the social (common) good and does not disrespect or harm a true value. Under this definition, that correct information and its compatibility with the truth directly require a continuous objective approach (Dedeoğlu, 2014: 160).

The function of conveying the phenomenon as it is, without any discrimination, seems to be the main principle of ethical journalism. Dedeoğlu argues further that there are also other significant basic rules to follow, namely: giving the correct news without causing any other harm; respecting personal rights and private life while compiling the news; avoiding to cause unnecessary panic and fear in society; showing sensitivity towards the protection of individual, social, natural and other values while conveying the truth (Dedeoğlu, 2014: 161). In this process, institutional and individual freedom as a news agency and a journalist have vital importance. Otherwise, wealth, power and relations of interest can easily dictate the form and content of the news, as stated by Herman & Chomsky above. The news text should not control and manipulate the thought but simply convey what has happened in the realm of truth.

According to Dedeoğlu, understanding with regard to ethical journalism does by no means differ from the general mentality concerning overall ethics in a society. This ethical attitude, which requires profound respect for fundamental rights and complying with basic obligations, should dominate over the whole of a society where every individual takes another individual, all living entities, concrete and abstract values into account and pays sincere respect to them all (Dedeoğlu, 2014: 161). The formulation of news text too should be considered (perhaps reconsidered) under these conditions. Naturally, Dedeoğlu talks about the theoretical aspects of the issue, but it can be rather different to see things in practice, when they are a part of the daily truth.

It is not very hard to find many awful specimens in the European and North American mass media concerning religion (Islam in particular), hate and violence. Kurnaz & Alsancak discuss, for instance, the remarkable proposal of British journalist Katie

Hopkins after terror attacks in Spain and France, which has a historical reference to the “final solution” of Hitler (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*), meaning the application of the same method on “radical” Muslims in the country (Kurnaz & Alsancak, 2022: 167). They also report and underline that cases, including religious violence and hatred against Muslims in Europe, have significantly increased after terror attacks. Also, in general, across Europe it can be observed that there are fears about islamization and ongoing xenophobia towards immigrants, which somehow cannot be stopped. That all leads undeniably to a repulsive image or simulacrum of Islam throughout the continent (cf. Türkyılmaz, 2021: 108).

As I have mentioned above, the hard power sets up a corridor of thinking towards certain individuals, groups, communities, nations, cultures, religions, ideologies etc. and then the soft power comes along with its reinforcement feature to complete the design of the already opened corridor with a detailed make-up of propaganda. Hard power is always necessary at the beginning and end of a process. The soft power is undeniably needed at the important interfaces for the crucial continuity of the whole process.

Öymen discusses “news framing”, which we can describe as part of the structural organization of soft power. This method requires that a specific aspect of the news text is given more prominence. In this manner, the news agency underlines, highlights and places special emphasis on some features of the news content. For example, the religion of a killer in a murder case can be skillfully brought to the foreground more than the murder itself when the killer is a Muslim. The kind of selective attitude is similar to the one in the algorithm, which I gave under Section 3. As a matter of fact, news agencies, which are governed by wealthy and powerful corporations, decide which news will be selected, framed and accentuated, then presented to the public, which has no background information about the issue and is always ready to believe with good faith in what has been told, as one of the most important headlines of the day in the world. In this process, it may turn out that some other very important news for people, the world, nature etc. has gone by the wayside, been concealed or swept under the carpet. In this regard, Öymen provides us with a very remarkable example from the records of recent history:

“...For instance, during the war between Iran and Iraq, the fact that Iraq made use of chemical weapons was not going to be brought to the fore much, because Western countries were supporting Iraq against Iran. At the same time, however, the fact that the Syrian regime used the same kind of weapons, was definitely going to find its eminent place in the headlines of all mass media broadcasts. In fact, this would even be considered a reason for war (i.e. *casus belli*), because it was already planned to overthrow the Syrian government and its leader. However, the news that opposition forces in Syria also used chemical weapons would be left in the background. Otherwise, the impact of the accusations against the Syrian government could have diminished. Likewise, the cruelty inflicted by the government upon the people in Syria would be highlighted, but the inhumane actions of the armed opposition groups supported by Western countries would be ignored...” (Öymen, 2014: 380).

Öymen explains us the concept of news framing in a very vivid manner, which makes it absolutely clear that even the dumb prince of a king or, to put it nicely, even the mentally handicapped son of a king could understand the whole matter without any effort. Under

this section, I have tried to briefly outline the general structural organization of soft power, which is mainly used to control and manipulate the process of human thinking owing to mass media. Hard power, i.e. violence and coercion, can only maintain its existence and continuity with the permanent support of soft power, i.e. intellectual influence by guiding perception predominantly in the field of mass media (or currently social media).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to deal with the conceptual or perceptive connections between religion, violence and mass media as the main guiding elements of human perception. The perception is managed and directed in such a manner that even an intrinsically and ontologically a peace-generating institution like religion can be smoothly put and mentioned together with its antonyms, such as violence, through the medium (or agency) of mass media. The Latin words “medium” and “media” are perfectly relevant here in this setting because mass media have the exact function of a tool intermediating between the two ends of a process, which yields a binary opposition, i.e. religion and violence. Normally these two concepts should construct the two extreme ends of a dichotomy (i.e. religion on one end and violence on the other). However, with the crucial help of the tool mass media and its perception-guiding capability, which functions as an interface, the related dichotomy disappears and turns into a singularity, which is a kind of fusion. In this mixture, violence becomes religion, which becomes violence in its turn. The pivotal role in the creation of simulacrum (i.e. an aggressive religion) and guiding related thought is played by the mass media, which can simply manufacture dissent as well as consent.

In Section 2, I have tried to support the postulate of Cavanaugh that the combination of religious violence is fabricated by a myth that has been dissipated by the tremendous contribution of mass media. As stated earlier, violence and terror are a costly enterprises. They require a large sum of money, a sophisticated organization, logistical support, supplies and services. In terms of scale, degree, capacity and capability, this is certainly not the kind of work that two religious fanatics can handle. Obviously, it is beyond the scope of a bunch of bigots.

On the other hand, as I have mentioned in Section 3, the existence of religions on earth is by no means compatible with promoting and propagating violence. On the contrary, all religions come into existence in order to oppose, stop and destroy hard and soft power, violence and injustice that have been going on for a long time in a society. If someone says that the word destroying already evokes the idea of violence, then religions or in a general sense human survival depend highly on self-defense and retaliation. If there is a decisive attack on you that makes it a matter of life and death, then the necessary license of self-defense was already given in order to survive by any imaginable ideology, let alone a religion.

A religion is essentially an antithesis of violence. The mechanism of propaganda turns the nature of religion the other way around and makes it look like a terror machine. This

is a simple play on the structure of human perception. People tend to wholeheartedly believe anything that is readily put in front of their noses, and it does not matter whether these people are educated or uneducated because counterproduction costs too much energy both in thinking and action. When there is anything that is already prepared and made fit to consume, it is easy to go along with it instead of taking an original step forward in order to oppose and refute what has just been proposed.

The fact that politicians are habitually prone to telling lies easily does not mean that all political sciences are lie-manufacturing machines. The fact that TV stations, news agencies and newspapers are in general disseminating manipulated information is not supposed to convey that all sciences related to signs and communication are fake and dishonest. If a Christian or a Jew commits a crime, that does not necessarily mean that their religion is automatically the one and only cause of or responsible for their misbehavior. At the end of the day, if we approach the phenomenon in a legal sense, it is necessary to include the rule of individuality in the crime. You are not responsible for the crime that your father or your family committed. Likewise, your entire family is not responsible for the crime that you committed. If you constantly search for religious fanatics, bigots and other dangerous figures in order to use them as a tool in the service of your imperialistic desire, passion and lust, that basically means that you have already lost your soul balance and psychological health. You may call them sick in the brain, but you are unfortunately in no better condition than them.

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