

Violence of Sacred Regimes

The Permanence of Religion and its Corruption in Ideology

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abstract

The creation of sacred regimes stems in ideology. The sacred as an ideological object legitimates and represents society as a whole in an attempt to crystallize collective consciousness. Here, the attempt is 'to synthesize the unsynthesizable' thus forming the imagined totality of the collective, which in turn doomed to fail for the synthesis into a collective union is impossible. The relation of the self to the Other is incongruent *vis-à-vis* the self fashions the Other as its radical enemy construed in the former's desire to subjugate the latter under his/her power to the extent of activating violent impulses, energies and sentiments. In so doing, the synthesis turns into manifolds of illusion or fantasy lodged in belief of the sacred expressed institutionally as religion and foments politically as powerful regimes. In this sense, sacred regimes i.e. revolutionary and religious fundamentalist movements are artefacts of this incongruent relation thus a discursive othering that allows an ideological misrecognition between the self and the Other. In this light, the paper argues the complexity of sacred regime and its endeavour to realise a collective enjoyment (*jouissance*) amidst violence and corruption imposed by religion and ideology.

keywords

Violence, Ideology, Totality, Symbolic, Regimes



II

THE EXTERNALITY OF SOCIAL FACTS to individuals (in Emile Durkheim) in a community allows collective conscience to exist as a totalizing transcendent being that could develop into an effervescent force in the form of an ideology which, as an ideology, is not within the control of the individual participants themselves. The totalizing transcendent being (the collective conscience) imagines itself and its boundaries in and through the social discourse of individuals within a certain symbolic order, allowing for the further abstraction of the community through collective imagination onward to conceiving a collective identity. Constituting a collective identity then is always already an attempt to “totally synthesize the unsynthesizable,”¹ the latter being the imagined totality of the collective. Such an attempt—totalizing the unsynthesizable—is doomed to fail since a complete totalization of the self that combines both its individual and collective form is impossible. Only an illusion of totality can be created, which brings to mind the Freudian thesis that religion is the “universal obsessional neurosis of humanity,”² that is, religion as a necessary illusion (of totality). This means that, every sacred, it being the core of collective identity, is desirous of perfect identification with itself and of complete representation of itself to itself, i.e. presenting itself to itself completely as a “totalitarian presence,”³ an absolute totality. The sacred, in this sense, is an inevitable representation of community identity, which in Durkheim, is legitimated and institutionalized as religious society. It helps to remember that for Durkheim, “the idea of society is the soul of religion.”⁴ Deductively, that there is no society or community without

¹See Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1999).

²Sigmund Freud, “Religion and Personality,” in *Seven Theories of Religion* ed. Daniel L. Pals (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 54.

³Levinas, *Alterity*, 4.

⁴Emile Durkheim, “Society as Sacred,” in *Seven Theories of Religion*, 88.

religion is thus here explained by the fact that there would be no community without a sacred and hence the inevitability of its institutional expression and form as religion, of the inevitability of the existence of the community as primarily a religious community. True to its etymological meanings, religion is always a force binding people together (*religare*) in a certain spirit of community. Always already, once the community becomes aware of itself as a community, the sacred is instituted as a basis of this awareness, as the operative substance of being a community. The urge and attempt to synthesize the community as a totality is an inevitable and mostly unconscious collective project arising from the desire to secure the infinity of the transcendent being of both the human being and the community. For Sigmund Freud, this desire to be infinite (omnipotent) is the source of religious dogmas, which arise out of the helplessness of humans in the face of inevitable death.⁵ To be sure, this desire to be infinite is doomed to fail since, despite the promise of immortality that is offered by religion, there is no real conquering of death except of course as an illusion. The connection between religious dogmas and ideologies is here undeniable if what ideology means here is a project to synthesize that which is unsynthesizable, a comprehensively totalising project. This desire to be infinite is of course possible only for human communities as this desire is given rise by the problem of finitude, of death and the knowledge of its inevitability. A curious connection with Freud's notion of human helplessness and religion's role to make this helplessness tolerable in relation to the problem of death and the desire of humans to be infinite/omnipotent is noted by Bell in his *The Return of the Sacred: An Argument on the Future of Religion*, in which the sacred of religion, the latter being one of the "cultural universals," is deemed to be inextinguishable from human society because it primordially secures psychological answers (a 'ricorso': therefore inadequate but effective solution) to the primordial

⁵See Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

human question on the inevitability of death, when and “where men have become conscious of the finiteness of existence.”⁶

Ideology as a sacred regime

Synthesizing that which cannot be synthesised is the operation of an illusion or fantasy as ideology (Zizek & Lacan) or a sacred regime in the form of a misrecognition that involves the “non-knowledge of its participants” as its condition of possibility. In order for the sacred of religion to metamorphose into a sacred regime (ideology as a truth regime) there must first be a desire to be absolute (pure, uncontaminated, infinite), which is expressed and operationalized through consistent self-referential discourse, and which makes the metamorphosis (from the sacred to ideology) a project of violence either against the Other in the self or the radical Other that the collective self fashions as its enemy or, in more acute sense, both the (intimate) Other in the self and the (externalized) radical Other. The enemy is here construed as the Other in radical opposition to the self. The production of ideology, thus, as a process, involves a radicalization of the sense of self through a corrupted/misrecognized construction of the Other, in which this Other is internalised through discourse within the deepest interior in the self. The perceived superiority of an ideology over other ways of looking at the world—other ideologies as its enemies—is derived from this misrecognition of the self and casting of its radical Other that is in Lacan is also lodged in the “most interior in the self.”⁷ The radical Other represents the absolute negation of or antithesis to the self but which paradoxically is lodged in the self. The Lacanian notion of the Real in the Symbolic, the Real being this void (the Real) that is both in the interior and exterior of the subject (the Symbolic)—the real is in a relation of “extimacy”⁸ to the subject—comes close

⁶Daniel Bell, “The Return of the Sacred: An Argument on the Future of Religion,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* Vol. 13, No. 3 (1978): 428 (187-208).

⁷Jacques-Alain Miller, “Extimite,” in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society* eds. M. Bracher, M. Alcorn Jr., R. Corthell & F. Massardier-Kenney, trans. F. Massardier-Kenney (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74.

⁸Ibid.

to establishing the radical Other (of ideology) of radical liberation movements.

This explains why ideology is associated with revolutionaries. Revolutionaries, being radically convinced of the superiority of their collective values, actively work to transform existing and hitherto dominant values in their social world according to the image of their perceived superior values in a project, borrowing from Nietzsche, of radical trans-valuation of values. Two operations are involved: the radical constitution of the self through self-referential discourse and the casting of a radical Other, the antithesis of the (revolutionary) self, as its foe. The constitution of the radical self, however, is not possible without always already, in the process of its own constitution, a radical Other (as enemy) is conceived and played out because it is the radical otherness of the enemy that marks the symbolic boundaries of the self. The radical Other as the enemy requires proximity⁹ as its casting requires a certain acquaintance of the self with an Other (a neighbor) that is radically different and as such despite being different is imaginable in its difference by virtue of being near. Proximity breeds contempt because it allows the self to be a witness to the ways the Other in its proximity experiences pleasure or *jouissance* in its own particularly different and exclusive way. This, according to Jacques Alain-Miller, is the principle of war: intolerance to the difference of the Other's *jouissance*.¹⁰ The "Other's *jouissance*" is a "hatred of a particular way, of the Others own way, of experiencing *jouissance*."¹¹ The Other thus in its experiencing of *jouissance*, though proximate to the self, remains opaque, inaccessible, radically different. The Other as the enemy (the Christians) of the Islamic revolutionaries who seek independence is a neighbour that sports a different culture, possessing a different way of living and enjoying the world in the form of a different religion, which has a radically different notion of salvation as their ultimate collective *jouissance*.

⁹Kenneth Reinhard, "Toward a Political Theology of the Neighbor," in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* co-authored with Eric Santner and Slavoj Žižek (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 26.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 77.

The Christian neighbor (of Islamic Separatists) through centuries of antithetical imperialistic discourse, of radical discursive othering, has paradoxically come to reside at the heart of the collective identity of Muslims, as the powerful Other that in its proximity has reached the most interior, finding a home in the “the deepest point in the interior”¹² of the self as a collective subject. This is a relation of the self to the radical Other which Lacan describes as “this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since at the heart of my assent to my identity to myself, it is he who stirs me.”¹³ Disdainful of each other’s *jouissance*, both communities (the Christians and Muslims) live in an environment of war: it is their respective difference in *jouissance* that grounds the alterity of each other, that which makes the Other really other, that is, radically Other, despite being intimate (being in the most interior of the self) that sends them to a war of radically different identities. In this war, religion, being the agency that grounds the alterity of the protagonists from each other, does not warrant a recognition of the Other as similar to the self (the Other as like me a human being or like us a human community) but this recognition of difference, however radical, makes it possible to identify the Other as the enemy that reassures the identity of the self to itself.

The kind of violence that characterizes this conflict between the self and the radical Other (the Christians and the Muslims) is a violence that is identifiable, i.e. in a war of religious identities. The human being in this war of religious identities remains to be recognised in the Other and hence also in the self, allowing for the ideological misrecognition to be operative alone in collective consciousness and not yet in the human being as such. The violence, therefore, is still containable, still within the parameters of identification. The more dangerous form of violence is that between absolute sacred regimes (fundamentalism) where the “friend-enemy distinction”¹⁴ loses its significance in the declaration of war. It is a kind of violence which Reinhard following Derrida describes as that which is made possible by the “disappearance of the enemy” which

¹²Ibid., 76.

¹³Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 179.

¹⁴Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor*, 11.

opens the door for an “unheard-of violence, the evil of a malice knowing neither measure nor ground, an unleashing incommensurable in its unprecedented – therefore monstrous – forms; a violence in the face of which what is called hostility, war, conflict, enmity, cruelty, even hatred, would regain reassuring and ultimately appeasing contours, because they would be identifiable.”¹⁵ The disappearance of the enemy makes possible a form of violence that is without identification in a Hobbesian war of all against all. Religious wars like the war between the Muslims and Christians in the Philippines, following this principle of identification, as long as the protagonists can still identify which is friend and which is enemy, could not take the status of a war of absolute violence dedicated to the disappearance of the enemy. Religious wars as conflicts of definitely identifiable sacred regimes are wars with still negotiable ethical considerations; these are more or less ethical wars compared with the monstrous obscenity of a war that is without identifications because in the latter, the self by not having any clear notion of its own boundaries, could be in a war against itself.

The absence of violent purificative rituals or purges among the Islamic separatist groups that usually accompany intense ideological splits in radical social movements proves the point that religion, as long as it has not become an absolutist sacred regime, i.e. a fundamentalism, has not yet succeeded in erasing the sense of the Other and as such still has in its bosom the fundament of ethics in the form of the sense of the Other, i. e. remains within the symbolic order, in society. Uncertainty as regards friends and enemies makes the self uncertain of itself, a condition that can propel a community such as a religious society or a nation or a combination of these two to exercise a form of violence that it cannot even think when it still knew its enemies and friends. America, for instance, as a nation-state that wants to rule the world is in this position of being “desperately unsure about both its enemies and its friends, and hence deeply uncertain about itself,”¹⁶ a position that requires America to imagine a radical Other and to ontologize this radical Other as Real, in order to declare war against it. What else is the Real but

¹⁵Ibid., 17.

¹⁶Ibid.

this misrecognized kernel of truth (Zizek) in the most interior of the subject (Lacan)? Here the illusory status of the enemy (the terrorists) could approximate the character of a world where for the self the enemy has disappeared and hence could justify unrestrained violence. The war against terror then, in the sense that it is a war against an unidentified enemy, is a war against humanity, which for America, since it wants to represent humanity, is ultimately a war against itself. The disappearance of the enemy is not a consequence but the cause of the loss of the sense of self.

The notion of the sacred sacrifice in violent rituals of collective effervescence studied by Rene Girard, in which the sacrificial victim is regarded as a symbolic representation of the enemy (the radical Other) and which is also the object to which the collective violent impulse, sentiments and energies of the community are symbolically inflicted through the killing of the victim to dissipate such violent forces and hence to prevent the participants from consummating these violent forces in everyday life accounts for a stage in the turning of the sacred into an ideological object.¹⁷ This journey of turning the sacred into an ideological object occurs when the symbolic sacrifice loses its symbolic value for the community, unleashing in turn the violent impulses, sentiments and energies towards real people that directly represent the now radically construed Other. Framed within the friend-enemy principle of war in Schmitt, ideology as a misrecognised sense of self, is here generated by and in the community.¹⁸ The sacrificing of the sacred in this condition does not anymore serve the purpose of including the violence of its killing within the symbolic order (displacing violence symbolically) as it is vented outward to other communities (in war) or, worse, to the community itself in real (non-symbolic) violent rituals of self-purification (in a war without identifications or which is the same thing, in a war of pure identifications). It is thus in the animus of the disappearance of the enemy that the bloody episodic purges in the communist movement can be framed. Violence without

¹⁷See Rene Girard, *Violence and Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

¹⁸See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

identification is the result of an acute intolerance to difference, where the friend-enemy distinction, being a distinction of difference becomes fragile and despite not really breaking down is always under the menacing threat of breaking down, a point in which violence is done for its own sake because unable to identify with neither a self nor an other, which reminds us of Eagleton's vivid description of Dionysian death orgy: "The God's bewitched camp followers who throw plundered human organs to the wind and tear men and women limb from limb in their crazed rapture, can be seen as thrillingly emancipated from the dull regime of reason; but they can also be seen as the doped captives of a quasi-fascistic cult."¹⁹ Paradoxically, like the mass murderers and torturers of the communist purges, those Dionysian camp followers who are "emancipated from reason and who in the spirit of chaotic freedom with neither rules nor hierarchies—"a Dionysian democracy"—are mercilessly intolerant to anyone who steps out of line."²⁰ The fragility of the ideological absolute brings it to a point of imminent collapse, into a chaotic orgy that paradoxically requires an iron-clad order typical of monolithic cults. Indeed, the Communist Party during those bloody rituals of ideological purification had been called many names, the most prominent and apt of which is that it has become what Eagleton would call a quasi-fascistic cult. The uncertainty as to who are its enemies blurs for the Party who are its friends and comrades which brings a desperate uncertainty about itself. The Party, turning its red ideological gaze unto its own children, is Red Terror, which is a Holy Terror.²¹

That ideology, however strong and internally coherent, cannot absolutely dominate the subject (cannot be an absolute master-discourse: ideology is absolutist but can never be absolute) is given light by the question Derrida asks: In a world "without an enemy, and therefore without friends, where does one then find oneself, qua a self?"²² The communist purges then were made possible by the sudden uncertainty of the communists about their sense of collective self, their collective

¹⁹Terry Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Reinhard, *The Neighbors*, 16.

identity vis-à-vis other ideologies. The infrastructure of such violence is the project of making everything the same in an imagined panacea of a reality, which is a project of devouring the radical Other in the self. But since the radical Other is fundamental to the constitution of the radical ideological subject, the project of exterminating it is an unconscious suicide, a project of destroying the infrastructure that gives rise to and supports the ontological status of the subject, in this case the revolution.

This could be likewise framed by appropriating Anderson's imagined community.²³ For Anderson a nation is imagined because even when "the members (of even the smallest nations) will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."²⁴ A sense of (national) community is derived from the collective imagination of the members that what they do and regard as true are shared by the rest of the community and are given the same meanings. Nationalism, for instance, is an outcome of imagined shared meanings of activities that have to do with a common identity as citizens of a nation. This allows for the members of the national community to "conceive" the nation as a deep horizontal comradeship"²⁵ in which each one member—despite the inequalities and hierarchies within the community—is equilibrated with everyone else as fellow citizen of the nation. In the past decades it has been noted that becoming national in substance and scope has been the trend among Marxist movements and states as Hobsbawm correctly expressed.²⁶ The role of common ceremonies and rituals celebrating that common identity is crucial in the forging and reinforcement of sense of community. In a radical group such as a communist or Islamic separatist movement, the participants do not only share the same imagination of the meanings of their activities: they (radically) share the same casting of what they are not, of that

²³See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁴Ibid., 6.

²⁵Ibid., 7.

²⁶Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, (London: First Vintage Books Edition, 1996).

which diametrically opposes their common identity, the casting of their radical Other. The purges were done to collectively and symbolically celebrate their otherness from their radical Other. Where else can they find the radical Other but in the innermost being of the self? The radical Other is that which resides in the most interior of the self. The celebration of solidarity (in the form of purges) is thus aimed at purging the self of the traces of the imagined radical Other. Since the radical Other is at the core of the constitution of the radical self, the purges are a kind of a collective suicide. Rather than merely destroying the sacrifice as the symbolic representation of the radical Other in a celebratory ritual of solidarity, the radical movement, having been absolutely convinced of its radical uniqueness and moral superiority now turns to itself as the object of violence to fulfil the unconscious wish of actually experiencing the “Real” of ideology. The radical movement is using itself as the sacrifice, the object of violence in rituals of purification. The Real (of ideology) here in Lacanian appropriation is that which cannot be symbolized, that which is lying at the outskirts of signification. The pursuit of this real thus is an unconscious suicide: the nightmare of coinciding with oneself, of phantasmatically and hence effectively erasing the Other in the self.

The intense ideological splits that spurred violent purges of comrades-in-arms within the movements makes for a strong case of the working out of the logic of violence and sacrifice in sacred regimes in ideology and ideological religion.²⁷ The possibility of religion (or any collective identity derived from a sacred) transforming into a violent ideological force is a permanent danger in human society just as society itself is the womb that houses this ideological force. The social conditions that make this transformation possible can be found anywhere in the world today, enunciated by the conflicts the powers in the world have had the thirst to create such ideological regimes, no doubt compelled by the power of what the radical Other symbolically represented in the sacred sacrifice.

²⁷See Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

The Sense of the Other and the Constitution of the Individual and Collective Self

The individual has no sense of difference before subjectivization, which is the reason why originally the individual has no proper sense of itself. Before the subject emerges as a sentient being it must initially have a sense of being different: the subject is given rise by the sense of ontological difference, which is here designated as one of the layers of the sense of the Other. The sense of the Other as ontological difference warrants the individual's primal sense of demarcation between a self and the outside world that engulfs it. It is only in this status in which the individual could be thought of as non-ideological inasmuch as it does not yet have a shared conception with others of that outside world and which is prior to subjectivization. As long as the subject emerges as subject, it is constituted, as Althusser would argue, by ideology through the interpellation of language. Subjectivization first occurs when the sense of the Other as different particularizes its appropriation of the world outside, that is, when the outside world is conceived as a reality differentiated into things in this world. The individual is properly subjectivized when as an individual the subject recognises its similarity with others as subjects, which at once inaugurates the individual into the symbolic world of language, hence into a particular appropriation and articulation of the world: the origin of ideology. Language through its performativity, that is, as discourse, constitutes the subject through the transformation of the sense of the Other from a basic sense of self and world to a proper sense of the world as inhabited by beings similar to the self, by similar beings as human beings and as speaking subjects. Thus, discourse as a practice that develops the sense of the Other through language throws the subject into the symbolic order that is society, hence, the subject becomes a subject by becoming a social being, one that already possesses a proper sense of the Other, amongst the first conditions of being human. The self cannot be a self as subject without this sense of the Other, the sense of being at once different and the same. The other as the same lies at the deepest level of the subject prior to social structural categories such as race, gender, class, religion etc. The other as the same is the rock upon which all categories actually take root and develop. At the

deepest level, every subject is the same as others, the same as others as humans. Despite the primordial role of the Other in the constitution of the subject as a social being, the Other as a being other than the self, is that which cannot be synthesized as a totality²⁸ for the self. The Other by always escaping totalization cannot be present to the self completely as totalitarian presence in much the same way as the self as other cannot present itself to others as a totality. If the self can perform a total presentation of itself to others, ethics as the tension between the self and the Other in the symbolic order is impossible. Representation, indeed, ontologically requires an Other otherwise there would not be any judgement.

The Sense of the Other Constitutes Society through Discourse

The human being relates to the world (others) in the movement of transcendence, which in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas is the “marker of the paradox of a relation with what is separate, a way for the distant to give itself.”²⁹ Paradoxically, the Other, lying at the fundamentals of ethics, is both an opening and limit to being. This can be explained through a new appropriation of transcendence, where it is conceived not within the structure of subjectivity but of responsibility in intersubjectivity, that is, in and as society. Hayat in his preface to Levinas’ *Alterity and Transcendence*, describes, “Transcendence [as] born of intersubjective relation”³⁰ in which the Other alters the self from the outside “causing the I to exit the self” to be thrown into the intersubjective world of the symbolic order. Transcendence then inaugurates the self into the social world in a movement that is a going beyond the self (crossing over – *trans* – while ascending – *scando*) towards a higher sense of existence, towards becoming a social being. This is the beginning of community with others, the emergence of the reality which in Durkheim is external to the

²⁸See Levinas, *Alterity*.

²⁹Pierre Hayat, “Philosophy between Totality and Transcendence,” preface to Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, ix.

³⁰*Ibid.*, xii.

individual and can alone be possible with a multitude of others and which is at the same time the foundation of ethics: human society. The individual is altered by the sense of the Other to make society possible. In the intersubjective and therefore symbolic (because shared) world, human beings negotiate their transcendence, which structures their very notion of freedom, again in a paradoxical way: the condition of possibility of freedom is the giving up of a primordial 'freedom' to and within the precincts of society. In Lacan, the self is constituted externally by its contact with the Other always already in the symbolic space that is society.

Language structures subjects through the lived reality of language—through discourse—in and through which the sacred as the ideal form of collective representation (also as discourse) is produced and gets embedded as inscriptions in the social body. The transcendence of subjects—the going beyond themselves of subjects through the seduction of the Other to form the social body—thus is also the generative-constitutive matrix of the sacred, that which in Durkheim, allows for the existence of society as an epiphenomenal reality. The sacred at the core of society is constituted by discourse and primarily because it cannot, despite being powerful and determinative, be seen, Durkheim is quite succinctly right in claiming that society can only be known through interpretation. Society is not seen but can only be grasped in one interpretation or another. Discourse analysis then is the most appropriate method of studying society because the sacred and society themselves exist as forms of discourse.

The Sacred of Religion: The Religious and Discursive Constitution of Society

As an epiphenomenal reality that is constituted in and through intersubjective negotiations, society is necessarily founded on a sacred whose being lies in the collective self of subjects and is constituted by negotiating subjects. In this sense, society exists more in the form of discursively formed collective intersubjectivities than as a real, material being. Through collective consent, human beings as subjects ascribe legitimacy to themselves by creating social things (through discourse)

whose meanings they inscribe in the social body through discourse. Social things as discursive representations of solidarity possess sacralized meanings of practices and objects of collective identifications which become powerful in and by themselves through the power of discourse. Social things are thus reified sacred: the sacred as meanings conceived as things. As has been explained, the sacred is institutionalized in society first as a form of belief on something that which as a belief subjects share in common. Religion thus is the institutional expression of the sacred and social things (structures and institutions) have religion as a primal form of being. Society then is constituted first and only as a religious being: *religion is society's birthright and fate*. Religion owes its permanence in society to the inevitable production of the sacred by human beings in the course of their negotiations with(in) social life. The religious constitution of society makes all modes of collective identity religious identities and as a corollary as potential sacred regimes (ideology). The objects of collective identification such as race, gender, nation, class, etc. have in their core religious appropriations as these objects are themselves made sacred by collective subjects. Being religious at their core, such collective identities are thus susceptible to if not fated to turn into ideologies in the form of sacred regimes. It can thus be argued that both religion and ideology are lodged originally in the bosom of society. It is the sacred that generates religions and ideologies and language as discourse is the means through which they (religion and ideology) are generated. It can likewise be argued that both religion and ideology are ways of corrupting the sacred with ideology being more virulent than religion in terms of the degree of corruption.

The Pursuit of the Ideological Sublime: The Ideological Constitution of the Human Being and Society

Ontologically, there could never be an ideology as there has never been a body of thought that is completely identical with itself, which is the object of all ideologies: to become completely identical with itself. Ideology is a desire for totality, a totalitarian desire and is thus always future-oriented, always waiting for an imagined state of things to come, either of a perfected democracy

to be realized in the future for radical communists or of a worldly salvation in a promised land for Jihad warriors. The conceived inevitability of a (religious) social panacea derives from ideology's inevitable failure to be completely itself. All ideology thus is a failure to totalize itself. The moment something is set to work to pursue an (object of) ideology, it fails while setting itself to work in pursuit of its object. Between the ideological activity and its object lies an unbridgeable gap, a space separating the Real of ideology from the symbolic forms of the real world although that space of the real, even when infinitely separate from the symbolic world (from society), engenders that social world. It is a paradox that despite the fact that the object of ideology is unreachable, it is, as a set of doctrines or thought forms, the condition of possibility of ideological activity. The animus or performativity of the sublime of ideology is a void (a lack in being) which lies at the core of subjects, which constitutes subjects in and through it as a subject of a lack.³¹ The subject enacting ideology is constituted incompletely as the subject it would become. To follow Lacan, being is necessarily complemented by lack. This status of the subject as fundamentally, ontologically lacking opens it to ideologization because as subject of a lack it desperately desires to fill this lack. The lack in the subject is thus the origin of ideology, which renders ideologization not only possible but inevitable. The pursuit of an ideological object inasmuch as it is driven by an ontological incompleteness in the self as subject – as desiring subject – must be both enjoyable and torturous in the paradoxical sense that a project that is doomed to fail cannot be sustained without giving pleasure to the participants, even unconsciously, in the course of its enactment. It is torturous and tormenting because the very form of its enjoyment is suffering a tormenting and tortured status and therefore “obscene enjoyment”³². This is the explanation for the ritual-like consistency of ideological activity: the enjoyment of the sacrifice – the sacrifices of revolutionaries (eschewing the material life of pleasures, moral purification, dying for the Cause, giving up the future of their children, etc.) – is not

³¹See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (New York: Verso, 1989).

³²Ibid.

actually derived from its instrumental value (for an inevitable future, for a democracy to come) but from the sacrifice itself. The real goal of the ideological activity is “the consistency of the ideological attitude itself.”³³ *Jouissance* is the obscene enjoyment derived by the ideologist from the enactment of his/her ideology. It is obscene because the ideologist is not aware that in enacting this ideology, s/he is in pursuit of a project of absolute violence against a radically constituted Other while being self convinced of the loftiness of the ideological sublime.



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³³Ibid.

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