

The Sacred of Religion and the Sublime of Ideology: Constructing Collective Identity through Religious Solidarities

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ABSTRACT

The sacred is ontologically central to the discursive construction of collective identity. Being the institutional expression of the sacred, religion is a staple in all human collectivities and a constitutive force in forging group identities. Hence, religion is coeval and coterminous with society and the human being; religion is society's birthright and fate. As an ontologically religious being who derives an identity from the social body, the human being is always susceptible to ideological corruption, to an excessive forging of identity and solidarity that blurs the sense of the other, that which is fundamental in the human as a social being. The observed fatal journey of group solidarities from the sacred to religion to ideology in history provides a wealth of data for theorizing the process of ideologization and the susceptibility of religion to undergo this process. The answer lies in the structure sacred-religion-ideology where ideology is seen as an embedded corruptive symptom in all social groups.

Key words: ideological corruption, collective representation, collective identity, sacred, religious solidarity, resurgence of religion

INTRODUCTION

This paper takes off from the assertion that the sacred is ontologically central to the construction of collective identity (Durkheim, 1914; Eisentadt, 1999) and that as a corollary; collective identity construction occurs as discursive inscriptions of the sacred into the social body, that is, collective identity is a sustained and compelling discourse about the sacred. Understood as a discourse about the collective self, the sacred always already exists as a synthesis of collective consensus among the members of society, once it is recognized: it is taken here as transcendent symbolic discourse of group life that generates and sustains a group's sense of itself. Pursuing this theoretical line it will be explained that every construction of collective identity has religious moorings, religion being the institutional form of the sacred. Since society happens only as collective life, it will be asserted that religion—being the fundamental solidarity constituted

around the sacred—is society’s birthright and fate: just as there can be no religion without a sacred, there can be no society without religion. After this theoretical position is cleared out, the paper will go on to discuss the production of ideology out of religion, implying that ideology is a unique (religious) expression of the sacred which radicalizes and transforms socially tenable religiously-inspired solidarities (nations, ethnicities, races, religions) into sacred regimes. Religion thus bears the fundament of social life in and through the sacred while in a paradoxical way hosts this sacred as a symptom of social life’s corruption, in the form of ideology.

Theories of collective identity construction around religion are used as data in this paper such as to identify their relationships and the common matrix that generates these theories; allowing for the emergence of a background theory that is crucial for framing both “the content and context” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004) of religious-ideological political discourses of radical groups in modernity. The paper thus serves as a presentation of a theoretical thread which will be used to analyze aforementioned discourses with a view of situating them in the current resurgence of religion in a supposed secular world. The paper preliminarily makes an attempt to gather and use existing theories to make sense of an obvious profusion of data in the form of religious-ideological political discourses of radical movements.

The first part of the paper traces the production of the sacred in society using Durkheim’s notions of collective representations to shed light on the being of the sacred, its central role in religion and on the ontology of society itself. Through a theoretical narrative of the process of collective identity construction around the sacred, it shall give the ontological discussions in the first part a socio-historical perspective to clear the way for the production of ideology out of sacralized solidarities. Pointing out the sublime objects of ideological production in society later on in the paper while touching on the currency of religious nationalism in today’s social world links the unanticipated “return of the repressed religiosity” (Bruce, 2003) and the current “resurgence of religion” (Zeidan, 2002) with their radical suffusion with nationalism in public political life.

Starting from the presupposition that ideology as a sacred regime has a religious core, it will be asserted that not all religion is always already ideological but leaves itself open to ideologization in and through a process of group identity production, maintenance and ensuing radicalization. It is

here where the sacred as a symbolic representation of the transcendence of the group over the individual turns into the “sublime object of ideology” (Zizek, 1989), where religious solidarities and/or collective identities are subsumed by a uniquely and radically construed collective self: the turning of the sacred (of religion) into the sublime (of ideology).

Transcendence and the Sacred

One of the conditions of possibility of the being of society is for there to be first a conscience collective, a transcendent being which could neither be found in any of the individual members of society nor in the sum of their number. The moment there is society, that transcendent entity, the sacred, should be there, simultaneous with society’s being, coeval with it, within it. That being, the being of the sacred, is not material being but has material indications (e.g. in social facts), is actually not merely material being but something other than just existing materially. The sacred, which is the source of religious ideas and practices (Durkheim, 1976) derives alone from the collective mind and not from individual fancy. It is thus theoretically construed as similar to a conscience collective, this symbolic core where the moral codes of society are inscribed and which has the power to shape and bound human experience and constitute social categories. Without a collective sense of something or of an idea or an idea about something which is consensually placed by the group above the individual members, the being of the collective as a transcendent entity higher than that which gave rise to it, is not possible to be. The sacred owes its origin, to a group of persons who for some reasons have had a history of doing things together, of living with a primordial sense of this doing things together and represent this collective life through discourses and symbols whose meanings inevitably percolate within social spaces, permeating the very social life that actually feeds this sacralizing process.

The being of society lies at the heart of the Durkheimian notion of the sacred, this something which in the contemporary world individuals could die for or in the service of, something grander and loftier than just merely being human. The sacred then, viewed in its transcendent form is something for which, in whose name, and under certain conditions a human being (or a select group) could kill or die for, could stake his/her/their entire claim to being. It is something beside which the individual is

only a speck of reality, is almost nothing since any individual could be taken out without diminishing its power and prestige.

It should do well to remind the readers that whenever Durkheim speaks about the sacred he has society in mind. In highly integrated religions such as those expected to exist in self contained societies, every other human being becomes entirely reducible to the system of beliefs embodying and representing society. Durkheim would call this type of collective integration mechanical solidarity. The human being, in this sense, is dissolved into a highly pervasive system of collective symbolic and practical identifications with the sacred that translates into the conscience collective. There is thus a process of collectivizing experiences and symbolisms of sacralized things and ideas that results to the establishment of a religious society. So religion owes its existence to the process of turning profane experiences, things and ideas into sacred, which here we call sacralization.

Religion and the Sacred

As Durkheim found out, there can be no religion without a sacred. Tracing the journey of the sacred towards religion is of utmost importance for a theory of society that is based on an ontological understanding of religion. “(Religious) phenomena held to be religious consist in obligatory beliefs, connected with clearly defined practices which are related to given objects of those beliefs” Durkheim (in Pickering, 1975; p. 93) thus defined what for him religious phenomena are. The sacred in and by itself is not yet within religion proper. Precisely speaking, the sacred is not yet a god or a divine subject/object but could be on its way to becoming one, although this is not assured. The crucial process that elevates a sacred object or animal or tree or an idea to the status of a god or divinity is when a community of worshippers takes it as a focal point of ritual practices that comprise a system of religious obligatory beliefs, which in turn permeate social practices in a definite and oftentimes obligatory way. Religion creates a correspondence between beliefs and practices whose obligatory relation is made possible by the power of society’s collective representation that feeds society’s motive to divinize a sacred thing or idea, which is to accord it with a ritual status within the religious system.

The sacred becomes a focal point of religion only when a community of worshippers shares the same divinization of a particular imagined or

actually existing thing such that the members are obliged to practice—through an institutionalized entity such as a church—a certain set of rites concerning this sacred thing. Certain things, indeed, could very well be the objects of adoration and awe and because of their sheer magnificence; some people share an attitude of reverence for these objects. However, these objects could be considered as religious objects only when these have become objects of obligatory practices in the form of rituals that are defined by rules whose breaching requires punishments from the community.

In a highly integrated society, such religious beliefs permeate the core of everyday life in the sense that they become a habituated way of life. Social life, in this sense, is religious life. Now, without the power of the society to oblige, reward and punish people around some rules of worship of sacred things in a continuous way, sacred things will not be incorporated and systematized under a certain religious system. The process of divinization sees to it that the hitherto sacralized experiences are appropriated by and subsumed under an existing social order not only in order that these will not disrupt society's continuance but actually sustain this existing social order. This means that sacred things, ideas, and symbols have in them powerful potentials to threaten an existing social order if the latter fails to appropriate them for the reinforcement of society. Religion through the church takes up this role (of appropriating and subsuming sacralized things, ideas and symbols) for the social order most particularly in simple societies; hence, religion is seen by Durkheim as a social cement that binds, integrates, and coordinates the core of the (if not the whole) community. Through sacralization, religion forms the core, if not itself already the core, of social solidarity.

All throughout history, the church takes up the sacred as objects of obligatory rituals that define and sharpen the religious society's sacred boundaries and self-identifications. The church keeps religious discourses and the holy books as representations of the sacred and wields these over the flock as their symbols and proofs of power. The people in turn identify with each other in solidarity under the church. When the identification with the sacred takes an excessive turn, for instance in highly integrated cultural systems, religious identification assumes a more abstract but stringent form, the form of ideology. In the church, divining the sacred is performed by institutionalized individuals who are deemed to have the power to understand and influence the sacred's mysterious character

such as priests, shamans, medicine men and the like. But indeed, religion as understood by Durkheim should begin from people's mutual feeling of awe, reverence and adoration of something. Religion thus results from sacred things which are held in common sentiments, beliefs and meanings by the members of society upon whose commonality they derive and justify their existence as a community by establishing a set or a system of practices which everyone, as imposed by the community, must follow and obey, necessarily working itself out to weave for the community a collective sense of itself, towards an on-going construction of identity.

Religion and Collective Representation

It is through religion that any member of society is accorded the unique ability of conceptually totalizing the whole community to which s/he subscribes. The religious world-view produces a special perspective that allows for a "coherence of outlook" (Giddens, 1996) in which the collective boundaries of the community become clearer and more powerfully enforced when viewed or imagined in and through this world-view. Hence, religion represents society by representing a certain conscience that most everyone shares. This conscience then is composed of important and enduring symbols that represent the community's life and history. In this sense, the importance of symbolic representation and discourse in the production of a society's sense of self necessarily privileges culture in collective identity construction. For instance, Cassirer (1906) in Habermas (2001, p. 5) explained the power of symbolization to articulate the world in a cultural sense this way: "Logic finds itself confronted with new problems, as soon as it tries to look beyond the pure forms of knowledge towards the totality of spiritual forms in which a conception of the world is articulated. Each of them—such as language and myth, religion and art—now reveals itself to be a distinctive organ for the understanding of the world, and also for the creation of ideal worlds, an organ which retains its peculiar rights alongside and over against theoretically elaborated scientific knowledge." Such a standpoint affirms the pervasiveness of religious discourse and articulations of social reality, that is, in its own right religion will continue to be an outlook with which the world is going to be seen and evaluated. The sacred then, being at the heart of every religious system, is going to organize society around itself through religion. Legitimacy and legitimation therefore will always be concerned with how truths will be authenticated

by religious institutions and their discourses. Religion, it seems and as has been said above, is society's birthright and fate.

It follows then that since sacred beliefs and objects of beliefs, wrenched and symbolically separated as they are from the mundane, quotidian affairs of society—from the profane—but owing its origin from them, do not have any power in themselves other than those affixed to it by society: its transcendent status/form is the kernel of its truth and power. It is not that priest, or that flag, or that tree, or that animal, that is ultimately sacred but that which is common to all of these, the common meanings that are attached to these by the members of the community, usually forming the basis of their sense of oneness and integration as a community, their solidarity. The sacred, graduated into religion through prolonged systematic collective ritual and social practices, assures the collectivity of human experience by serving as an invisible link of each member to everyone else. Without the collective sense of the sacred, society will not have a basis for being. The key then to the Durkheimian socio-ontology lies in the structure society-sacred-religion, a rethinking of which could lead to a fecund appropriation of the being and identity of religiously-inspired radical social groups and movements which today ironically litter this supposedly secularizing world.

In the thesis of secularization, religion and the sacred will have to yield to modern rationality to the point that religious systems will simply go away from the centerstage of human affairs. New forms of morality based on individualism and differences will be the basis of social judgment between good and evil. The point, however, is that despite the secularization thesis in a supposedly disenchanted modern world, people continue to be religious not only about their monotheistic icons but also about their highly abstract ideologies, moral affiliations and doctrines. Secularization itself is fast becoming a sort of a new religion. Laced with a potent kind of rhetoric that never fails to appeal to an "oceanic feeling" (Freud, 1961) of certainty, secular beliefs have become in fact indistinguishable from religious dogmas and self-righteous ideologies.

Collective Identity Construction and the Ideologization of the Sacred

For the members of a community, constructing their collective identity entails undergoing a process of identification with their ways of

existence, coupled with an effective and coherent spatial and symbolic representation of the boundaries of this collective identity. Without identification with something that makes it possible to symbolically imagine the community as a collective whole that is inhabited and comprised by more or less the same individuals, highly symbolically charged and integrated collective identity such as can be found in political and religious social movements cannot be had. In traditional societies, the process of identification was quite simple. Confined to a limited social space and depending on each other for survival, tribe members had to forge a social bond that is greater than each and everyone of them, a force that allows for the community to transcend the individual such as each member is legitimated by and within the community: a transcendent collective sense of themselves, an identity within and through which their world is lived, interpreted, and represented. In modern societies, collective identity is constructed always already against other identities these societies host in and through a secularizing social space peculiar to the modern world. Enveloped by a threatening complex world, a stricter and tighter collective identity is required to secure what Giddens (1986) would call the group's "ontological security", allowing for a certain kind of militancy about identity and its social contents (race, ethnicity, nation, ideology, religion). While it was nature which posed a mortal threat to traditional societies and which made it possible for human beings to imagine and order their world—in their way to constructing their spatial and symbolic collective space—it is modernity itself which now plays into the construction of a more rigid, internalized collective sense of self of groups in society: the threat to existence has shifted from nature to humanity/society.

Following this essentially Durkheimian logic, Shmuel Eisentadt (1999) posited 3 major codes or schemata for constructing modern collective identities; these codes being "primordality, civility, and sacredness or transcendence". Operative "throughout human history and in all human societies", these codes—primordality and civility—work in their own foci or spheres of collective identity construction and from time to time get enmeshed with each other through the work of the third code, the sacred/transcendent, of "linking the constituted boundary between 'us and them' to a particular relation of the collective subject to the realm of the sacred and the sublime, be it defined as God or Reason, Progress or Rationality". It does not matter then whether the sacred (or sublime) is religious or secular,

superstitious or scientific; as long as it performs the role of cementing the community into one coherent whole it ensures the continuance of the community at least from the point of view or imagination of those who are within its symbolic boundaries. The sacred thus is the community's central organizing principle, its transcendent whole.

A few insights which are paramount to the arguments this paper is presenting derive from the theories of collective identity construction and symbolic-collective representation of communities mentioned above. First among these is the primacy and centrality of the sacred in constituting identity, an insight presupposing that religion—it being the sacred's historical corollary—lies at the core itself of every collective identity, possibly since human society began. Religion as the basic social organization of the sacred, in this sense, is society's ontological constitution, its condition of possibility. In its necessarily transcendent being, society hosts in its bosom a religious core derived from a sacred, which is its ontological basis.

It should not be surprising then that despite the modernist projects of transcending religion (in Marx, Freud, Nietzsche) through reason and secularization, it remains irrefragably invested in human society. This insight lends itself to a possible explanation of two interlinked contemporary phenomena: the resurgence of religion (Zeidan, 2003) and the conspicuous failure of secularization theory (Casanova, 1994) in the modern world. For instance, in a world that has become a hothouse of religious nationalism (Friendland, 2001; Juergensmeyer, 1999) and fundamentalism (Sim, 2005; Ali, 2002) and a stage for religiously inspired spectacles of mass-violence, religion has indeed triumphantly reversed the much anticipated secularization process by successfully putting itself back into the core of public life. It is not so much as it seems that religion has taken a leave of absence from the public scene but rather that institutional products of "secularization" processes themselves have religious and ideological underpinnings. Secularization drags under its feet its own anti-thesis, its undesirable, "ugly" irrational Other, which is the sacred. It could even be that secularization itself is either a version of the sacred or is itself ontologically constituted by the sacred; hence, secularization, despite modern disenchantments, can be said to have a religious-ideological core.

The Form of Ideology and its Production

The deeper question, however, is whether it is theoretically tenable to view ideology outside the confines of religion—a question that pulls us back to reinterpret the Durkheimian sacred. Does the ideological sublime have a religious core? Or more precisely, is ideology an indicator of an excess of religion? A whole new perspective is opened by Žižek (1989) regarding this question of ideology as a religion and its obverse, that is, of religion as ideologizing in the sense that both of them—religion and ideology—even for those who think critically, requires and imposes a stringent discipline for followers, makes people obey, always in an unknowing, habituated way. Again, the structure sacred-religion-ideology forces itself upon us who take the trouble asking about the sources of our happiness/miseries, about our own ideologies such as to be freed from them. The unconscious status of ideology serves to conceal the “surplus enjoyment proper to the ideological form” (Žižek 1989) such that despite the stringency of ideological requirements the individual will continue his ideological journey because it gives him pleasure unconsciously.

Ideological production is a process of distorting the basis of collective representation through a corruption of the sense of being the same as others in a community, which is the matrix that generates and engenders the social world in its necessarily symbolic form. Symbols are shared experiences that represent the group as a collective entity which is useful in the production and maintenance of identity and whose processes of production lie at the heart of social life/praxis, the representation of which becomes symbols denoting the latter’s supra-individual, transcendent status, as they represent the social order. The sacred, elevated into its status by symbols, is the outcome of these shared experiences. Symbols are other-oriented but paradoxically seduce social members into self-referential discourse, which is the beginning of ideologization. First there must be order, and within this order differences arise that set the condition of possibility of ideological production. The differences existing within a community are kept in control by social power or precisely the power of an ideological group to impose itself on the other groups in the name of social order and for legitimacy, while exploiting this privileged position to further entrench itself in society ideologically and materially, in a process that is consonant with the way Marxism defines ideology, that is, as a distortion of consciousness to justify a certain balance of power

and accumulate a surplus of power from that balance. What is precisely distorted is the pre-ideological solidarity or identity (referred to as sacred in sociology of religion) that the community holds to be transcendent in and through its primary symbols. Through historical materialism, classical Marxism insists that this lost world of harmony prior to ideology is the primitive communal society to which human society must progress back to, i.e. to regress in thought while temporally progressing into the future, to bring the past to the future, to go back to the future (Zizek, 1989). But being itself a distortion, ideology can only be a partial interpretation of reality, a false consciousness, a misrecognition of truth, a lie. Because the individual within an ideology is “prevented from becoming aware of the incongruence of his ideas with reality” (Mannheim, 1936) which is the first condition of “ideological mentality”, the ideological subject is not allowed by his/her ideology to accept or consciously recognize the fundamental misrecognition and lie operating at the core of his/her ideology. Hence, ideology cannot recognize itself as misrecognition as it cannot become aware of itself as ideology. This (the self-acceptance of ideology as a misrecognition, a false consciousness) is of course not possible: for ideology cannot look at itself from a position of an Other, because if it can do so, it ceases to be ideology by demolishing its own condition of possibility. At the bosom of ideology is lodged a lie, which is the corruption of the sacred, as ideology itself: it cannot purport to divest the world of ideology without this ideology (that does the divesting) reproducing itself as a dominant ideology, to reinvest itself again and again as ideology. It is not truth which ideology seeks but power, the power to constitute truth.

The Church as an Ideologizing Institution

Durkheim’s notion of the sacred as a solidarity that binds and represents the community as a collective whole—as a conscience collective—to each and every member of the community while differentiating the community to those outside it, offers a way to interpret ideology through sociology of religion. This can be found in Durkheim’s definition of the church, this institution in which is invested the power to enforce ethical rules over the community by invoking a mediated relationship with the sacred: the church as an organized entity within society represents an ideology through religion; which is to say religion is an ideology insofar as it imposes its will on the people on the basis of an assumed legitimacy. The church legitimates its dominant position always already as an ideology in

as much as it enforces its rules and conceptions of the world on the people and deems and makes people believe these as uniquely true. Whereas the belief of the people on sacred things need not operate on the basis of the ideological legitimation function of the church (or any ideologizing organization)—the imposition of legitimacy that distorts legitimacy itself—the church takes this task of legitimation to conceal something from the people such as to impose on them these doctrines. Here, the ideologizing agent performs the role of imposing an ideological mentality that is based on “conscious deception where ideology is interpreted as a purposeful lie” (Mannheim, 1936), which is the third type of ideological mentality according to Mannheim. Accomplishing this task, the church distorts the shared direct experience, production and reproduction of the sacred in and through social life through its mediation, transforming it (the sacred) as an ideological object. It is not anymore the socially produced sacred that generates and constitutes truth and consensus in society but the mediator between the people and their collective self in the sense that the mediator, the church, by having a “surplus of power” (Chiapello, 2003) distorts the link between the people and their collective sense of self, their identity, in the process distorting the generative matrix of the sacred and distorting social life itself through ideological reconstitution. There can thus be a positive religion that plays a central role in integration, in the sense that it is a faith on a collective truth, which veers away from ideology as long as this collective truth is kept from having a surplus of power and is not used as a means of disproving the collective truth of others, although this kind of non-ideological religion can hardly be found in the world today. Understanding the sacred as a collective truth prior to ideology could reveal the secret of corruption of the sense of the other (the social sense) in ideological and fanatical sacred regimes.

Ideology and the Unconscious

The ontological status of ideology is currently being juxtaposed by psychoanalysts of culture with that of a dream. In the dream, the dreamer is not in control of his rational faculties as the dream unfolds through the workings of the unconscious and remains to be in such a helpless condition as long as the dream goes on. Theoretically, the kernel of the dream—the desire that manipulates and distorts the images to hide its contents (the contents of desire lodged in the dream)—must remain hidden from

the rational consciousness of the dreamer. The object of the dream is to express a desire but to keep the dreamer from knowing this desire. It is an expression of a desire that forbids its revelation to consciousness lest it loses its grip of the realm of the dream. Žižek (1989) traces the ontological status of the ideological sublime by locating its genesis, like in a dream, from the workings of the unconscious. Drawing heavily from Sohn Rethel's (1978) analysis of the abstract power of commodity exchange system, which operates in the unconscious of people trapped within this system, ideology is derived by Žižek from an external, unconscious desire that distorts consciousness, similar to the ontological reality of dreams. This external, unconscious desire in ideology is responsible for the unconscious status of those who are within ideology. In this analysis, the enactment of an ideology, or any enclosed and self-satisfying system or thought form that limits conscious control, the participants are regarded as "practical solipsists" or those who by virtue of being involved in a ritual of ideology do not know that such a process is under way and that they are its participants. The condition that makes for ideology to possibly exist is "the non-knowledge of the participants as to its essence" (Žižek 1989): one can only get out of it through a process of interpreting its logic which in doing so dissolves the condition of its existence.

With this *conditio sine qua non* of ideology in mind, the 'mystery' that surrounds the current spate of religious/ideological acts of violence can be revealed through a tracing of their genealogy: first, by locating the journey of that external, obscene abstract desire that makes ideology possible and that also makes it unbearable for ideology to recognise an Other on the same plane of reality, that is, as an equal, more or less similar entity to itself; second, the analysis could also reveal the way ideology works on the individual and how it is shared with others who basically have the same socio-historical context; and third, the process in and through which those within the spell of ideology discover a way out by recognising the misrecognition, which is virtually like seeing through one's own ideological structure using one's own blind spot or blind eye, could likewise be revealed. The genealogy of this ideology in a war-torn and war-weary Philippines makes for the central project (which is a tracing of the journey of two radical armed movements as they violently enact their religious and secular ideology) from which this paper has been derived.

Narcissism and the Logic of Ideology

Narcissism is a denial of the symbolic order, a resisting of the Lacanian big Other in configuring the self through the social, in which the sense of the other is constituted and enhanced through sharing and celebrating the sacred and participating in its further symbolic construction towards an identity. It is this resistance of the narcissist (to join the symbolic order) that allows for the regression to the authentic lack in the self prior to the symbolic stage of the social world; identifying back again with the image in the mirror where the self is lived in mimesis and the object of mimetic identification is the non-symbolic, pre-linguistic singular image of the other. A link can thus be established between ideology/fundamentalism and narcissism: they are discourses of excessive self-indulgence devoid of a proper, social sense of the other. The desire for purity (which the ideologist/fundamentalist/narcissist exhibits) that is derived from an avoidance of the constitutive power of the symbolic world (avoiding the gaze of the other, the power of symbols, the social) is just a thread away from this analysis: ideology/fundamentalism/narcissism is anti-difference, anti-other. It cannot tolerate the Other because it cannot even imagine having an Other that does not fall within its own logic. Its fundamental joy derives from a surplus of its own internal discourse, a surplus of enjoyment that is always violent in an excessive way: a negative *jouissance*. So, contrary to previous understanding of ideology as a means to an end (like Marxism for an emancipation and fundamentalism for salvation), a warning must be issued: “ideology serves only its own purpose” (Zizek, 1989). It cannot and does not serve anything other than itself. The utopian goals of ideology (absolute emancipation and salvation) as Mannheim (1936) explained them are not utopian because the bearers of these goals do not know that these are unattainable in the real world, hence these “utopian” goals do not serve as means to an end but an end in itself from the point of view of an ideologist: the goal of ideology is its own practice. The practice of ideology is already its own purpose, its own goal: utopia is lived in a world of illusion that is of course unknown to its practitioners.

Pursuing the Sacred of Nationalism

Contrary to the dominant claims of secularization theory, the classical masters of sociology never wrote religion off in exchange for an unbridled modernization and enlightenment through reason and science.

Marx (1988), indeed, disdained religion's power to alienate man from his natural-sensuous species-being and set religious being apart from and opposite the communist project of human self realization in a future society of equals but never declared religion dead as he did for philosophy. Religion for Marx has to be transcended through an unrelenting critique, a project which he markedly announced by saying that all critique must begin from a critique of religion. The closest definitive statement that Marx said about religion's decline was when he referred to the Feuerbachian radical critique of religion as signifying the theoretical watershed of secularization. For Marx, after Feuerbach's critique of religion and his own critique of metaphysics and philosophy, "the criticism of religion has largely been completed" (Hart, 2003), henceforth setting off an unstoppable deluge of universal secularization. Marxists after Marx like Said and Žižek tended to qualify Marx's assertion on the completion of the critique of religion after Feuerbach: they have anticipated religion's return to political prominence in what political theorists and psychoanalysts describe as a "return of the repressed" (Žižek, 1989; Hart, 2003), that is, the coming back into the public, popular consciousness of an erstwhile repressed foe of secularism, to haunt its repressor. Said went as far as to reinstate Marx claim that "the premise of all criticism is the criticism of religion" (Tucker in Hart, 2000) as a claim that could be truer today than when Marx formulated it, a claim that holds more truth now than before secularism became a worldwide movement, now that religion again haunts the world like it did during the Inquisition and the Crusades. Freud (1939) spoke in much the same tune as Marx by acknowledging the "power of religion over the mind, which overwhelms reason and science" and which, in modernity is "a halfway-station between magic and science" securing "some mastery over nature and subordinate individuals to the culture's mandates". He depicted religion as an "illusion" (Freud, 1928) but despite his secular hopes he could not see it dissolving with the march of modernity. Weber lamented the inevitable triumph of rationality in the modern world in his disenchantment thesis but did not rule out new enchantments as a way out of the Iron Cage. They all accepted the decline of religion to usher the monolithic rule of reason but could not resist the lure of interpreting that force that binds human beings together in a common identity—which here, following Durkheim, I call the sacred—in a perhaps unconscious, proto-religious way.

A case in point is on how sociology's founding fathers interpreted nationalism mentioned above. Compelled to recognize the upsurge of secularist ideas that mirrored the powerful definitive conditions of what is now known as modernity while acknowledging the deeply religious and symbolic moorings of society and other human group affiliations, they ambivalently described nationalism as a kind of a secular religion (Durkheim), a substitute religion (Weber) or ideology (Marx)—all of which testify to the continuance of the religious constitution of solidarity in society rather than the much anticipated dissolution of religion and its variants into the acid of science, reason and secularization.

As a secular religion, nationalism is allowed to be rooted out of the traditional church while maintaining deep religious underpinnings, which means nationalism is secular but with an unmistakable religious appeal. More importantly, being a secular religion, nationalism is a religion that plays within the political arena despite secularization: it drags and secures religion back into the public sphere. As a substitute religion, nationalism poses a challenge to religion as a force to integrate people around some sacred principles but is not constrained by the modern idea of being kept, as a religion, within the confines of culture. The core of identification shifts from the church to the nation—still within the religious environment of meanings—yet not solely confined to this meaning environment: the nation in its symbolic order assumes the likeness of a church that is highly political in nature. As ideology, nationalism is radicalized from a benign solidarizing concept of identity, of peoplehood, to an activist force that consciously seeks its own destiny and liberation in the world through worldly and oftentimes violent means: nationalism as an ideology seems to not just be akin to religion but an excessive variant of it, i.e. its corruptive symptom. It is still without a doubt a religion whose adherents are properly religious but primarily in an unconscious, excessive way.

Religious Nationalism as the Return of the Repressed Sacred

Nationalism as both a religion and ideology has currently returned to the fore of public politics. Bruce (2003) asks succinctly: "Why is a common religious heritage and identity so often at the heart of nationalism? And why is religion so regularly implicated in nationalist movements? In a theoretically fecund essay on the upsurge of religious nationalism in the contemporary world, Roger Friedland (2001) traces the roots of religion's

return to the public sphere and its reentanglement with the state from an ontological understanding of religion as an immanent social force. History, Friedland argues, seems to have had a full circular journey since the modern state was stripped of its religious connotations. The separation of state and religion placed the state at the nexus of collective representation while pushing religion at the private confines of individual and family, hence, shifting the core of sacralization from religion to the state or precisely, from the cultural to the social—a shift that reduces the individual to the homogenizing sovereignty of the nation state as the sole site of collective representation and solidarity. The outcome is of a paradoxical mystery that only religion could offer. In stripping the state of religious underpinnings the state becomes the site and outcome of collective representation that necessarily affixes sacred status to the state not unlike those of religious icons and objects of worship. The supposedly secular and secularizing nation-state turned into a divine power which opens the way for what Friedland describes as “a new terror: states armed with the powers of the divine” (Friedland, 2001, p. 125) in the contemporary (western) world. Being the site of powerful symbolic collective representations from society, the nation-state is now “suffused with the religious”, which produces a nation with citizens symbolically enamored to the nation-state as a sacred power in its own right. Religious nationalism exemplifies this recoupled religious-political representation of the state. By representing the nation the state thus becomes the object of political desire of nationalists, of those who invest in themselves the responsibility of realizing a true nationalism by capturing the state as an apparatus of power over the nation. Bruce (2003), indeed powerfully argues that “the most important symptom of the return of repressed religiosity is the deification of the state”, the latter being the sublime object of current nationalist discourse and collective representation. After a long process of secularization, religion, indeed, is back with a vengeance.

Collective representation, although inevitably leading to the production of the sacred, takes different routes in a complex, differentiated, highly developed world. It produces different shades of religious nationalisms as societies imagine the nation-state in different ways. Intense conflict of religious nationalisms ensues, that parallels religion’s violent past. The state must arm itself of the same religious conviction about itself and its power to rule as its enemies which covet it resulting into a religious nationalism in power against religious nationalisms which want power, all

wearing the same religious certainty of the right to rule. In today's global world, it is nationalism in its necessarily religious and ideologizing form that bears and radicalizes the power of the sacred in social life, particularly in the realm of political struggle; as activist movements continue to arise or are rejuvenated from the depths of the Cold War by the unrelenting process of globalization.

After having been orphaned by the collapse of world straddling ideologies, ethnic and religious nationalist movements imagine their arch enemy—the implicitly secular liberal-capitalist hegemony of the Western world—in typical religious garbs as a “Satanic secular foe” (Juergensmeyer, 1993) to rally their forces against. Deriving energy from the hegemonising strategies of the predominantly Western style globalization, the sacred of nationalism—whether in secular, religious or ideological form—brings the battle into the international political scene against a sharply stereotyped enemy: the “secular West” (Juergensmeyer, 1993)—that is, if the West is really secular. But is the West really secular? If ideology can be construed as purely secular then The United States of America, as the prime bearer of the West's “secular ideology”, is indeed secular, in the paradoxical sense that it is zealously religious about its supposedly secular ideology. From the way this paper approaches ideology, that the Western-liberal-democratic-capitalist system is secular is problematic and misleading. The religious nationalist enemies of secular states in Juergensmeyer's new Cold War could be right in stereotyping their enemies led by the US as their “Satanic secular foes”. The war, it seems, between secular and religious ideologies is fought more and more in religious terms.

CONCLUSION

As members of groups, communities and societies, human beings normally develop a sense of self, which is anchored on a sense of this self as being ontologically the same as others—this sense being drawn and constituted out of the same (although differentiated) social scene. Without this sense of the Other, no human groups can ever thrive.

The blurring of this primordial human sense corrupts the basis of society's being inasmuch as it corrupts the social being. The sacred by both being the basis of social solidarity through collective representation/identification (as religion) and a threat to this solidarity through an

excess of inward discourse and self identification (as ideology) is a key to understanding the virulence of religious-ideological movements and nation-states (religious nationalism) and religious-secular ideologies (liberal-capitalist system) in an ironically purportedly secularizing global world.

The construction of collective identity around the sacred and through religion, as discussed above, bears an ontological tendency to radicalize this collective identity into the ideological form, which corrupts the sociality of the participants of ideology as it corrupts the very basis of being human, of the sense of the Other. The blurring and corruption of this sense (of the Other), however, is the chief preoccupation of human beings in this new age of religion and ideology.

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