Terrorist Violence Religion and Power Since Late 20th Century

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Abstract

Violent terrorist phenomena with religious label, mainly Islamic, have become a serious problem worldwide over the last thirty years. There is a view, supported by New Atheists and others that the cause of terrorist violence, and of much political violence generally, is religion. In this essay that position is rejected and it is argued that the basic values of major religions are incompatible with terrorist violence. Recent terrorist phenomena have a multidimensional aetiology. They can be better explained in the context of power relations and power structures, at national and international level, in the framework of globalization and the advance of technology. The position that late terrorism is a consequence of 'the clash of civilizations' is also questioned on the same basis. The article further explores the problem of the meaning of terrorist violence and its relation to the sacred. In this context, there is a condensed account for the development of terrorist violence, mainly by Islamic extremists, since late 20th century. The central point of the essay is that these violent terrorist phenomena, carried out by fanatic fundamentalist extremists under a religious label, should not be associated with Islam and its holy texts as a world religion. The overwhelming majority of Muslims worldwide are very peaceful people.

Keywords

Terrorist Violence, Religion, Power, Political, Islamic, Fundamentalist, Extremist

1. Introduction

Terrorism is a serious problem facing humanity in the 21st century. Unsuspecting innocent ordinary people using public transport, dining in restaurants, attending entertainment and sporting venues or a place of worship may suddenly face death, injury, or mutilation. During the last three decades, the victims (deaths and injured) amount to hundreds of thousands around the world (<https://www.statista.com>statistics>) (Nov. 30, 2020). It is already a global problem that preoccupies many governments and the founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, has predicted that things could get worse with the potential threat of bio-terrorism. The macabre attack in New York, 11 September 2001, by the extremist Islamic organization *Al Qaeda*, raised the question of the correlation of religion and terrorism. It highlighted, also, the long-established relationship among violence, religion and sacrifice (Girard, 1972). This poses significant questions for the sociology of religion because all major religions stress peace, harmony, justice and brotherhood for all humanity in their basic texts and in their theological and liturgical traditions. At the same time, all of them have been involved in political violence and religious wars historically. How might this contradiction be understood?

Some, the New Atheists, in particular Dawkins (2006) and Hitchens (2006 & 2007), have argued that religion is the cause of terrorist violence in contemporary society and, historically, of political violence at large. Thus, many

secularists make a case against religion generally. I do not agree with that thesis and will argue that the values of the major world religions are incompatible with terrorist violence. So, religion, in substance, is not generic to terrorism and its use by terrorists and radical ideologues is a distortion of the basic message of their own religion. I maintain instead that the essence of terrorist violence is political/secular. It is immediately related to the pursuit, possession, and fight against power structures by fanatic extremists, acting under the canopy of the sacred. Attributing, thus, to terrorism a religious origin.

For Freud violence is immanent in the biological constitution of all species and in nature at large ('survival of the fittest'). For humans, however, violence is, above all, socially constructed. They are the only species which transcend their biological organism and they can opt for peace or violence. Thus, humans have developed culture, language, religion and the arts and can exercise peaceful coexistence and brotherhood with fellow human beings. Yet, paradoxically, the same brotherhood, kinship, and social identity of people in groups, nations and religions that fosters common interests and solidarity within the group also create tensions, conflicts and wars with those outside the group/culture. The common denominator underlying all these conflicts, even at the kinship level, is power. So, siblings often fight and hate each other for power and privilege, especially those in power.

The big religions, which Max Weber (1948) has called *world religions*, include in their founding texts and in their theologies and liturgical traditions, universal visions of brotherhood and salvation of humankind. These schemes of salvation and redemption however, though visualized beyond history, in heaven, they are pursued within history in a world of scarcity and full of conflict, violence, injustice and domination of one group or nation over another. Thus, some action may, specifically, involve violence. What interests me here is the frequency, the intensity and extensity of recent terrorist violence by various groups, especially Islamic, which carry the label 'religious'. The problem of the connection of terrorist violence and religion by extremists globally has been highlighted by Juergensmeyer (2017) and others and has now acquired wide social concern.

My objective is not to present a quantitative picture of the phenomenon for which detailed statistics per country and globally abound. Nor do I wish to engage in the social political/ideological and theoretical dimensions of the problem for which the bibliography is extensive (<http://www.cep.unep.org> PDF) (29 Jan., 2021). Rather, I will examine the extent to which the nature of the problem is religious¹, or a consequence of the pursuit and exercise of political power by extremists who fight against power structures, seeking to impose their own 'sacred' model of society in a globalised world. So, my focus is on the relationship between religion and terrorist violence, in the context of political power, mainly by Islamic fundamentalist extremism after the Cold War.

My sociological theoretical/methodological approach is phenomenological, non-reductionist, open. It avoids what Frank Parkin (1971) has called ideological social closure and Charles Taylor (2007) has discussed as closed world structures. It is, thus, non-positivist. It is also congruent with the view that the substance of religion is transcendence, as transcendent (free, autonomous) also is the nature of man.

2. The problem of Meaning of Terrorist Violence

Commonly used and acceptable definition of terrorism does not exist. The subject merits an essay in itself but here I explore it briefly in the context of its relevance to the dialectic between religion and power². The term apart from the acts to which it refers, carries also a subjective, value laden, emotive ideological element. So, the same bomb explosion, which is characterised by the authorities and the public as abominable, terrorist, barbarous crime. It is considered by the group or groups behind it and their sympathisers as a brave liberation act of courage and sacred duty. Clearly, such activities are illegal, and the final criterion for their characterization is the law, but for the perpetrators and their sympathisers, who may be many, they are symbolic acts which declare the asymmetry of power between them and the system and the authority which they fight.

The most often used definition of terrorism by analysts is that of the UN in 1992: "A method which causes fear with repeated violent acts, by (semi)illegal individuals or state agents, for special criminal or political reasons, where—in contrast to murder—the immediate targets of violence are not the main aims". This definition is used by political and state actors although it does not express all researchers and all citizens. Another definition produced and used by the Ministry of Defence of the US is: "The premeditated use of illegal violence or threat of illegal violence in order to cause fear, which aims at forcing or frighten governments or societies in the pursuit of aims which are

¹ Along with Martin (1978, p. 12), by religious I mean: "acceptance of a level of reality beyond the observable world known to science, to which we ascribe meanings and purposes completing and transcending those of the purely human realm".

² For a detailed analysis of the dialectic between religion and power see (Martin, 2014) and Kokosalakis (2020)

generally political, religious or ideological”. Similar definition is given and used by the State Department and the FBI.

The well-known linguist and critical analyst of American politics Noam Chomsky (2002, p. 119) has argued that there are two ways of approaching the study of terrorism: the literal and the propagandistic one. Politicians often use the second. He makes clear and stresses that terrorist acts are destructive and should be condemned but the bearers of authority and power cannot apply two measures and two weights in defining what is and what is not terrorist violence. So, Chomsky using the same definition of terrorism which the American authorities use, shows, with plethora of examples, that with the same logic and the same methods and acts the American state has been involved many times in terrorist violence. What Chomsky wants to emphasise is that political power, especially in its non-democratic imperialist pursuits, uses unfair violence, which does not consider illegal, but it is equally condemnable and inhuman with that of the enemy terrorists.

In any definition of terrorism, therefore, there are involved ideological, subjective, axiological factors which differ according to whether one is perpetrator or member of specific group, whether one is immediate or mediate victim, whether representing the power and authority of some government, or whether one is ordinary citizen. Also, the attitudes and views of ordinary citizens differ, not only from country to country, but also within the same society. So, I agree with Chomsky that the problem of meaning of terrorism is a matter of approach and in substance it is a matter of objectivity and of universal moral criteria which cannot be other for the ‘terrorists’ and other for the governments or the authorities which confront them.

In my view, the problem of the meaning terrorism is related to motives and, in the last analysis, is a matter of ethical criteria of violation of human dignity, of democratic values, of human rights and of the sanctity of life. There are, I think, universal panhuman ultimate and non-negotiable values. World religions promote such values in their basic texts and liturgies. They also justify self-defence and resistance against the violators of human dignity and freedom. These values also are criteria for the quality of civilization generally.

From a Christian pacifist and theological stand point violence in general is condemnable, especially when it is offensive to the human person as the icon of God. David Martin (2020) has explored arguments relevant to the involvement of Christianity in the world in connection with English poetry and secularization (Kokosalakis, 2021) and Roberto Cipriani (2017), has elaborated the connection of religion and values generally in the context of ‘diffused Religion’.

From a purely cultural civilizational perspective violence, state violence included, to the extent that violates and vilifies human dignity is an offense to civilised life. So, the shameful and inhuman treatment of terrorists, or suspects, in the prison of *Guantanamo* as well as the debasement and humiliation of detained Iraqis by American soldiers, which have ‘graced’ television screens worldwide, compete in barbarity with terrorist violence. They have not caused, of course, the disgust and horror caused by the decapitation of innocent hostages by ‘religious’ fanatics.

3. Religion Civilization and Violent Power

Within a cultural civilizational context, the role of religion has been both: positive and negative. The big religions: Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, promote the betterment and moral elevation, perfection and salvation of the individual. They also aim at the redemption of the world and teach and promote peaceful coexistence, love, and solidarity amongst people and the human kind at large. But they have also played a negative role since in the name of God, and the *holy*, there have been countless wars, barbarity, horror and abomination and has been produced so much violence in human history.

The American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1993) put forward the thesis, (now known as the Clash of Civilizations), that after the end of the Cold War violent conflicts in the planet will have a religious-cultural rather than economic or politico-ideological base. He talked thus of the conflict and confrontation of civilizations in large groupings of people on the basis of religion, language, and their cultural identity. He named eight such civilizations: the Western, the Islamic, the Orthodox-Slavic, the African, the Latin-American, the Confucian, the Hinduist, and the Japanese. According to Huntington these civilizational and religious identities are immediately related to violent religious conflicts and to the degree and function of democracy in contemporary societies worldwide.

Concerning Islam it is true that in its strongly political, theocratic, totalitarian form it is not compatible with western liberal democracy. But, the same is true of any totalitarian system whether named religious or political. After the Iranian Revolution (1979), the leader (political and religious) Ayatollah Khomeini stressed: “What our nation wants is an Islamic republic, not just a democratic republic, nor a democratic Islamic republic. Do not use this word

democratic. This is the Western style. We respect Western civilization but we will not follow it'. (The Guardian, 2.3.1979). This extreme theocratic position expresses today's extremist Islamic terrorists, but the overwhelming majority of Muslims worldwide reject and oppose it.

Presently, it is not my purpose to criticize Huntington's thesis which, in any case, has received substantial convincing criticism from various social scientists, (<https://www.researchgate.net>2734>). (Accessed: 15.2.2021). I agree with this criticism but I want also to stress that this position enhances xenophobia, racism, and supports extremist politicians and citizens, on all sides, who may want to use it for their own vested political interests. My criticism is that Huntington's position is based on generalities, trying to explain complex sociocultural/political phenomena and violence and conflict from a one-dimensional, mono-causal cultural aetiology. Democracy, which originated and was developed in classical Greek states, mainly in Athens, is now the official polity in western liberal countries. But it is also true that democracy, as political system, is pursued and practiced now, in various degrees, worldwide, including most Islamic countries.

As Islam, theologically, does not separate religion and politics it has implications for the function of democracy. Yet, this characteristic of Islam as big religion in no way explains, or can be attributed directly to, contemporary Islamic terrorism and Islam cannot be singled out as a religion of violence. In any case the political role of religion generally has been increasing everywhere since the 1980s.

Christianity has a strong pacifist element because it makes a distinction between sacred and worldly power and, according to its founder Jesus Christ, we should not confuse 'the things of Caesar with the things of God' (Mathew, 22.21). He in fact went further in his teaching and advised his followers to 'turn the other cheek' (Mathew, 5.38-42)³. Yet, Christianity has been involved in various wars soon after its official recognition and establishment as state religion by Emperor Constantine in the 4th century and throughout its subsequent history.

It must be stressed that Islam also, in its founding, sacred, text the Quran (20, 25), refers to peace and eminent scholars, especially Laurence (2006), have analysed in depth the high civilizational quality of this *Holy Book* in a historical, sociocultural, theological and political context. Yet, extremists known as Jihadists, taking references on *jihad* out of context, interpret it as (holy war) against enemies internationally (Afsaruddin, 2013; Khorsokhavar, 2009). They take examples from the fight against colonialism (Peters, 1979) and from the political struggles of Islamic history generally. But, all religions, including Buddhism and Christianity, which have a strong pacifist element, have engaged in political struggles and violence periodically.

In Islam the violent political elements is more prominent because of the way it engages in the world in specific socioeconomic and political conditions. It must also be stressed that Islam in itself was politically divided from the beginning. Sunni and Shia Islam have engaged in big struggles and conflicts between themselves historically. The Iran-Iraq war, (1980-1988), is a prominent recent example. However, our focus here is on the marked increase of terrorist violence by Islamic radicals worldwide since then and the way such activity has been attributed a sacred character.

4. Condensed historical framework of the development of terrorist violence since late 20th century

During the Cold War, the far left produced extreme political organisations such as: The *Red Brigade* in Italy, the *Baader Meinhof* in Germany, the *Red Army* in Japan, and the *17 November* in Greece. All these were purely political/secular, based on Marxist ideology, and engaged in terrorist violence extensively. After the Cold War these organization lost their ideological/political impetus and were dismantled by the respective governments.

In the last decades of the 20th century, revolutionary organizations were formed in the Middle East, in Northern Ireland, in Turkey, in the Basque country and elsewhere. These included: the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO); the Irish Republican Army (IRA); and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey. These organizations were illegal in their countries, their power was asymmetrical to that of the state, and they engaged in secret terrorist activities such as bomb explosions and murders. Apart from the Basques, who are clearly nationalist, all the others carry mixed ethno-religious—nationalist ideology but their aims have been above all political.

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 highlighted the immediate connection between religion and politics there. After the Revolution of Khomeini there emerged a fundamentalist, Islamist political ideology which, for the secularised West, is not only incomprehensible but also politically dangerous. The USA became alarmed after the occupation of their

³ At a parenthesis here we should mention that the basic Marxist critique against Christianity is that it rejects revolutionary violence and legitimises the exploitation of the working class and the poor in capitalist society. I think that this critique is simplistic and wrong but this is not our subject.

embassy in Tehran and the hostage of its personnel from young fighters in 1979. Since then, American governments face the serious problem of terrorism which intensified due to US foreign policy in the Middle East, especially the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Within this political climate various anti-American and anti-western, fundamentalist, militant Islamic political organizations emerged. *Al Qaeda* is the most prominent and it is multinational. It is estimated that it has several thousand members but little is known about its membership due to secrecy (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda>). It functions mainly in Iraq (Islamic state), in Syria and the Middle East and has, allegedly, secret connections with some Islamic countries. It was founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden and others and organised and executed the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in September 2001, now known as 9/11. This attack is now considered historic.

The well-known Palestinian-Israeli Problem is also linked to political violence directly, especially in the Middle East. The conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis has its roots in the end of 19th century when the Zionist movements raised claims for the settlement of the Jews of Diaspora in Palestine, which was then under Ottoman rule and the great majority of its inhabitants were Palestinian Arabs. The vision of the Jews to acquire their own country, since the pillage and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, revived strongly after the *Holocaust* and became reality in 1947, when the UN voted for their settlement there. Israel was declared an independent state by its first president David Ben Gurion in 1948 but it was never recognised or accepted by the Palestinians and the Arab World. The Arab-Israeli wars which followed, with the victories of the latter and their settlements policy, under the cover of the US, sharpened the conflict and involved terrorist violence on both sides, continuing to the present. At this stage, fundamentalist Islamic political organisations emerged like the Palestinian (Sunnitic) *Hamas*, the Lebanese (Shiitic) *Hezbollah* and the *Islamic Jihad*. On the Jewish side there were the followers of Rabi Meir Kahane, the Israeli extremists *Baruch Goldstein*, and the *Yigal Amir*. The intransigence and the fanaticism of these groups, which continues to the present day, has been explored in detail and criticised by Amos Oz (2006, 2017). Oz links the fanaticism of these groups with terrorist violence directly. These non-state groups practice terrorism not only against their enemies but they also targeted their own moderate political leaders and murdered the president of Egypt Anwar Sadat in 1981 and the Israeli president Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. These non-state organizations (*Hamas* is now an elected political party in Gaza) have no explicit official connection with organised religion but they carry a religious identity although their aims are clearly nationalist and power/political. Indeed, the Islamists claim to fight against the west at large on religious grounds.

The connection of religion politics and terrorism was strengthened and spread in various parts of the world during the last thirty years and with the development of globalisation (Juergensmeyer, 2017). In India, there was conflict and many violent terrorist acts between fanatic Buddhists and fanatic Muslims. In the former Soviet Union, there were many bloody incidents in public places by Tsetseni guerrillas. Terrorist attacks spread especially in big cities in Europe (London, Paris Madrid) as well as in Africa (Egypt, Kongo, Soudan, Nigeria), and in Asia (mainly in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan). Even in peaceful New Zealand, 'God's own country', in the city Christchurch, 15.3.2019, a white racist extremist killed 50 Muslims at prayer in two mosques. Terrorism in Europe has been largely organised by ISIS (the so called Islamic State). In this article, I focus on terrorist violence and Islamic extremism but I want to stress also that globalization and electronic technology suits the terrorists worldwide and makes communication between them easier and their task more deadly.

My general point is that claiming that the cause of terrorist violence is religion, as Hitchens (2008), and others do, is wrong. Recent terrorist violence, though carrying religious identity, it has, as always, a political base and political aims and a multi-dimensional aetiology. Therefore, over and above the seriousness and the real threat of the danger of terrorism, which varies from country to country, the problem and the threat are used and magnified for political purposes. The prime aim of the perpetrators is to spread terror in society as deeply and widely as possible. But the receiving state agents also may use the magnification of the problem for their own political reasons through two main factors. The first is the structure, the use, and the policies of power at geo-political level. The US president George Bush Junior and the British prime-minister Tony Blair used such policies in 2003, when they invaded Iraq with the excuse of destroying chemical weapons there, which they never found. Undoubtedly, terrorism in this context is used as an excuse in a propagandistic way.

A climate of fear, threat, and xenophobia is created thus which, especially in the US and elsewhere, touches the level of hysteria. But this is at the expense of democracy and human rights (Manitakis, 2003). Furthermore, it has serious implications for racism and immigration policies. We cannot engage in these important problems here but it is clear that such climate, and the laicism which feeds it, fits admirably in legitimising the internal and external policies

of some political leaders in the US and elsewhere. Certainly, it fits the interests of USA as superpower. George Bush was just mentioned but the policy of Donald Trump is a more recent example. Yet, this climate suits mainly the terrorists who fight the West in the name of God.

The second factor which contributes to the augmentation of fear and the real danger of terrorism is the contemporary way of communication and transmission of information. The media, especially the social media, the internet and the television, magnify events in a particular iconic way. Phenomena such as terrorist violence due to their emotive religious/ideological load are well compatible with the impressionist nature of the media, especially the social networks, and are conducive to raising the fear of death which is immanent in every consciousness and every human soul. This factor, of course, converges neatly with the basic aim of the terrorists to spread terror. Technology also serves the terrorists to communicate among themselves in order to plan, organize and execute their macabre tasks.

5. Terrorist Violence and the Sacred

Girard (1972) has explored in detail the wider and deeper dialectic between violence and the sacred in variable cultural anthropological context. In this classical study, sacrifice is analysed as a means of redemptive purification and as expiation of the divine. Girard also examines ritual sacrifice and human sacrifice in the context of scapegoat theory. He shows its deeper anthropological and moral theological meaning as redemption and reconciliation with the divine. In this context, all religions have ritual practice of sacrifice and all have their martyrs. Yet, martyrdom usually emerges when religions are in a state of persecution and under the threat of extinction by social conditions and power structures. Early Christianity, for instance, was persecuted and had thousands of Martyrs under the Roman Emperors and early Islam was persecuted in the Meccan period. But, recent terrorists are after power. Their 'martyrdom' and 'sacrifice' is a distortion of the basic redemptive meaning of religious sacrifice and of altruistic sacrifice at large. Historically they may refer to the domination of Islamic societies by western colonial powers but such domination is not applicable in the contemporary social/historical circumstance.

For the terrorists the ends justify the means with the specificity here that means, almost always, are the lives of innocent human beings. The other gruesome particularity of terrorists is that, as means for their purposes, they often use their own brainwashed fanatic young people as live human bombs. So, by turning barbarity into martyrdom and sacrifice, the terrorists have in their hands a non-fightable weapon. To the extent then that such acts are religious, religion is answerable. But my view is that the values and basic teaching of major religions, in this case Islam, are distorted here and are used as a cover for the real aim and cause which is power. So the terrorists in their inability to face state power they invoke the power of their 'almighty God', and taking the concept of *Jihad* from the *Quran* out of context, they claim martyrdom and sacrifice. The exclamation of the individual perpetrators is: 'God is great'. Yet, the basic aim and function of such phenomena is that they transform the asymmetrical power between the terrorists and the state into an unmanageable threat against the state and its citizens by spreading terror.

These arguments are explored in detail by eminent Islamic scholars who show how the basic teaching of the *Quran* is distorted by radical ideologues who pursue power in the name of God. Afsaruddin (2020) gives a detailed theological and sociological interpretation of *Jihad* as it is in the *Quran* and argues elsewhere (2013: ch. 8) that the concept is taken out of context and appropriated by political ideologues. Here radical Islamic theologians are refuted, including Ayatollah Khomeini, and their Islamic rhetoric criticized. Khorsokhavar (2009) also explores the dynamics of *jihadism* sociologically and sets it in its political context in the Middle East, and its use in the West by radical Islamists. What all these studies show is that terrorist violence has a political rather than religious base and the sacred is used for ideological legitimation.

6. Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines fundamentalism as: "the belief in old and traditional forms of religion or the belief that what is written in a holy book, such as the Christian Bible is completely true". It adds that "Recent years have witnessed a growth in religious fundamentalism". Initially, the term has been used to describe developments in Protestantism in America at the end of the 19th century. It was basically a Protestant theological response to academic Biblical criticism and to modern interpretations of the Bible. Protestant fundamentalists claimed that the biblical text is literally true as the word of God. In recent decades the term has been used broadly to refer to certain anti-modern aspects of religious revival generally and to Islamic extremists in particular. Lawrence (1989) explores Christian, Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism as a revolutionary response to the modern age.

In all religions, we must distinguish the meaning of the basic texts, which is a matter of open, dynamic, symbolic,

theological interpretation, from the fundamentalist approach which gives the texts a closed literal and static meaning. The fundamentalist approach, usually, misrepresents and distorts the real symbolic religious, salvationist, mystical message of the text. The fundamentalists also are invariably fanatic. They have a dualistic (*Manichaeism*) view of the world and the demarcation lines they draw between themselves and *the others*, including their moderate coreligionists, are very strong, absolute, hostile, and exclusive. Fundamentalism thus has negative connotation. Hunson (2019) provides a detailed account of the study, the complexity, the facts and types of fundamentalism in all major religions. He points out that because in Islamic context the term “emphasises the religious roots of the phenomenon while neglecting the nationalist and social grievances that underlie it, many scholars... speak of ‘Islamist movements’ instead of Islamic Fundamentalism”. The term, however, is now widely used both in popular and academic language.

My point here is that Islamic fundamentalism, as religious fundamentalism generally, must be distinguished from the wider religious cultural civilizational meaning and practice followed by the great majority of believers. Hanson (2019) also stresses that the emotive character of terrorist phenomena has led to the mistaken view in the West that Islamic fundamentalism and Islam are closely related or even identical. Indeed, such identification is far from the truth for Islam worldwide. Simply the elective affinity of Islamic fundamentalism with a critique of modernity suits well the anti-western attitudes and the terrorist violence of Islamic extremists.

Since the collapse of the socialist world in late twentieth century the political role of religion and of Islam, in particular, has increased. The reasons for it are very complex and many, but a basic one is globalization which, aided by electronic technology, fuses economic, political and cultural forces internationally and at national level. This is coefficient with the late advanced monetary capitalism of the markets which now functions as a locomotive of global socioeconomic change (Thurow, 1996). As all religions, Islam, as a world religion, has to function within these socioeconomic and political conditions which enhance its historical diachronic contest with the West, and its unease with modernity at large. This circumstance provides the fundamentalist Jihadist extremists a very fertile ground for planning and practicing their aims. Within this ground Islamic fundamentalists view the world in a specific way and draw not only sharp lines of exclusion of the West but also enhances their vehement animosity against it. This fuels terrorism which is an effective weapon against the asymmetrical power of the enemy. Islamic fundamentalism also turns terrorist activity against the enemy into self-sacrifice. So terrorist bombers are turned into human bombs of suicide in the name of almighty Allah. Yet, their understanding of Allah is far from the authentic, undefinable Allah discussed by Bruce Laurence (2015), and is not the God worshiped by hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide. But their understanding provides them with an ultimate weapon to fight and terrorise their powerful Western enemies. The paradox is that all this is aided and realised by modern advanced electronic technology, which is used by the terrorists very efficiently and effectively against their targets which usually are other than the innocent victims involved.

Modernity itself, and the West at large, had its convincing critics not only by Islamic academics like the prominent Palestinian Edward Said (1978, 1993) but also by distinguished western sociologists, like Alain Touraine (1992) and Antony Giddens (1990). So, a consequence of the marginalization, even rejection, of religion in rational discourse by modernity is now a reason for the revenge against it sought by Islamic fundamentalist extremists, who fight *the infidels*. Cheap, yellow western journalism does not help, of course, and throws oil in the fire with its irreverent ‘satirical’ comments on the holy of holies of Islam. But it must be stressed again that the overwhelming majority of the hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world are peaceful people going about their everyday life and are trying to cope with its difficulties with the help of their God.

7. Epilogue

The growth of terrorist violence in recent decades, not only by Islamic extremists but also by racists and others, is a complex phenomenon of multi-dimensional aetiology. Certainly, the intensity and extension of the phenomenon is immediately related to the growth of nationalism, to globalization and geopolitical developments. Its main causal explanation may be traced within power structures and power relations and policies within non-state organizations and in governments, inside and outside Islam. In Islam especially it carries a fanatic fundamentalist religious dimension which must be distinguished from the basic ecumenical diachronic moral values of all major religions which condemn barbaric violence from any source. Indeed, all of them, including Islam, support the peaceful coexistence and solidarity among the people but they also have theories of ‘just war’.

Western civilization, which in its economic, political and scientific technological dimensions, has now become global, experiences a cultural crisis itself. Since the 1980s, the classical theory of secularization, (expounded mainly

by Wilson, 1966, 1982), seems to be challenged by the revival of religion, almost everywhere. Certainly secularization theory and the view that religion has now become privatised (Luckman, 1967) and plays no longer a serious public role, is contrary to empirical evidence (Berger, 1999) and has been strongly criticised (Martin, 1978; Casanova, 1994, among others). Religious revival and its political role have become evident especially in Islam in which extremists do not separate religion and politics. In this circumstance, the separation lines between Islam and the West have been stronger and more focused. The Jihadist fundamentalist extremists have exploited this and have declared war against the governments in the West and not only.

Terrorist violence has now spread almost everywhere. In order to counteract state power, the Islamic extremists engage in terrorist violence by invoking the power of their God, but their ends are clearly political. Yet, the same almighty God is worshiped by the hundreds of millions of their peaceful co-religionists round the world who pray daily in their mosques, in public spaces, in their homes, and even in the streets.

As nationalism has been flourishing again everywhere and the world has become economically and politically interconnected, it seems that the political role of religion since late twentieth century is here to stay. In this circumstance, and in the context of globalised society at international and national level, the big religions may play a significant positive political and civilizational role, given their diachronic cultural and spiritual capital of universal human values. But they could also play a negative role if they engage in the pursuit of power and succumb to laicism and/or extremism. For this reason, the dialogue amongst their leaders and their cooperation with political leaders is of crucial importance now and in the future.

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