



ZLOŠŤ: PRVÉ SLOVO EURÓPY

Obrad Savić

Samozrejme, predovšetkým chcem poďakovať svojmu drahému priateľovi Samuelovi Abrahámovi, ktorý ma oslovil, aby som prispel do špeciálneho čísla *Kritiky & Kontext*. Ako šéfredaktor žiadal, aby autori zaslali krátky text s výstižnými úryvkami z vybranej knihy. Podľa redakčnej poznámky to znamenalo skrátiť naše teoretické zásahy či politické poznámky na minimum. Preto stručne poviem, prečo som sa rozhodol predložiť ako svoju obľúbenú knihu veľmi polemický, dokonca provokatívny titul od Petra Sloterdijka, *Zlošť a čas. Psychopolitické skúmanie* (*Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, Columbia University Press, New York 2012), ktorý pôvodne vyšiel ako *Zorn und Zeit. Politisch-psychologischer Versuch* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2006).

S hlbokou a vášnivou zvedavosťou odporúčam prečítať si túto knihu, ktorá otvorene obhajuje, hoci nie bez spochybnení, radikálnu rehabilitáciu zlosti ako

RAGE: EUROPE'S FIRST WORD

Obrad Savić

First and foremost, of course, I want to thank to my dear friend Samuel Abraham, who invited me to participate in the special issue of *Kritika & Kontext*. As editor-in-chief, he insisted that contributors send an article reduced to pure quotations from a chosen book. This was, according to editorial remarks, to reduce our theoretical interventions or political remarks, to a minimum. Therefore, I will say briefly why I decided to submit—as my favourite book—one very polemical, even irritating title by Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2012), originally published as *Zorn und Zeit. Politisch-psychologischer Versuch* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2006).

With deep and impassioned curiosity I suggest reading this book that openly argues, although not without some challenges, for a radical rehabilitation of rage as a political concept. In other words, Sloterdijk insists that a realistic reconstruction

politického pojmu. Inými slovami, Sloterdijk nástojí na tom, že realistickú rekonštrukciu potlačených dejín „negatívnej emócie“, Zlosti, treba uskutočniť mimo tradičnej paradigmy sebaovládania. Množstvom rozumných argumentov odmieta platónsku a stoickú koncepciu *thymos*, keď sa predstavuje ako mílnik na ceste k *morálnemu skroteniu masovej zlosti*. Vie, že hnev založený na pomste a nenávisti nemožno úspešne zmierniť a ovládať racionálnymi prostriedkami. Práve naopak, „potláčanie zlosti“ vyvoláva viac hnevu a rozsiahle nahromadenie výbušnej politickej energie. Napríklad všetky revolúcie, obzvlášť komunistická sa sústredila na ideologické tvrdenie, že rozsiahla thymotizácia proletariátu si zasluhuje politický rešpekt a má vlastnú triednu legitimitu. Samozrejme, Sloterdijk pripomína a dnes vieme, že ideologické rozšírenie politickej zlosti – komunistická zlosť, rasová zlosť, etnická zlosť, feministická zlosť, černošská zlosť, náboženská zlosť, islamská zlosť atď. – nenávratne rozbili jestvujúcu „svetovú banku zlosti“: „Po všetkom tom, čo sme počas tohto skúmania povedali, by bolo absurdné tvrdiť, že zlosť má svoje najlepšie dni za sebou. Naopak, zlosť (spolu so svojimi thymotickými súrodencami, hrdosťou, potrebou uznania a rozhorčením) je základnou silou v *ekosystéme afektov*, či už medziľudských, politických alebo kultúrnych.“

Na záver môjho stručného expozé dodám, že Zlosť má aj racionálny moment, a tým je úžitok z vyjadrenia hnevu, ktoré môže vyburcovať naše politické pobúrenie nezávisle od starej, večnej, metafyzickej nenávisti. Len kráčajúc po tejto stope môžeme pochopiť Sloterdijkovo varovanie na konci knihy: „Islamizmus ako mobilizátor tymotických zásob veľkého rozsahu v skutočnosti vôbec nedosiahol svoje (historické) vyvrcholenie.“ Islamská zlosť je skutočne jedinečná, pretože samu seba vytvára tým, ako sa vynakladá: jasnejšie nám ukazuje, ako regulovať náš politický odpor

of the suppressed history of a ‘negative emotion,’ Rage, must be realized outside of the traditional, self-controlled paradigm. With a lot of reasonable arguments, he rejects the Platonic and Stoic conception of *thymos* presented as a milestone on the way to the *moral domestication of mass rage*. He knows that anger based on vengeance and resentment cannot be mitigated and controlled successfully by rational means. Quite the opposite, ‘restraining rage’ produces more anger and the wide accumulation of explosive political energy. For example, all revolutions, especially the Communist one, was centred on the ideological assertion that an extensive thymotization of the proletariat deserves political respect and has its own class legitimacy. Of course, we know today, as Sloterdijk suggests, that the ideological dispersion of political rage—Communist Rage, Race Rage, Ethnic Rage, Feminist Rage, Black Rage, Religious Rage, Islamic Rage, etc.—irretrievably destroyed the existing ‘world bank of rage’: “After everything that has been said during the course of this investigation, it would be absurd to claim that rage’s best days are behind it. On the contrary, rage (together with its thymotic siblings, pride, the need for recognition, and resentment) is a basic force in the *ecosystem of affects*, whether interpersonal, political, or cultural.”

At the end of my brief exposé, I will add that there is one rational moment of Rage, the benefit of expressing anger that can galvanize our political indignations free from old, eternal, metaphysical resentment. Only in this trace we can understand Sloterdijk’s warning at the end of the book, “As a mobilizer of thymotic reserves on a large scale, Islamism has in fact not at all reached its (historical) climax.” Islamic rage is really unique because it produces itself by spending: It shows us more clearly how to regulate our political aversion outside liberal paradigms and its political correctness. As

mimo liberálnych paradigiem a ich politickej korektnosti. Pokým mali duch a rozhorčenie stabilného prostredníka, túžba po svetovej spravodlivosti – mimo pozemského života či v rámci skutočných dejín – mohla nájsť útočisko len v domnelom presvedčení. Nasledovný Sloterdijkov náhľad treba vyhlásiť ako axiómu: V podmienkach súčasnej globalizácie nie je možná žiadna politika, ktorá by v širokom meradle udržala utrpenie v rovnováhe, pokiaľ bude vychádzať z lipnutia na minulých krivdách voči niekomu bez ohľadu na to, či ju uzákoní spasiteľská, sociálno-mesianistická alebo demokraticko-mesianistická ideológia.

z anglického originálu preložil Andrej Čierny

long as the liaison of spirit and resentment was stable, the desire for justice in the world —beyond earthly life or within actual history—could find shelter only in fictitious beliefs. The following Sloterdijk insight needs to be asserted like an axiom: Under conditions of existing globalization, no politics of balancing suffering on a large scale is possible that is built on holding past injustices against someone, no matter if it is codified by redemptive, social-messianic, or democratic-messianic ideologies. The quoted paragraphs and pages belong to the English version of Rage and Time.

RAGE AND TIME* A Psychopolitical Investigation

Peter Sloterdijk

At the beginning of the first sentence of the European tradition, in the first verse of the *Illiad*, the word “rage” occurs. It appears fatally and solemnly, like a plea, a plea that does not allow for any disagreement. As is fitting for a well-formed propositional object, this noun is in the accusative: “Of the rage of Achilles, son of Peleus, sing Goddess...” That it appears at the very beginning loudly and unequivocally announces its heightened pathos. Which kind of relationship to rage is proposed to the listeners in this magical prelude to this heroic song? How does the singer want to bring to language rage? How does he intend to address the particular kind of rage with which everything began in the old Western world? Will he depict it as a form of violence, a violence that will entrap peaceful human beings in atrocious events? Should one attenuate, curb, and repress this most horrible and most human of affects?

...

What could one object to Homer from the vantage point of the present and the conventions of the lowlands? Should one accuse him of violating human rights by conceiving individuals all too directly as media of higher commanding beings? Should one accuse him of disregarding the integrity of victims by celebrating the forces that caused them harm? Or should one accuse him of neutralizing the arbitrary violence of war, of transforming its results immediately into divine judgments? Or would one have to soften the allegation to claim that the god has become a victim of impatience.

*Peter Sloterdijk: Rage and Time (translated from German original *Zorg und Zeit*) published in 2010 by Columbia University Press.

Would we have to claim that he did not possess the patience to wait until the Sermon on the Mount and that he did not read Seneca's *De ira*, the exposition of the stoic control of affects, which served as a model for Christian and humanistic ethics?

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In book 4 of the *Republic*, Plato presents an outline of a theory of *thymos* of great psychological richness and extensive political importance. The impressive achievement of Plato's interpretation of *thymos* consists in a person's ability to be infuriated. This turn against oneself can come about when a person does not live up to the expectations that would have to be satisfied in order for that person not to lose self-respect. Plato's discovery thus consists in pointing out the moral significance of intense self-disrespect. This manifests itself in a twofold way: First, it expresses itself in shame, an affective, all-encompassing mood that completely fills the subject. Second, this rage-drenched self-reproach takes on the form of an inner appeal to oneself. The act of being dissatisfied with oneself proves to the thinker that the human being has an inert, even if only obscure idea of what is appropriate, of what is just and worthy of praise. When not living up to this idea, a part of the soul, that is, *thymos*, lodges an appeal. With this turn to self-refusal the adventure of independence begins. Only he who is able to disapprove of himself is able to control himself.

The Socratic-Platonic conception of *thymos* presents a milestone on the way to the moral domestication of rage. It is situated halfway between worship of quasi-divine Homeric *menis* and the stoic dismissal of wrathful and intensive impulses. Thanks to Plato's theory of *thymos*, civil and militant impulses receive the right to remain in the philosopher's city. Because the polis that is governed by reason also needs the military, which is introduced here as the group of guardians, civilized *thymos* is allowed to remain within the city walls in the spirit of protection. Plato insists upon the recognition of protective virtues as powers that constitute society in many different ways. Still, in the late dialogue *Politicus*, which deals with the skills required for statesmanship, the well-known allegory of the weavers underlines the necessity of creating the spiritual web of the "state" by interlacing prudent disposition and courageous attitude.

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There is no person living today who has not realized that the Western world, and through it also indirectly all other areas of the world, is being irritated by a new theme. With a concern that is half true and half put-on, Westerners raise an alarm: "Hatred, revenge, irreconcilable hostility have suddenly appeared again among us! A mixture of foreign forces, unfathomable as the evil will, has infiltrated the civilized spheres."

...

When the expenditure of rage develops more complex forms, the seeds of rage are consciously dispersed, and the fruits of rage are diligently harvested. Through hate culture, rage is carried out in the form of a project. Wherever revenge intentions ripen, dark energies become stabilized over longer periods. What Nietzsche says about the genesis of conscience, that it is premised on the human who can promise, is even more true for the memory of the one who engages in revenge. This person is an agent who remembers not only the injustice that has been inflicted upon him but also all his plans for paying it back. The person "who may promise" is, according to Nietzsche's complex characterization, the subject with the "lasting will." Once this subject is constituted, revenge intentions can then be sustained over long periods of time—even passed from one generation to the next. Once the stage of transmission has reached the next agent, an authentic economy of rage has come into being. Now the

resource of rage is no longer accumulated arbitrarily and occasionally wasted; rather, it is maintained and continually produced as the object of an ongoing project. Once it has reached this stage, rage becomes a treasure trove for its possessor, opening up avenues to transpersonal motives. As soon as collectively administered amounts of rage are stored as treasures or assets, the question becomes pressing as to whether such accumulated assets can be invested like capital. I will answer this later with the support of a new psychopolitical definition for left-wing parties. In reality these parties need to be understood as banks of rage that, if they do their business well, will know how to effect politically and thymotically relevant gains.

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Just like the monetary economy, the rage economy passes a critical marker once rage has advanced from local accumulation and selective explosion to the level of a systematic investment and cyclic increase. In the case of money, one calls this difference the transition from treasure hoarding to capital. For rage, the corresponding transformation is reached once the vengeful infliction of pain is transformed from revenge to revolution. Revolution cannot be a matter of the resentment of an isolated private person, although such affects are also instantiated in its decisive moment. Revolution rather implies the creation of a bank of rage whose investments should be considered in as precise detail as an army operation before a final battle, or actions of a multinational corporation before being taken over by a hostile competitor.

The concept of the coming “revolution,” considered in light of the events of 1917, finalizes the transition from the actualism to the futurism of rage. It implies a complete dismissal of the principle of expression. Vengeful acts of expression mean nothing more than a narcissistic expenditure of energy. The professional revolutionary, who is working as an employee of a bank of rage, does not express individual tensions, he follows a plan. This presupposes the complete subordination of revolutionary affects under the commercial strategy. It does not suffice anymore to “embellish the world with horrors,” to use the sarcastic-lucid phrase uttered by Schiller’s hero in the play The Robbers, which Karl Moor proffers to characterize the maxim of his revolt against injustice. Whoever intends to embellish the world in the future needs to go much further in making it ugly than the romanticism of rebels and assassins could ever dream. Individual flowers of evil are no longer sufficient—one needs a whole art of gardening.

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By far the most influential creation of a body of rage occurred on the left wing of the workers’ movement when it increasingly came under the influence of Marx’s ideas during the last third of the nineteenth century. Retrospectively, it is clear that the strategic successes of Marxism rested on its superiority in formulating a sufficiently precise model for the powerful historical rage collective of that age. The leading thymotic group was from now on to be called the “proletariat” or, more specifically, the “industrial proletariat.” Part of its definition was, according to Marx’s thought, a systematic concept of being exploited. This conception was supplemented by an ethically sophisticated historical mission centered around the concepts of alienation and reappropriation. Nothing less was at stake with regard to the liberation of the working class than the regeneration of the human being. This liberation would correct the deformations resulting from the living conditions of the majorities in class societies.

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It is evident that the discourse surrounding the class consciousness of the workers referred, in fact, to nothing but the thymotization of the proletariat. Thymotization

signifies the subjective aspect of the preparation for an extensive battle. Class consciousness thus never meant that the industrial worker was supposed to come home after work in order to read Schiller's Maid of Orleans to expand a mind constricted by turmoil and sorrow. The expression certainly never implied that workers were supposed to reflect on their misery in economical terms. Authentic class consciousness means consciousness of civil war. As such, it can only be the result of battles in which the truth of the position of the fighting class is revealed.

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It appears that a neo-authoritarian turn of capitalism with a liberal-bellicist background is more and more likely. The year 1979 needs to be seen from today's perspective as the key time of the twentieth century. The entry into the postcommunist situation begins then in a threefold sense: the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union after the invasion of its armies into Afghanistan, the accession to power of Margaret Thatcher, and the consolidation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini.

What is called neoliberalism was in fact nothing but a recalculation of the costs of inner peace in the countries of European capitalist and social-democratic "mixed economy" or of American-style "regulatory capitalism." This necessarily led to the result that Western entrepreneurialism had paid too high a price to attain social peace under passing political and ideological pressure from the East. The time for cost-reducing measures had come, measures that aimed to switch priorities from the primacy of full employment to that of corporate dynamics. In fact, a downright reversal of the zeitgeist was brought about: it moved ever quicker away from the revolting and control-centered ethics of comfort during the decades after the war (which survived only in France) in order to give preference to a neo-entrepreneurial risk ethic.

The "market revolution" in Great Britain, which was designed by Joseph Keith and, starting in 1979, realized by Margaret Thatcher (a revolution that would soon spread to the Continent and large parts of the Western world, especially Reagan's and Clinton's America), makes clear how precisely the above diagnosis captures the situation and how radical were the consequences that are to be drawn from it. This shows itself most strikingly in the permanent trend of neoliberalism—the long march to mass unemployment that has set the tone from a social-political perspective. The new circumstances brought with it what could have hardly been imagined until then: unemployment rates of 10 percent and more are accepted more or less without a fight by the populations of European nations—even the increasingly visible decrease of welfare benefits has so far not provoked a flaring-up of the fire of class struggle. The relationships of sovereignty have been reversed overnight: organizations of employees have little power to threaten, because the privilege to threaten has, rather one-sidedly, passed onto the business side. The latter can now plausibly claim that everything will become much worse if the other side refuses to understand and abide by the new rules of the game.

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It is necessary to keep this scenario in mind in order to understand the conditions under which Islamic terrorism could celebrate its rise to become a power with the capacity to exert threats. Initially, the Islamists did not seem to be more than parasites of the post-communist constellation. No one would have thought at the time of Islamism's first appearance that one was witnessing something like a third Catholicism or an Eastern alternative to communism. Nevertheless, day by day the Islamist activists successfully imposed themselves as the new enemy of the West, initially the United States, and then helpless Europe. In this role they have been interpreted ambivalently from the begin-

ning. For tragic-minded political scientists, who are convinced of the need to always have an enemy, the anger of Islamism seemed like a present from heaven. Although Islamism was initially not especially dangerous in a material sense (as long as its agents did not gain access to nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons and the control of migration remained sufficiently strict), it keeps the psycho-political tone of irritated collectives in the West at the desired level. For the adherents of the liberal idyll, on the other hand, Islamist terror remains an unwelcome guest—a crazy graffiti sprayer who disfigures the facades of enemy-free societies with obscene messages.

However one may evaluate the ambivalent reception of the new terror by its Western addressees, it would never have advanced beyond the level of an irritating marginal phenomenon if it had not become an interesting asset in the recalculation of the costs for social peace in Western societies. While the communist threat led to a significant increase in the social costs of peace, the threat of Islamist terror brings with it, at the bottom line, effects that help lower the costs. By exerting imaginary stressful pressure on the attacked collective, it contributes to a feeling of belonging to a real community, a belonging based on solidarity, a survival unit wrestling for its own future in spite of recently severely deepened social differences. Additionally, the new terror creates, because of its undifferentiated hostility against Western forms of life, a climate of diffuse intimidation in which questions of political and existential security enjoy high priority over those of social justice—*quod erat operandum*.

With the exaggeration of the securitarian imperative to the level of being the omnipotent theme of contemporary media democracies, the zeitgeist readjusted itself after September 11, 2001, to a new ecosystem of threats and defense mechanisms—while, this time, as frivolously as it might sound, the threat tendencies of Islamist terror in general point “in the right direction” when seen from the perspective of radicalized capitalism. To feel threatened by the Middle Eastern sources now means to see reasons why one could perhaps be ready to make peace with the drifting away of Western political culture into postdemocratic conditions. The “war on terror” possesses the ideal quality of not being able to be won—and thus never having to be ended. These prospects suggest that the postdemocratic trends will enjoy a long life. They create the preconditions with which democratically elected leaders can get away with presenting themselves as commanders in chief. If political thinking limits itself to advising the commander in chief, concepts such as democracy and independent judiciary cultures are only chips in a strategic game.

The psychopolitical fate of the United States during the Bush administration illustrates these relations with an abundance of unmistakable examples. Within a few years the world became witness to how a democracy that is proud of its culture of dissent experienced a sudden extinction of political diversity of opinion because it was exposed to the knowingly and willingly induced fiction of a struggle for survival, which needed to be waged by the entire nation. The political field of the nation was influenced by homogenizing forces. Reminiscent of real wars, in this *drôle de guerre* there was a paralyzing of inner opposition through the patriotic imperative. This development to a large extent results from the work of the neoconservatives in the United States, who do not hesitate to proudly conjure up the specter of “World War IV,” to suffocate, wherever possible, every sign of a new opposition in light of growing social inequalities.

An investigation of the redistribution of threat potentials on the geopolitical maps of the present raises the question of how the much-discussed Islamic danger is to be understood. By which media does it affect the psychopolitical system of the West and

the Islamic countries? Does it really have the potential to “replace communism as the world dogma,” as one can hear it in radical Islamic circles between Khartoum and Karachi for the last decade, and not only from behind closed doors? The new specter, which is haunting Europe, the United States, and other parts of the world—from where does it take its power to threaten the leaders of the established powers? Can political Islam—whether appearing with a terroristic component or without—unfold itself to become an alternative world bank of rage? Will it become a globally attractive collection point of antisystemic or postcapitalist energies? Can Islamism be used for the continuation of the weary Western grand narratives concerning the uprising of the debased and humiliated against their masters, old and new? Does it suffice to meditate on the concept of jihad as long as it turns into a pseudonym for class struggle? Or do the fronts, which emerge from the eruptions of the Islamic world, not possess a sense of obstinacy that can only be reconciled with Western forms of the narrative of continuing revolution, universalizing emancipation, and progressive realization of human rights at the price of misunderstandings and distortions.

What qualifies political Islam as a potential successor to communism are three advantages, which can be analogously identified with historical communism. The first is the fact that an inspiring mission dynamic is inherent to Islamism, a dynamic that predisposes it to become a quickly swelling collective of new converts, that is, a “movement” in the narrow sense of the term. It is not only the case that it quasi-universally addresses “all” without discriminating on the basis of nations and social classes. It attracts especially the disadvantaged, undecided, and outraged (insofar as they are not female, and sometimes even those). It does so by presenting itself as the advocate of the spiritually and materially neglected poor and by gaining sympathies as the heart in a heartless world. The low preconditions of admission play an important part here. As soon as a person has been admitted to the ranks of believers, he is immediately usable for the purpose of the fighting community—in some cases to be immediately used as a martyr. By plunging into a vibrant community, newcomers are often given for the first time the feeling of having found a home and of not playing an equal and detached spectator but a particular role in the dramas of the world.

The second attraction of political Islam emanates from the fact that it—in a way only preceded by communism—is capable of offering its followers a clear, aggressive, and grandiosely theatrical “worldview” that rests on a clear differentiation of friend and enemy, an unmistakable mission to win, and an exhilaratingly utopian final vision: the reconstitution of the global emirate, which is supposed to provide a shelter for the Islamic millennium, stretched out from Andalusia to the far East. With it the figure of the class enemy is replaced with that of the enemy of the faith, and class struggle is replaced by holy war—while keeping the dualistic schema of a war of principles, it demands a necessarily long war rich in casualties. As usual, in its last battle the party of the good is destined to win.

It can easily be seen that when it is used for political purposes, so-called fundamentalism is less of a matter of faith than an appeal to act or, more specifically, a matter of providing roles through which great numbers of potential actors are put into a position in which they can move from theory to praxis—or rather from frustration to praxis. In general it is true what demographic research has brought to light: “religion provides... additional oil for a fire whose original fuel does not come from it.” As a matrix of radical activations, Islam is on a par with historical communism; perhaps it is even superior because it can present itself with regard to its culture of origin not as a movement of radical rupture but as one of a revolutionary reestablishment.

The third and politically most important reason for the inevitably growing dramatics of political Islam (even if at this hour, after a series of defeats, it seems to have lost quite a bit of its initial attraction) results from the demographic dynamic of its field of recruitment. Just like the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century, it is essentially a youth movement or, more specifically, a movement of young men. Its verve to a large degree results from the excess of vitality of an unstoppable giant wave of unemployed and, socially speaking, hopeless male adolescents between the ages of fifteen and thirty—in their majority second, third, and fourth sons, who can enact their futile rage only by participating in the next best aggression programs. By creating in their base countries counter-worlds to the existing one, Islamic organizations create a grid of alternative positions in which angry, ambitious young men can feel important—including the impulse to attack both close and faraway enemies today rather than tomorrow.

These numerically enormous groups constitute the natural allegiance of agitators from the elder generation, whose sermons derive their content almost automatically from the willingness among the members of their congregation to be outraged—whereas the Islamic tradition only provides the semantic forms to add captions to real anger and violence tensions. As in a laboratory experiment, it was possible to observe these conditions during a scheme to create “spontaneous riots” because of the Danish caricatures of Mohammed in February 2006. While politically correct Europeans agonized over how to apologize to allegedly or actually offended Muslims, anonymous activists in Iraq continued to turn the wheel of provocation or, even better, the wheel of combative self-stimulation a bit further by way of destroying the Golden Mosque in Samarra, one of the most important Shiite sacred buildings in the north of Baghdad. They destroyed it with a bomb attack, which led to dozens of Sunni houses of worship being devastated during counterattacks. These events speak a clear language. They reveal more about the hunger for a triggering event among the groups who are ready to attack than about an allegedly inevitable clash of civilizations. The agitators would feel sorry if they had to realize that the external catalysts were in fact sorry.

From this perspective it is legitimate to claim that Islam, in its Islamist variation, could transform itself to become a religious readymade excellent for mobilizing purposes. Its suitability comes from characteristics of Muslim dogmatic theology that from the start were publicly committed to the war against “infidels.” The unprepared reader of the Koran has to be amazed about how it is possible that a sacred book is not afraid to repudiate itself when almost on every page it threatens the enemies of the prophet and of the faith with suffering in the eternal flames. The explanations of scholars hardly help to get over this estrangement, even if they try to trace the polemical passages of the Koran back to their historical context: the prophet engages in these passages in a form of early-socialist criticism against the wealthy of his time, the arrogant and ruthless merchants from Mecca who did not want to hear anything anymore about the egalitarian and generous values of the old Arab tribal culture. Mohammed’s teachings, scholars argue, ties in with these values as it commits his followers to caring for the weak. The initially plausible reference to the monotheistic privilege of zealotry both for God and against the infidels fails to provide a sufficient explanation. It is just as evident to claim that no human being would want to concern himself with the opaque passages in the Koran if it were not for the fact that millions of aggressive gangs of searchers for God choose their words so to fit their coming deeds (while the comparably heated passages of the psalms of rage in the Old Testament have left the small audience of churches and synagogues cold for a long time).

The new mobilization movements—whether legitimate or not from the standpoint of Koran theology—could, assuming that birth rates remain high, influence a reservoir of several million young men in the Arabic hemisphere by the middle of the twenty-first century, men who probably only find an existentially attractive horizon of meaning in departing to politically and religiously concealed projects of self-destruction. In thousands of Koran schools, which recently sprang up like mushrooms everywhere that has boiling excesses of adolescent men, the anxious cohorts are indoctrinated with the concepts of holy war.

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In considering the hijacking of the airplanes that were flown into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York on the morning of September 11, 2001, within the context of our observations, it becomes clear that it was not a demonstration of Islamic strength but a symbol of a sardonic lack of means, the compensation for which could only have been the sacrifice of human lives masked as being sacred. No Marx of political Islam will ever be able to argue that although modern technology emerged out of the lap of Western civilization, it will only reach its complete determination in the hands of Islamic operators. The lesson of September 11 is that the enemies of the West expect success exclusively from the vengeful reversal of Western tools against their creators. The Islamophile Friedrich Nietzsche would have to modify his judgments today. The accusations that he leveled in his curse against Christianity have, behind his back, arrived at a different address. Radical Islamism provides the first example of a purely vengeful ideology that only knows how to punish not how to create something new.

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After everything that has been said during the course of this investigation, it would be absurd to claim that rage's best days are behind it. On the contrary, rage (together with its thymotic siblings, pride, the need for recognition, and resentment) is a basic force in the ecosystem of affects, whether interpersonal, political, or cultural. This thesis remains valid, even if rage cannot concentrate itself in the future in the form of universal collectives of a communist type, but rather only in regional collections. If regression from a certain achieved state of political psychology is not possible, the thymotic energies I have discussed here should be officially accredited as an adequate image of the real, inasmuch as they have fallen victim to an organized misinterpretation.

What has truly reached an end is the psychohistorical constellation of religiously and politically inflated retributive thinking that was characteristic of the Christian, socialist, and Communist courtrooms. Nietzsche found the right concept to characterize its essence when—with an eye to Paul and his invention of “Christianity”—he diagnosed that resentment could become a mark of genius.

FOR ADDITIONAL READING:

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