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Spiritual Revolution: The Challenge for the 21st Century

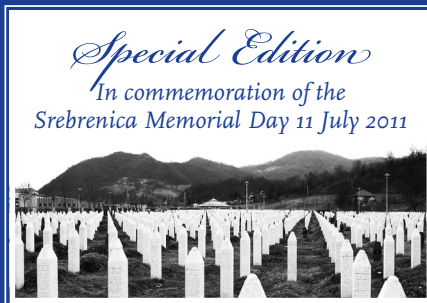
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GRAND MUFTI OF BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Who is the 'Other' today?

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Foreword

THE CRIMES THAT WERE COMMITTED in the Balkans during the last decade of the previous century, provided a tragic reminder as to the lengths man could potentially go to when immersed in a state of fear, hatred and division.

One often is comforted by a false sense of conviction that the most heinous of crimes committed against particular people of faith, race, creed or colour in generations gone by could never be committed again. We naively believe that the lessons of the past have not only be learned, but well and truly headed. As such, we become at risk of treading similar albeit un-identical paths which led to tragic events of years gone by.

The crimes committed at the very heart of Europe, and particularly that of Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the 11 of July 1995 dispel that myth. Not only are human beings chronically capable of committing the most repugnant of acts against fellow human beings, regardless of the advancement of time, the catalysts for these crimes are invariably similar whatever the different and unique circumstances of each.

The Cordoba Foundation has been working tirelessly to raise awareness of the threat man poses against his fellow man, should particular conditions become established on the ground. Whether Srebrenica, Auswitz, Rwanda, Gaza, Kashmir or Somalia, and whether in the last century, this or the one coming, injustice establishes fear which breeds suspicion and ultimately hatred. From there, the move on to violence is neither a difficult nor inconceivable step to undertake. Our objective is to work in common collaboration to remove the very initial elements on that tragic path, and to counter the root causes for clashes based on false and misguided understanding and implementation of the concepts of 'self' and 'the other'.

The Srebrenica Memorial Day provides a timely reminder to us all of the challenges that can only be met in a sense of togetherness and community.

This special edition of the Occasional Papers is dedicated to Srebrenica, which presents the writings of two distinguished people, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia Dr Mustafa Ceric and Professor Enes Karic, professor of Qur'anic Studies at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Bosnia. The issues raised in this edition of Occasional Papers provide timely reflections and observations on human relations, of dialogue between people and cultures as well as the attendant challenges of a spiritual revolution today.

Anas Altikriti
CEO – The Cordoba Foundation

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Occasional Papers is a publication of The Cordoba Foundation that provides a medium for diverse opinions, presenting a comprehensive view of the myriad perspectives pertaining to dialogue and cross-cultural exchange. This is done by publishing important contributions by experts and world leaders.

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Mustafa Cerić

Spiritual Revolution: The Challenge for the 21st Century

Allah is the Light of the Heavens and of the Earth. The similitude of His Light is as it were a Niche wherein is a Lamp: the Lamp within a Glass: the Glass as it were a pearly Star. From a Tree right blessed is it lit, an Olive-tree neither of the East nor of the West, the Oil whereof were well-nigh luminous though Fire touched it not: Light upon Light! (Qur'an, 24:35)

THERE IS AN OLD SAYING THAT GOD ALMIGHTY HAS CREATED three kinds of beings: angels with reason but without passion; animals with passion but without reason; and men with reason and with passion. If passion prevails over reason, then animals are better than men, but if reason prevails over passion, then men are better than angels.

Nearly two centuries ago the German philosopher Immanuel Kant predicted that eventually the world order would come about either through intellectual or moral insights or through the experience of chaos. We are still in a position to make that choice.

WHY DO WE NEED A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION TODAY?

The word revolution designates "the action by a celestial body of going around in an orbit or elliptic course"; it is "a progressive motion of a body round an axis so that any line of the body parallel to the axis returns to its initial position while remaining parallel to the axis in transit and usually at a constant distance from it" (Webster's Dictionary).

Thus, "from antiquity through the early modern period, a 'revolution' invoked an idea of a periodically recurring cycle. In Copernicus's new astronomy of the mid-sixteenth century, for example, the planets completed their revolutions round the sun... thus invoking an idea of a revolution as a radical and irreversible reordering developed together with linear and unidirectional conceptions of time. In this newer conception, revolution was not a recurrence but its reverse, the

We need spiritual revolution to return to the initial position round the axis of Divine Spirit.

bringing about of a new state of affairs that the world had never witnessed before and might never witness again".

Both of these two meanings of revolution can be applied to the idea of a spiritual revolution: first, of man's need to return to his origin, his initial position, and, second, of man's realisation that there is an alternative to his way of life. What are the divine revelations of the Tawrat (the Torah), the Injil (the Gospel), the Zabur (the Psalms), and the Qur'an but a progressive motion of a transcendental word round the axis of the Divine so that any meaning of the transcendental word parallel to the Divine, returns to its origin and its initial position. Hence, we need spiritual revolution to return to the initial position round the axis of Divine Spirit out of which we all have been made.

[For,] lo, thy Sustainer said unto the angels: -Behold, I am about to create a human being out of clay; and when I have formed him fully and breathed into him of my spirit, fall down before him in

prostration! (Qur'an, 38:71-72).

While asking man to change his way of life from *Jahiliyyah* (of Ignorance or Negligence), the Qur'an is offering him the alternative of Islam which is nothing more than the return or submission to the orbit of the Divine Spirit, which man had ignored or neglected and thus had put himself in danger of falling out of a natural law, known as the *Sunnat Allah*. This natural law (as the *Sunnat Allah*) demands respect for freedom of religion as a fundamental principle, followed by respect of human life, human equality, human dignity, human community, human justice and human decency.

In fact, Islam means "revolution" in the sense of Muslim who is the *munib* (the returner), the one who comes back to the basics of human relationship with God and his fellow human being after it was broken due to man's ignorance or negligence. As a paradigm for a multiple spirituality, prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) is described as "*a compassionate, attentive and revolutionary (munib) in the sense of returning to the initial position of humanity toward God*" [Qur'an, 11:75]. But for him to have been elevated to that God given honor, Ibrahim, had to go through different temptations which had led him through a spiritual revolution, that brought about a radical and irreversible reordering of human faith in One God as an everlasting alternative to human way of life. He first saw a star as his Lord, but when it disappeared, he was attracted by the moon to be his guide, but when it set, he then saw the sun rising and said: "This is my Lord. This is the greatest of all". But when the sun disappeared as well, he said: "*O my people, I am free from your falsehood. I am returning my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth and never shall I be attached to falsehood*" (Qur'an, 6:76-79).

Still, Ibrahim, was revolutionary by asking provocative questions: "*My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead*" said Ibrahim. "*Don't you believe?*" God said: "*Yes! But to satisfy my own heart or my own understanding*"... (Qur'an, 2:260)

The case of Ibrahim as an inspiration for the need for spiritual revolution has its most appealing sign in the fact of

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him being put to the fire: "*Burn him and protect your gods, if you are to do anything at all!*" But God said, "*O Fire be cool and peace for Ibrahim!*" (Qur'an, 21:68-69).

I don't know whether Terry Jones had a slightest idea about the attempt of the burning of Abraham's body which obviously failed, but his attempt to burn the copies of the Qur'an sounds like that of Abraham, which obviously failed because it would be self-burning or spiritual suicide. So, in the attempt of the burning of the Qur'an I see, indeed, the great sign for the need of the spiritual revolution of the Abrahamic paradigm because it is revolutionising our approach to the basics of our human relationship towards God and towards our common human heritage.

Perhaps, it would be too simplistic to relate recent floods in the world to the biblical and Qur'anic stories of Noah's flood, but it would be, on the other hand, too arrogant not to see in them the sign of warning that we should start building Noah's Ark.

The problem of climate change is not anymore limited to the confines of the knowledge of an expert team. It is a reality of everyone's life and a fear of human collective mind. The nuclear threat is not a political game of the cold war anymore. It is life threatening for the whole of humanity. The poverty that is spreading around the world is not anymore far away

from us. It is a reality in our neighborhood.

There are so many things that make me proud of my faith, but when I see the state of the Muslim Society I do not find a big difference from the rest of the world. I see in my fellow Muslims the same paradox as elsewhere: the higher degrees in education, the less degree of ethics; the more knowledge, the less wisdom; the more experts, the less solutions; the more wealth, the less moral values; the more houses, the less families; the faster communication, the less decent human relation; the more books about pollution, the less care about natural environment; the more conferences about peace, the more wars around the world; the more call for reason, the less rational behavior.

The way out of this paradox of our global civilisation is the spiritual revolution that is different from the scientific, intellectual, political or industrial revolutions. It is the revolution of spirit that should embrace all of the positive results of the previous revolutions in the sense of the return to the God's light (nur) — a source of His light with which He enlightens human hearts and minds, which is light upon light, which expels darkness one over the other, which chases away darkness from human mind, which removes hatred from human heart, and which cleanses the human soul from Satan's evil.

We should listen to what the Prophet had to say: "Verily, God created the creatures in darkness, and then He poured them some of His light." It is this light, i.e. God's light, that has enlightened the human spirit and mind to lead humanity from slavery to freedom; from might to right; from mythology to science; from hatred to love; from terror to security; from fear to hope; from war to peace; from corruption to ethics; from poverty to wellbeing; from falsehood to truth; from selfishness to compassion; from arrogance to humility; from harshness to gentleness; from greed to modesty; from discrimination to equality; from pornography to chastity; from pedophilia to morality; from drug-addiction to self-esteem; from godlessness to Godliness; from suicide to the purpose of

...the ultimate purpose [the] state and society is not to reign supreme over people, or to disturb them and violate their human rights

life, and from *jahiliyya* (ignorance) to spiritual enlightenment.

Thus, we need God's light that will enlighten once again, the human spirit and mind to lead humanity in a spiritual revolution which is to be of greater significance than the revolutions that changed the world. Although it took a long time, human beings eventually understood that they are born free and that freedom is like a virus for which there is no cure. Over time human beings have learned that their rights to life, faith, freedom, property and dignity are fundamental God given human rights and thus no human may be authorised to deprive any human being from these gifts of God.

Therefore, the ultimate purpose of state and society is not to reign supreme over people, or to disturb them and violate their human rights, but to set each man and woman free from the fear of a witch-hunt to which they are subjected simply because of their appearance and the way of dress, and to defend their rights so that they may build mosques, churches and synagogues in peace, in order to live and work in full security and without harm to themselves and their neighbors.

On paper we have it all - freedom, right and science, but deep in our soul we sense that we are losing these values as some people would like to take us back to the dark age of slavery, might and mythology or *jahiliyyah* — *Is it a judgment of the time of jahiliyya that they are seeking? Who is better than Allah to judge people who are certain in their right beliefs* (Qur'an, 5: 50).

spiritual revolution demands a return to wisdom, tolerance and dialogue, notions that have become lost in the flood of arrogance...

Of course, science cannot replace the need of the soul to hear beyond what the ear can hear and to see beyond what the eye can see, through enlightened intellect. But also, human intellect which produces knowledge cannot renounce scientific achievements that have made man's life on earth easier.

The call for a return to faith must not mean a return to the world of mythology in which the light of intellect and the power of reason are dimmed. A spiritual revolution does not imply erasing human sagacity and rationality. It presupposes precisely what the last Messenger of God, Muhammad did, when he showed the way out of the dark age of *jahiliyyah* towards spiritual, moral and scientific enlightenment.

At the start of the 7th century of Milad, Prophet Muhammad surely led the most significant spiritual revolution in the history of mankind. With Divine inspiration (*wahy*), he carried out the most convincing and most efficient reformation of religious thought by abolishing the institution of mediation between God and man; by freeing man from the inherited sin; by establishing the principle of non-violence in religion; by repealing racial discrimination; by freeing women from slavery and fear; by taking into consideration human reason as an important yardstick in faith; by elevating human knowledge to the level of faith and morality; and by establishing equilibrium in relations between the individual and society.

Prophet Muhammad established an Islamic worldview

which defines the individual as a self-confident and autonomous human being which should be respected with all his human rights. He defined the community as a *jamà'at*, i.e. as an integral *umma*, which integrates that which protects the rights of the individual with that which makes community stronger, that is to say, people and nation. In the Noble Qur'an we read:

"Thus We have appointed you as an integrative middle nation, that you may be witnesses for mankind, and that the Messenger may be a witness for you."

The idea of being integrative and inclusive was not strange to the great Muslim jurist al-Shafi'i when he was brought to the Caliph Harun al-Rashid to speak about the Book of God, but he replied to the Caliph: "About which of the Books of God you want me to speak, O the Commander of Believers, for God has revealed many books?" (Qur'an, 2: 143).

Furthermore, the Qur'an asks us to be tolerant in communication with people of all faiths, nationalities and worldviews:

"When you want the others to understand your faith, invite them with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Your Lord is Best Aware of him who strays from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright." (Qur'an, 16:125)

Therefore, spiritual revolution demands a return to wisdom, tolerance and dialogue, notions that have become lost in the flood of arrogance, egoism, extremism, holocaust, genocide, terrorism and violence in the streets and in homes. We have reached a point when the very mention of the word "wisdom" usually makes one think of elderly people who are wise because they have grown old and can no longer be ruthless.

Yes, ruthlessness has become what "wisdom" used to be for those who think that "wisdom" of life is to be found in narcotics; the "wisdom" of modern age in alcohol; the "wisdom" of freedom of choice in the lack of shame; the "wisdom" of wit in theft, and the "wisdom" of courage in violence. Of course, when one subjects his worldview to acquiring knowledge and

we need a spiritual revolution in the 21st century... to exercise patience and self-restraint... becom[ing] human beings of the greatest good fortune

information without morality and ethics; without wisdom and meaning; without decency and honour, without tolerance and the culture of dialogue, then we face violence, intolerance and discrimination in society.

Beside knowledge and information which are more accessible today than at any other time in history, especially to our youth, we need to learn wisdom as an ability to distinguish useful from harmful knowledge and useful from harmful information. Human soul, being Divinely inspired, possesses this capacity for wisdom as a spiritual power which increases with piety and shields man from ruthlessness towards his and the life of people around him.

The pollution of the human soul with lies and immorality is no less harmful than the pollution of nature with poisonous gases and garbage. Moreover, it is not possible to cleanse nature as long as human soul remains polluted with wickedness and irresponsibility towards life on earth.

Man must learn tolerance and a culture of dialogue because there is no other way that can contribute to his success in this world and his salvation in the Hereafter. It is because of the lack of human compassion for all forms of life on earth and because of the absence of true tolerance and a culture of dialogue among people and nations that the 20th century

will be remembered as the century of dark ideas of racism, fascism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia - the ideas that have induced people to commit the most heinous crimes in history of mankind.

Death camps, Gulags and the atomic bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed millions of people, more than in any other century. However, the 20th century is not only notorious for the numbers of those killed, but also because of the conviction that out of those killings a new, better world would be born. In the 20th century industries of killing organised by states against its own citizens, were launched with the conviction that those who survived would live in a better world than was ever existed. In the 20th century man tried to replace the Divine Spirit with a satanic evil spirit, daring to utter the words: "God is dead", becoming conceited in thinking that he can live as if there were no God. But, today those of us who have survived the "dark moments" of the 20th century can bear witness that God is al-Hayy, the Ever-Living.

We the survivors bear witness that we are aware of the Divine Spirit in us which beckons us to a spiritual revolution that should change the way of life in this century. We hope that the first signs of spiritual revolution will appear in al-Quds, in Jerusalem, in the Holy Land of Ibrahim's sons, for whom we pray here and now so that God Almighty may soften their hearts in order that they may remember that holy peace – not holy war – is in their hearts. The same we wish for the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other nations that suffer conflict and violence.

In Bosnia we are truly proud of the centuries of coexistence and tolerance, because, in spite of the experience of genocide, we have not forgotten to read the verses of the Holy Qur'an: *"The good and the evil are not the same. Repel the evil with what is better: then will he between whom and thee was hatred become as it were thy friend and intimate! But no one is granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint — none but persons of the greatest good fortune"*.

Hence, we need a spiritual revolution in the 21st century so

that we may learn how to exercise patience and self-restraint and thus to become human beings of the greatest good fortune.

Indeed, we need a Muslim initiative in the 21st century with the same vigour as it was in the 8th century in Bagdad, the Muslim initiative for an intellectual revolution and as it was in the 12th century in Cordoba, the Muslim initiative for a scientific revolution that brought about an epochal and irreversible change because it was applied in a systematic way to events in science and only later to political events. "In just this sense, the first revolutions may have been scientific, and the "American," "French," and "Russian Revolutins" are its progeny".

In just this sense, the first revolution in the 21st century should be spiritual through a moral insight so that humanity may be spared from an immanent chaos of the 20th century.

In the words of Musa Eric Waldbaum: "This century presents accelerating challenges for becoming. In order for us to become full human beings, we face the need to study, reconcile, understand and embrace consciousness, spirituality, ethics, values, culture, the sciences, arts, law, politics, economies, knowledge, actions, technologies and innovation. Individually, each of these areas only touches on the richness of meaning. The task is to see beyond reductionism and to make emergent the very meaning of our lives. To act responsibly in a world where man cannot know everything-indeed where uncertainty may be at the very core-faith is essential. But that faith cannot be doctrinaire. Rather it must be all embracing, seeking knowledge even to China as the Prophet (*peace be upon him*) said."

The first revolution in the 21st century should be spiritual through a moral insight so that humanity may be spared from an immanent chaos of the 20th century.

Enes Karić

Who is the ‘Other’ today?

“Very deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless?”

Thomas Mann.¹

VERY DEEP IS THE WELL OF PAST WHEN IT COMES TO THE dynamics of the relationship between “us” and “the others”. Practically, in the past the roots of both “us” and the “others” have existed. History can be read in a way that detects the dynamics between us and the others. It is equally possible to detect many factors that were crucial in the making of the binary viewpoint that created and constituted “us” and “the others”. Since the vastness of the past is immeasurable, it is possible that the dynamics of the relations between “us” and “the other” can be interpreted in many ways.

“The Other” is by “us” seen as the geographic “other”; as somebody who is the “other” linguistically,² religiously, racially, politically, culturally, in gender, in age, etc. It was not long ago in the West that a great number of media, books, and educational concepts promoted the awareness that the “other” can be perceived as a member of any group that does not belong to: white race, male, Anglo-Saxon, Caucasian, and Christian.

This concept of “the other” speaks about a Eurocentric belief that pervades modern media and culture, as contextualised by Derrida’s notion of *differance*. It is a characteristic which supposes that “the other” can be known only by something he/she is NOT (a sort of negative affirmation). However, the idea of “the other” can be viewed in another light. We are facing a strong trend of “Othering”, that is, placing everything which is not “Us” into the category of “the Other” – and “the Other” in this way is seen as something incomplete, negative, and

“We are facing a strong trend of “Othering”, that is, placing everything which is not “Us” into the category of “the Other””

somewhat strange. For example, when it comes to the ancient past, the Greeks perceived “the other” as “barbarians”, just as the “al-ajam” for “al-arab”.³

In the past it was not uncommon for the geographical distance to define the bipolar approach to the other, that is the other was not well known, and his/her language was not understood. However, there are also other “distances”, or “proximities” that have determined the constituting of the relationship of “I” with “the other”. This “I” has often transformed itself into the “First One” or “The Primary One”. Of course, in the age of globalisation, when we — discuss “the other” today, we should note that a very rich imaginary system as well as nomenclature about the “other” was created for many centuries.

Muhammad Khalid Masud, in his book *Naming the ‘Other’: Names for Muslims and Europeans*,⁴ lists names in which Muslims were marked by as “others”: Agarines,

Today, when we use the words “Christians”, “Jews”, “Muslims”, we do not imply only those three types of believers, but their secular counterparts as well.

Arabs, Hagarines, Mohammedans, Moors, Moselms, Mussulmans, Saracens, Turks... On the other hand, Muslims called people hailing from the other side of the world, that is, the West today, by the following names: Afrang, Angrez, Farang, Farangi, Gora, Westerner, Vilayati, Vilandizi, Yorupi, Yunani... Practically all these names were created during the “great debate” between Muslims and Christians in the Mediterranean, as well as in Europe. As a faith, a civilisation and culture, and a worldview (*Weltanschauung*), Islam has brought a very dynamic nomenclature in marking the various segments of humankind. *Dar al-Harb* was the space of “the others”, and *Dar al-Islam* was populated by “us” and those who lived with us, most often as “others”.

Today, there are a large number of Muslim professors at eminent universities who study the place of Christians and Jews under the Islamic empires. For example, Osman Tastan lists many examples of positive and negative discrimination towards the Jews and Christians under the Ottoman Empire. Bernard Lewis thinks that the history of Islam and Christianity developed in extremes, through “contacts” and “impacts”.⁶ Unlike Lewis, historians Thomas Arnold and Philip Hitti consider the emergence of Islam as a special integration of the Mediterranean, and the Near East.

WHO IS “THE OTHER” TODAY?

Who is “the other” today? How do Muslim intellectuals answer this question? In his book *Islam and the Encounter of Religions*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University (Washington D.C.), states:

“As for the encounter of Islam with the Judeo-Christian tradition, this had persisted throughout nearly fourteen centuries of history of Islam. Judaism and Christianity themselves are in a sense ‘contained’ in Islam inasmuch as the latter is the final affirmation of the Abrahamic tradition of which Judaism and Christianity are the two earlier manifestations”.*

It is obvious that we can discern from this statement of the departure from the position that “Judaism and Christianity” are the simple “other”, since Nasr claims that, in some sense, they are “encompassed by” Islam. They are therefore an integral part of us, and cannot be “the other”.

In *The People of the Book and the Diversity of “Religions”*, author Fazlur Rahman holds a more hermeneutic attitude that Christians and Jews have their legitimate way to God and Salvation, and that they do not need to become Muslims in order to reach salvation. Rahman’s approach heavily relativizes the stereotype that in the history of monotheism, the Jews and Christians were looked upon by Muslims as “the others”.⁸

Mohammed Arkoun, in a great number of his studies, encouraged the view that Jews, Christians and Muslims are complex “Communities of the Book”.⁹ Moreover, Fahmi Huwaydi often claims that “the Copts in Egypt are not *dhimiyyun* (protected people), but *muwatinun* (fellow-countrymen).”¹⁰

There are thus a great number of very strong voices of Muslim intellectuals today who in their public appearances encourage the overcoming of the classically structured status of Christians and Jews as the “other” in the way of *dhimmiyyun*.

Today, when we use the words “Christians”, “Jews”, “Muslims”, we do not imply only those three types of believers, but their secular counterparts as well. However,

those secular counterparts did not reject their own traditions. They still emanate – in a way – cultural, traditional and civilisational meanings and enlightenments which are derived from Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hence, we should ask openly: Who is “the other” today? The answers can be very diverse, of course.

In Israel the “others” are Muslims and Christians. In the countries of the Middle East with a Muslim majority population, Christians and Jews are the others”, although when it comes to Christians, Lebanon and Egypt can often be taken as an example of a positive exception, because Christians in these countries enjoy their legal and religious rights as much as possible, and their influence on the society is largely felt. When it comes to contemporary Europe, the Jews and Muslims are “the others”. Even the experience from the region of the Balkans as a whole, for the last three decades, speaks about the reduction of Muslims to the status of “other”. At times that reduction has been very brutal, as evidenced by the verdict of the International Court of Justice from 2007, which states that the genocide was committed against Bosnian Muslims

It would be useful at this stage to list some considerations as to why Muslims felt the effects of being construed as “the others” since the 18th century. For a long time there has been an enormous volume of literature that has portrayed Muslims as “the others”. Norman Daniel, for example, in *Islam and the West*, writes about the construction of an image of Muslims.¹¹ Bernard Lewis, in *Islam and the West* (but with different aims to Daniel) attempts to characterise Muslims as a force unwilling to build connections with the surrounding world,¹² and by implication this meant Muslims were “the others”. There are many works written in that talk about the confrontation of one contemporary geopolitical side of the world, which is the West, and Islam on the other side, the implication of the Islamic side being “the other”.

The overview of the main examples of such literature about Islam offers the descriptions of Islam as “the other”, and, in

a way, offers an outline of history of Islam’s becoming “the other”. When we say the title “Islam and the West”, this implies then that Islam can mean anything. For Lewis, the Egyptian fellahs (peasants) are Islam, the modern republic of Turkey is Islam, Iranian revolution is Islam, Arabic socialistic and Ba’athist regimes are Islam, the smell of cévapi is Islam, etc. In that aspect the so-called anti-Western agenda of all these perceptions of Islam is being projected, to finally reach the conclusion that Islam as a bloc, is a dangerous “other”. There are many aspects offered in such kinds of literature, where Islam is being seen as the “other”. When it comes to the Balkan region, Maria Todorova wrote a very instructive book, *Imagining the Balkans*¹³ where she analyses the different modes of identity constructions in the region.

From their side, many Muslim authors have dealt with research on the Muslim world during 17th and 18th centuries, when the first signs of its reduction to “the other” emerged. For example, Fazlur Rahman and Akbar S. Ahmed, have claimed that Muslims considered the first signs of modernity as the infants of colonialism.¹⁴ The fact is, of course, that most Muslims rejected modernity, and considered it a foreign concept. The Muslims' own conceptions of modernity during

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“As a faith, a history, a culture, and civilisation, Islam has been excluded from [the] concept of the “JudeoChristian civilisation”

the 17th and 18th centuries mostly did not result as was expected.

In the 18th and 19th centuries through the process of colonialisation, the European protagonists of modernism and modernisation ensured themselves the primary position in the world. Muslims therefore became the “other” in many plans for the distribution of power. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when they were placed in front of the dilemma of “machine” or “prayer”, mainstream Muslims most often chose “prayer” or solely prayer. Many Muslim efforts to combine “machine” and “prayer” were not successful, or it is better to say they were not a true competitive force to the West which was on the rise.

In a different context, Hegel pointed that out by the seclusion/retreat of Islam/Muslims “to the oriental peace” and by showing their cultural resistance⁵ to the projects of westernisation, modernisation, and participation in “progressive” shaping of history, Muslims in Western theological and philosophical literature all the way from Voltaire have become “the other” in a specific way.⁶ The projects of Muslim “awakening” during the 20th century have ended in diverse socialist and communist systems. These systems have awoken the concept of the “Arab/Muslim” revolution in different regions which has become all too evident in the start of 2011 vis-a-vis the “Arab Spring”.

In this respect, many Muslims actually have followed the

West, by adopting the methodology of revolutions which have their origins in the West, and not strictly in the Muslim tradition. If we pose the question who the revolutionary is today, the answer is most certainly “the other” – who seeks to liberate himself/herself from the “otherness”.

Perhaps the most significant factor of the construction of the Muslim as “the other” is down to the proliferation of the concept of the West as a homeland of the “Judeo-Christian civilisation”. As a faith, a history, a culture, and civilisation, Islam has been excluded from this concept of the “Judeo-Christian civilisation”.¹⁷ From Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have all arrived in Europe -- not one of them have roots in Europe. Given this fact, shouldn't Islam be also recognised at-least as the “third” in the phrase “Judeo-Christian-Islamic civilisation”?

CONCLUSION

We have to get used to seeing more than one West and one East on all sides of our globe. We have to promote such awareness in our dialogues for the sake of our collective better future. Because the Islamic East neither means the negation of the Christian East nor of the Judaic East, nor should the phrase Christian West imply a negation of an Islamic West or Judaic West. These religions are universal and have a universal message and hence should oppose a project which seeks to reserve any regions of the world, let alone a whole continent — as the exclusive homeland of just one religion.

It is high time that the idea of “the other” is seen as a creative force, to enrich the world. The question becomes how can this be done? It is done by rightfully acknowledging the differences which exist between us, thereby diminishing the prejudices and assumptions which are not truth-based. From a religious point of view, we can show the variety of God's creation. Religion can be seen as a key to this affirmation of differences – the change of our standard view on “the other” as something negative and terrifying.

In the speech *about* “the other”, the key term is *representation*.

Who is the one who can, or who is allowed to speak in the name of “the other” today? Is such a speech possible at all from the so-called outer perspective and is any speech on a subject necessarily followed by a set of assumptions, allegations and projections? Do we actually limit the necessary exchange of knowledge and experiences, which is the imperative posed in the Qur’an: “O mankind! Lo! We have **created you male and female**, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware”? (49:13, translation by Marmaduke Muhammad Pickthall).

In such a context, it is necessary to understand that every speech about “the other” is in close connection to the *way* it is expressed and its *intention*. In contemporary speech about “the other”, the wish to hear *from* “the other” is most often neglected, and the speech is lost in its own loud echo. In that way the binary oppositions are made more distant: everything which is Us is on the positive, bright side of the Manichean opposition; everything which is Them belongs to the dark side of projecting our own frustrations and weaknesses. If we try to speak *from* the position of “the other” in this way, to occupy his/her voice, it is a safe path to the dehumanisation of the Other, which we know very well from the tragic experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The concept and the idea of “the other” has always been present in literature, religions, cultures, traditions, customs, myths – in different ways. That Other was often the irreplaceable element for the structuring of one's own identity. In literature, for example, Arabs from the Camus' *L'Étranger* are simply a part of the colonial context which helps the author to present Mersault's complete alienation from the world. They, the Arabs, do not exist as individuals with their own personalities – they exist only as long as it takes to show Mersault's deranged consciousness and his relation to humanity.

Unfortunately, we often do not come across the idea of “the other” as a friend, as brother or sister, as different but equal –

although the valuable efforts were made in artistic and cultural creation of humankind. We can speak about “the other” as a member of a non-white race, non-Christian or about Other as female. However, we can speak about “the other” as a truly religious one. In the all-present invasion of aggressive secularism and suspension of religion into the farthest corners of public and private life as well, the true religion (unburdened by ideological and political interpretations) emerges as the neglected Other.

Too little space is given to the true dialogue between atheists and theists, and although religion is a key element of spiritual life of many people, it is rarely being asked for advice in the media, and, if it is being done, it is followed by harsh criticism and remarks about the “separation of religion and state”. By excluding religious thought and religiosity from the dialogue, public life can become poorer, and certainly not richer.

Therefore, the danger lies in representation of the Other as the unknown, negative, totally different and thereby dangerous, but also in the universalisation that places certain (for example, Eurocentric) values as the only relevant ones, deaf to all cultural peculiarities of other non-European regions. Let us observe that in the example of feminism: the criticism which comes from the non-Western critics is that the representatives of European and American feminism do not understand the otherness of their African or Asian sisters. The things that concern American women do not have to be part of the reality of a woman from South African Republic, and vice versa.

The **common place** dialogue with the Other (that diverse and disunited group; unreachable but all-present) should not be a cacophony in which everyone hears only himself/herself, but it should also not be a place of the total immersion into the voice of the other and an irretrievable assimilation and loss of identity. It is extremely important to find the balance, since the equal danger lies in a hermetic helmet towards everything which is different, and in the monolithisation of identities which looks more as the overall shadowing of the reality.

1. Mann, Thomas (2008). *Tales of Jacob*, cited according to Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights, a Companion*, Tauris Parke Paperbacks, London and New York.
2. Wehr, Hans (1980). *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Beirut/London, p.593.
3. The word *barbarian* means the one who speaks *our language* incomprehensibly, and in the Old Greek those are the ones who barely, if at all, could speak Greek. The Arabic word *ajam* denotes primarily the one who does not speak Arabic well, or one who does not speak it at all. In Arabic *ajam* can also refer to *barbarians*, who are Persians.
4. See: Masud, Muhammad Khalid (2001). *Naming the 'Other': Names for Muslims and Europeans*, published in: Zafar Ishaq Ansari and John Esposito (eds), *Muslims and the West, Encounter and Dialogue*, published by Islamic Research Institute and Centre for Muslim-Christian Relationships, Islamabad, Washington, pp. 123 – 145.
5. See: Tastan, Osman (2001). *Religion and (Religious) Minorities*, objav. u knjizi *Turkey* since 1970 (edited by Debbie Lovatt), Palgrave Publishers, New York, pp. 137 – 159.
6. Compare with the discussion Lewisa, Bernarda (2000). *Contact and Impact in Lewis' book: The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, Phoenix Press, London, pp. 17 – 57.
7. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (2005). *Islam and the Encounter of Religions*, objavljeno u: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Living Sufism*, Suhail Academy, Lahore, p. 117.
8. Compare with Rahman, Fazlur (1994). *The People of the Book and Diversity of "Religions"*, published in: *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis, pp.162-170.
9. Gunzher, Ursula (2004). *Mohammed Arkoun: Towards a Radical Rethinking of Islamic Thought*, published in Suha Taji-Farouki (ed.), *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, Oxford University Press and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, pp. 125-167.
10. Cited in: Goddard, Hugh (2004). *Perceptions of Christians and Christianity*, published in: Suha Taji-Farouki and Basheer M. Nafi (eds.), *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, p.307.
11. Daniel, Norman (1997). Daniel, *Islam and the West, The Making of an Image*, One World, Oxford,
12. Lewis, Bernard (1993). *Islam and the West*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford.
13. Todorova, Maria (1997). *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford.
14. The instructive book in this aspect is: Rahman, Fazlur (1984). *Islam and Modernity, Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.
15. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in many of his works, claims that there is nothing negative in the reserves many Muslims have to the modernity, secularism, and so on. Their resistance to those "isms" shows that they are still in many ways connected to the experiences of sacred and holy aspects of their faith, Islam. Compare with works of Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (1988). *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Suheil Academy, Lahore. Also, see by the same author (1997). *Man and Nature, the Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man*, KAZI Publications, Chicago. ,
16. Compare with a very valuable book by Almond, Ian (2010). *Representations of Islam in Western Thought*, Center for Advanced Studies, Sarajevo.
17. That made some Muslim authors to conclude that today Islam is rejected, but also under a sort of siege. See: Ahmed, Akbar S. (2004). *Islam Under Siege*, Polity Press and Blackwell Publishing, Cambridge and Oxford.



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Cerić has authored "Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam"; "A Choice Between War and Peace", and "European Muslim Declarations" (published in *Arches*), among other numerous publications in Bosnian such as "Religion, Nation and Homeland".



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