Section III.

Transcription of the Lecture “Globalization and the Crisis of Culture and Religion”

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At its center, this lecture focuses on the crisis of culture and religion – which essentially condenses to a crisis of the state, as globalization is bypassing the state – by addressing Islamic fundamentalism and by providing a more global view on the topic. Fundamentalism is not a product of tradition, but a modern phenomenon – a result as well as an active player of globalization. It disconnects religion and the concept of revelation from culture (as is the case in Salafism). Thus, an iconoclastic concept of culture and history has emerged (e.g. Daesh in Saudi Arabia). There are common traits between different kinds of fundamentalisms: an explicit system of norms and a social life, which reduces life to living in a faith community with high distrust towards society in general. A problem in the contemporary globalized world is the need to make everything explicit, which is opposed to culture. This trend reflects nothing but a normative system that can only be implemented in an authoritarian way. What follows is the crisis of culture – the destruction of the very concept of culture – that such a type of globalization promotes. Breaking this cycle entails refraining from indulging in this kind of systematic “normalization” of everyday life and trying to reopen a space not only between believers and nonbelievers, but between everyone. Ultimately, this calls for the need to reopen the discussion on the relationship between culture and religion in practice.

Globalization; Crisis; Culture; Religion; Fundamentalism; Iconoclasm; Explicit; Norms; Normalization; Identity

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Introduction

Globalization entails a crisis of the very concept of culture. How can we build a political society if we do not share culture at a local or global level? A political society is built on something we have in common. It's an identity. It could be many things: a social or political contract, an ethnicity, a language, a history, a tradition. By definition in our modern societies it is usually connected to the state. The state is, in a sense, the representation of the society. We can discuss political representation inside the state, but the state in itself is a representation of the society. What we have now is the crisis of the state, because globalization is bypassing the state. The construction of Europe is a very concrete case of local globalization, if I may call it that. So what we see as its revenants (fundamentalism, populism) only form part of a mutation of the relationship to culture. Modern populism is not the same as old populism. It's not fascism. It's not Nazism. Of course we come across some common elements like xenophobia, the quest for a Duce and so on; but in terms of norms and values, modern populism is far more complex than it seems. In my lecture I will start with Islamic fundamentalism and proceed to a more global outlook.

1. Islamic Fundamentalism: a Product of the Crisis of Culture

The problem with Islamic fundamentalism is that it is commonly perceived as something coming from the past, from a traditional, medieval kind of Islam; medieval is a term very often used to qualify this kind of Islam. The problem is that there never was such an Islam in medieval times. In a sense, as far as Islam is concerned, medieval times were far more enlightened. Another issue is theology: what in Islamic theology triggered what we consider to be fundamentalism today? For instance there is an entire debate on the term "jihad" and the unsubstantiated idea that Islam lacks reformation in order to be adapted to modern times. The question is how a theology called Salafism could be revived. We had a conference in Beirut two months ago on religion and violence, in which all the professors of Islamic Sunni Theology of the University of Beirut said: "When I was a young student nobody was speaking about Ibn Taymiyyah, nobody was speaking about the Salafi. Now we are confronted with Wahhabism, these strange guys in Saudi Arabia, the Bedus, but we used to teach falsafa, philosophy, at the universities and I do not understand how we could get from this kind of culture of enlightened Islam at the faculty of Theology to this kind of Salafi teaching. It is not traditional Islam at all – it's new." My own research shows that fundamentalism in general, not just in Islam, is not a protest of tradition against modernity and globalization. It is, on the contrary, a product and an actor of globalization. Why? Because the strength of this kind of fundamentalism is that it explicitly disconnects religion and culture. Salafism is totally opposed to culture. What is its theological basis?

2. Salafi Iconoclasm: Erasing Culture and History

The theological basis that can be found in Ibn Taymiyyah and Abd al-Wahhab is that you cannot know God, so there is no possible contact. It corresponds to a sort of negative theology. We know God only through his will. We cannot interpret, because if we interpret, that would mean that we can think like God, which is not the case. So we have to take the revelation as something which is not and should not be historical or connected to any culture at all. Everything that happened at the time of the prophet is without interest and at worst heresy and paganism. Salafism puts three things on the market: firstly, norms (dos and don'ts), secondly, explicit norms, since there is nothing implicit there, and thirdly, the absence of a connection to a specific society. So Salafism is a toolkit which works everywhere, in any circumstances. There is clearly an iconoclastic concept of culture and history. If you look at Saudi Arabia – it systematically destroyed what could be called Saudi culture, Saudi archeology, Saudi history, Saudi tradition. The result is Las Vegas plus Sharia, which is Medina today. But it is less fun than Las Vegas. In this sense, with Daesh, we have the explicit dimension of iconoclasm: they want to destroy everything which is linked to history. This is very interesting because, in a sense, Daesh is the logic of Salafism carried out until the end – and with the end I mean the apocalypse. They have no faith in the future. A just Islamic society is not sustainable for them; it's just the prefiguration of the coming of the Antichrist. To make the coming of the Antichrist happen, they have to get rid of everything that belongs to the past. There is also an interesting dimension of negation of genealogy which is very strong in Daesh. Instead of speaking about a religious ideology, we should see Daesh as a narrative.

3. The Generational Dimension

If you look at the profiles of the people who join Daesh either to perpetrate terrorist actions or to fight jihad, there are two figures: second generation Muslims and converts. They do not join just because they belong to a second generation of whose parents came to Europe in the 60s and 70s or because it is normal to be a Salafist in this situation. No, we have had second generations in radical terrorism for 22 years. They arrived in 1995, and since then there has been the same profile. We don't have a third generation. After such a long period of time, there should be a third generation, purely in the interest of demographics. However, there appears to be only a first generation, a second generation, and converts, whose profile has been the same since 1997. When looking at origins, it is evident in Germany, for instance, that only 10 % of the radicals have Turkish origins, although the Turks represent at least two thirds of the Muslim population.

Everywhere, the Moroccans are overrepresented: the bulk of the terrorists in Belgium are Moroccans, as in Holland, as in Denmark, and to a certain extent in

Germany too. There are a high number of brothers: In every terrorist cell since 1997 until the Bataclan there has been at least a pair of brothers, sometimes sisters, but no fathers. 20 to 25 % of the people who have perpetrated a terrorist attack in the West had a child in the year preceding the attack. The best example is the San Bernardino attack in 2015 in California. The man is a second generation Muslim, his wife is from Pakistan. They had a little girl and one day, when the little girl was nine months old, they left the girl at her aunt's house and went to kill fourteen people and themselves. All of the people who are sent to Jihad are asked to make children and all the girls who go to Syria are requested to be mothers. All the men die in the months following the birth of their sons. So there is a connection to this very concept of generation.

In addition: before killing themselves, be it in Syria or in Europe, the terrorists very often call their mother, never their father, and say: "Mother, you are a bad Muslim, because you will cry once you hear that I am dead. But on the contrary, you should be very happy. Firstly I am going to paradise and secondly I will bring you with me." By doing this, they turn the generational dimension around. The parents have eternal life thanks to their children. There is this dimension of a shortcut in history and genealogy, which goes along with an apocalyptic vision and a personal apocalyptic religious idol. Of course Daesh is the utmost extreme, but it conforms to the idea that religious life is not sustainable. You cannot live as a good believer, because you are a sinner. Therefore, you have to catch the moment when you can go directly to paradise. Referring back to Salafism: Salafism is not suicidal at all. They believe that life is given by God for you to learn how to get to paradise. You must follow the rules, and if you do that for your whole life, it will work out. There are also explicit dos and don'ts here. There are no grey zones – you are either in or out. This means that you have a problem with socialization, since you cannot socialize with "wrong believers" – with Christians. You are only allowed to socialize within your own community.

4. Two Digressions on the Question of "the Explicit"

Then I worked on Christianity and Evangelicalism. In these cases, the focus is on honor, which is why one is to be born again and fight a second time. Once one is born again, one cannot be associated with "wrong believers". You can preach to the population, but you cannot socialize with people who do not believe. Here, everything is also explicit. It means that confessions are public. You cannot even confess *ad auriculum* which is very interesting because Catholicism is, what I would call, the management of the grey zone; secret, implicit and accepting of conformity. There everything stays between you and your confessor.

These are the common traits between all kinds of fundamentalisms: an explicit system of norms and a social life reduced to the life in your faith community with big distrust towards society in general. This creates many problems, because

norms are non-negotiable. Society either conforms to your set of norms or that society is considered to be pagan.

1) If we take the Catholic Church for example, we can say that since *Humanae vitae* the church has put the issue of norms on the table. The social gap issues like abortion and gay marriage were not linked to the church before the 60s. Abortion was banned in France in 1921 by parliament, without any pressure from the Church. The criminalization of homosexuality was very common in Western Europe until the 60s. It was not a request from the Church, it came from society itself. The 60s were very important, a divorce of values and norms. Suddenly there were no shared norms between the faith communities and mainstream society. This gap has widened since then, the last issue being same sex marriage. There is a problem in this case because the Church – the Catholic Church in particular – does not ask people to follow God’s norms. The Catholic Church has a concept, namely natural law, which is precisely the grey zone, the idea that you do not need to be a believer in order to agree on certain ideas. There can be consensus without sharing faith. Faith is not compulsory. When the church decided to take to the streets against gay marriage, Cardinal Barbarin was very clear: it is not because we are following God, but because the institution of gay marriage is a breach in natural law, an anthropological revolution. He was right by the way; I think it is an anthropological revolution. In doing this, he tried to build a coalition with the grey zone – people who are not believers at all – and with Muslims and Jews, in order to build a coalition of people who are against gay marriage, not on religious but on anthropological grounds. The only people who joined him were some Lacanian psychoanalysts, so it was a great disappointment for the Church. Since this demonstration, we have had the rise of a Catholic party “*Sens commun*” for the first time in France since the toast of Cardinal Lavigerie in 1891. This party goes into politics with a Catholic program in the name of God. The conference of bishops is no more in charge. So the debate is once again on norms, explicit norms.

2) If we look at the other side we find something interesting: what is the other side? It is freedom, liberty, sexual life and so on. Here, my field work was in California in 2009. California is 1968 squared, “it’s my choice”, it was the self-institution of the self, “I do what I want, I create my life”, freedom as the criteria for building a society – that all started from there. Evangelicalism started from here too. After spending one year in California, I found that it was one of the most regulated societies that I know. You have an extraordinary complex of regulations. Everything is regulated. Strangely, it’s a place where everything is supposed to be “my life and my choice”, but then people permanently regulate their own life. You cannot invite a child, you can only invite your own child’s friend. But when you do, you have to fixate on everything, at which time he comes, at which time he leaves, what he will eat; you have to speak with the other parents. If you invite their kid to a birthday party, you have to check whether they eat kosher, vegetarian, halal etc. Everything is regulated. So I decided to explore that. It is now a real problem. For instance, sexual life and the implicit: You have to have a

ten page contract before asking somebody to date you. Everything has to be explicit. My children had classes on how to say yes and no, how to ask things – they were not even ten! They had classes asking them to be explicit about everything they do. Never touch people. The “explicitation” of normativity, for instance emotions in emails – they are not that much fun, they are the “explicitation”; you have to explicitly say what your state of mind is. You cannot make a joke without adding: “This is a joke!” It is not just California, now it is systematic. I sent a joke to my secretaries at the institute and they were totally perplexed. They asked me “What is the status of your email?” I said: “It’s a joke.” – “How fun! Next time put an emoticon, so we know that it’s a joke.” You cannot make jokes if you do not explicitly point out that it is one and this trend is going very far in language, for example.

5. Globish as a Language without Culture

As you know we speak Globish and we will speak more and more Globish once British is out. When it is no longer in the EU, we will have no cultural references when we speak English – at least we will understand each other, because the people who really speak English will not be here. So there will be a creolization of English, but that will also bring about the “explicitation” of English. If you look at the English of the European Union: that is not British English at all. Once again everything has to be understood by someone who is not a native speaker. So there are words which you will never use. You will never say “siblings” – that would be too complex – you will say “brothers and sisters”. It will never be more than 2500 words plus your right to use 300 technical words like “benchmark” etc. Then everything will be contractual, everyday life will become more and more judicial. There is an extension of the regulations to school administrations etc., which are all based on the same thing: you have to make everything you do and think explicit. Kill the implicit, which is exactly the same as killing the culture.

The status of culture in court is very interesting. Twenty years ago you could argue in court that a client perpetrated a crime but he/she was influenced by his/her culture. Twenty years ago, that was a receivable argument. The judges would accept it as an excuse, but now it’s an aggravation. The status of female excision for example: it has changed in the last twenty years. Twenty years ago the anthropologists would come to court and say: “They have different customs” and the court would be lenient, but not at all now. By the way, the courts now have a tendency not to define that as cultural obligation but as a religious obligation, thus turning something which is in fact cultural into a religious norm. I will stop here on that.

6. The Collision between the European and the Christian Identity

The last point is identity. The identity which is brought up now by the populists has nothing to do with culture or history. In what way do we oppose Islam in the European debate on it? We oppose European values and Europe's Christian identity. The only problem is that European values are totally opposed to Christian values. The German, Belgian and Dutch governments have questionnaires for visa applicants and immigrants which are all about whether they accept “our values” and I would say that the pope could not sign such a questionnaire. In Germany one of the questions is “Do you accept nudity in public space?” You cannot imagine Cardinal Ratzinger saying “I am German, I will tick that box.” The last thing I found was in Belgium: The Flemish government has a questionnaire for Moroccans. It says: “Flemish sleep at ten p.m.” and if you look at all questionnaires, you have an ideal normative life which is the life of nobody, of course, but is constructed as the national identity. For instance, in those countries which consider gay rights to form a part of the European identity there is a big problem, because it means that Catholicism is not part of the European identity; that you have no right to be a conservative religious man. If you were, you would not be able to sign this kind of questionnaire. So where are we going with that? Precisely to the delegation of real cultures which are all based on the implicit. If you make everything explicit, you have no culture anymore. You only have a normative system which, by definition, could only be implemented in an authoritarian way. It's what I call the crisis of culture, the destruction of the very concept of culture by this kind of globalization. How can we deal with that now?

The first duty is not to indulge in this kind of systematic “normatization” of everyday life. That is exactly what Francesco Ghia said. We went too far in this definition of religion as normative. The question is how can we reopen the grey zone, not only between believers and nonbelievers, but between everybody? The fact is that we consider religions to determine the everyday life of people – we have this idea that “a Muslim is a Muslim”, that he has some kind of Koranic software in his mind and if you want to influence the possibility of a Muslim to adjust to Western society you have to go back to that Koranic software, reopen it, change the concept of “Jihad” and then put it back in. We have a normative concept of theology, which means that in fact we do not address religiosity or spirituality in the way a believer experiences his own religion. It has become this complex area which is not studied anymore, now in our societies we are more and more religiously illiterate and the most vivid forms of religion are culturally illiterate because they do not want to address the issue of culture. We have to reopen the relationship between culture and religion in practice, not by having a big discussion about it.

7. Questions and Answers

Q: You said it is a process of globalization and I appreciate the parallels you have drawn between Salafism and California, but what is it in the process of globalization that is driving this?

R: I think globalization is, by definition, a process of “deculturation” through the loss of traditional or national cultures. It is also a process of mobility and if you want to be mobile, you must travel lightly with as little cultural luggage as possible. Therefore, you develop some sort of travel kit of how to adapt to societies. This is why Salafism and Evangelicalism work with people who are mobile, in a sense, even if it is not so willingly. Those people could be going to California to find a good job or ordinary immigrants or whatever you might think of. So the second point is linked to individualism, this kind of normative system – you do not need to be part of a face community, even though you might think you are part of one, because very often you meet your face community on the internet. You yourself can decide, and do it yourself. It is very interesting to see how these people discuss norms of everyday life between themselves. The infidels wear their watch on their left hand, so should a good Muslim wear his watch on the right hand? This kind of debate is about the little things that show who you are, how you lead your life. That also means that it works well for people who are not well socialized. They reconstruct their second generation identity based on a set of formal norms. The problem is the sustainability of this process: You cannot study a language over ten years, you need a language that is immediately accessible. Globish is one of these languages, but the Pentecostals have glossolalia which is fantastic – you speak every language.

You do not need a language. God’s word passes from you to someone else immediately. You do not need cultural mediation. I think this is part of the Pentecostals’ success. Before the internet they invented a way of communicating immediately without the need of a dictionary or grammar. Normativity is a set of regulations for everyday life which could take different forms according to context (religious, non-religious); and the domestication of body language is extremely important. The same thing goes for a Salafi – you should not smile, you have signs which indicate immediately that you are a Salafi (no moustache) and the wording, the use of specific vocabulary. There is a Salafi Globish which is very interesting, because they speak the local language but they have a reservoir of specific terms that they use only in Arabic, e. g. *din* instead of “religion”, because if you said religion it could imply that Islam and Christianity are the same thing.

You have some sort of a copyright on expressions; for example in Malaysia, the law is that Christians are not allowed to use the word Allah, while in Arabic the term means God. On the secular side, there is the debate on cultural appropriation, which is very interesting. Now if you are not African-American according to some groups you cannot use signs belonging to the African heritage. There was

the Dolezal case in the US – she was a girl who represented the black community in a small city in Montana for years and one day her brother and parents went on television and said: “But she is not black, we are all white! Blond, blue eyes.” It was a huge scandal. She lost her job, her husband who was black divorced her, and she was seen as a traitor by the black community in general (not the local one). The accusation was that of cultural appropriation because she tried to have relatively dark skin and she combed her hair the African way. “You are not black so you have no right to use our way of living.” That is very close to what populists are doing. It is the same thing; “It is our identity.” For instance, the normative approach of the boycott of white Gospel singers; this is linked to the idea that a specific type of music and a way of dressing is copyrighted by a specific group. We used to say that globalization is relation, and now we have the exact opposite; the reappropriation of cultural elements by people who think that they are the legitimate owners of this or that trait of cultural behavior. Often this leads to court in the US, but more and more in Europe too. The courts have to make a decision on this. So here normativity is reinforced. The courts might be relatively liberal and reject the case, but that means that the case is always deferred to a normative system however it may work.

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