



ISLAMOPHOBIA STUDIES JOURNAL

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About the Cover

Artist: Kyung Chyun is an illustrator working in Oakland, California. She attended California College of the Arts in San Francisco for BFA in Illustration. Kyung was born and raised in Seoul until the age of twelve when she immigrated to the states. She considers illustration and art to be her American dream as much as that sounds corny. Honors include 2015 New York's Society of Illustrators scholarship. Her portfolio can be found on kyungchyun.com.

The cover illustration uses the well known feminist analysis of the gaze as the foundation for its concept. The gaze is powerful, judging and oppressive. Extending from the analysis, the gaze represented by the group of multiple eyes in the illustration represents surveillance and fear of the Muslim population. The eyes are an important element in this illustration also because of what is not shown--the American public's habit of overlooking the violence against the Muslim people while insisting on their view point of status quo.

About the *ISJ*

The *Islamophobia Studies Journal* is a bi-annual publication that focuses on the critical analysis of Islamophobia and its multiple manifestations in our contemporary moment.

ISJ is an interdisciplinary and multi-lingual academic journal that encourages submissions that theorizes the historical, political, economic, and cultural phenomenon of Islamophobia in relation to the construction, representation, and articulation of “Otherness.” The *ISJ* is an open scholarly exchange, exploring new approaches, methodologies, and contemporary issues.

The *ISJ* encourages submissions that closely interrogate the ideological, discursive, and epistemological frameworks employed in processes of “Otherness” – the complex social, political, economic, gender, sexual, and religious forces that are intimately linked in the historical production of the modern world from the dominance of the colonial/imperial north to the post-colonial south. At the heart of *ISJ* is an intellectual and collaborative project between scholars, researchers, and community agencies to recast the production of knowledge about Islamophobia away from a dehumanizing and subordinating framework to an emancipatory and liberatory one for all peoples in this far-reaching and unfolding domestic and global process.

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Editorial Statement Muslims are civil society's prisoners!

Prisons are institutions structured and built to maximize control and exercise absolute domination over the incarcerated population. Society's primary and professed approach to prisoners is centered on a rehabilitation model in which the individual is locked up for a period of time before being allowed back into cities and towns to mix with the "normal" population. The other and more pernicious approach practiced often at the same time and toward targeted ethnic, racial, and political groups is constructed punitively, so as to teach the individual involved or the group a lesson on "proper" conduct and establish social, political, economic, linguistic, and religious boundaries.

In both approaches above, and within the confines of the prison, the prisoners are placed on a highly controlled regiment with every minute of the day accounted for and intensely regulated. The system is managed by the guards and the prison's administration with the involvement of psychologists to guide and analyze the societal rehab program at every turn. What the prisoners eat, drink, and do inside the prison is controlled with a system of privileges and punishments used to elicit cooperation from the incarcerated population.

The prison is an apt metaphor and analogy that describes the American Muslim predicament in the current period. In more than one way, the similarities between the regulated and controlled daily life of a prisoner resembles the contours of the American Muslim's experience in civil society. What can be said by an American Muslim is already prescribed. The scope of engagement is highly regulated and departure from it is subject to punishment or withholding privileges. Despite the fact that prisoners inhabit and control 95-98% of the space in the prison, nevertheless, the guards and the warden control and regulate every aspect of daily life of the incarcerated population.

Consequently, the way to evaluate and approach the American Muslim community in the current period should be approached within a prison-prisoner lens. Here, the ability to move around and enjoy privileges should not be confused with freedom, equality, constitutional rights, and dignity in the full sense of the word. Let us be honest for a moment and detail the Muslim predicament in today's America: a community subject to structured governmental control, surveillance, entrapment schemes, guilt by association, and punitive measures instituted to elicit "correct" conduct and proper political and religious speech.

Take for example, the levels of intrusion into Muslim religious space, whereby the government admits to deploying informants and monitoring leaders within these institutions. Religious freedom becomes vacuous if government intrusion is constant and presumption of guilt without evidence is how the Muslim community is regulated and controlled. The introduction in the US of CVE programs and Prevent in England are symptoms of the prisoner-prison relationship. The key question: What other community in the US has such programs to prevent and counter extremism?

Just like the prisoner needing to adhere to prison's regulations as far as clothing are concerned, Muslims distinctive attire is a suspicious act that requires intervention by civil society guards. The subject must be induced by institutional intervention, so as to rehab it away from such clothing since they imply individuality, distinctiveness, and rejection of established cell block rules. In this sense, the clothing run contrary to civil society's constructed "norms" and change must be undertaken, and if need be, enforced to remedy.

The more critical civil society control structures are those that operate at the level of ideas and shaping consciousness. Muslim bodies are marked and controlled in civil society, so as to discipline and produce a prisoner mental state of mind that begins to regulate on the inside, that which was placed by the institution on the outside. The constant demand on Muslims to condemn every terrorist act, problematizing Muslim critique of foreign policy, and the constant insinuation of double talk or taqiah with the only speech magnified and permitted is the one affirming empire and interventionist policies. Muslims are to be spoken for, and not to speak on their own terms. Could Muslims speak in civil society? And if they do, are we ready to listen?

A more insidious aspect of this civil society prison construct, is the ongoing criminalization on the one hand, as the punitive measure and the intensive rehab program directed at the youth to shape their worldview and identity. Muslim youth are the site of a civilizational rehab program with the intended goal of birthing a new breed content with subjugation and ready to celebrate on the one hand his/her cultural inclusion at the expense of political agency, dignity, and freedom on the other. Culture and identity divorced of religious and political content is a mere commodity sold and bought by the highest bidders.

Muslims, as a class of people, are prisoners of civil society in the west and are subject to hyper structures of control that negate

the basis on which membership in society is founded upon. In more than one way, the Muslim today is an unequal citizen, and the citizenship even when it is allowed to be exercised, is probationary and subject to limitations. Just like released prisoners wear a bracelet to monitor their whereabouts and check regularly with their probation officers, so are Muslims in civil society made to wear an imaginary bracelet and check with security institutions, so as to ascertain if the rehab program was successful and no more 'inducing' is needed.

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Repeating Fundamentalism and the Politics of the Commons: The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy and the Contradictions of Global Capitalism

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Repeating Fundamentalism and the Politics of the Commons: The Charlie Hebdo Tragedy and the Contradictions of Global Capitalism

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ABSTRACT: I argue that the Charlie Hebdo massacre, and the issue of fundamentalist terrorism in general, should be examined in relation to the contradictions of living in a neoliberal global capitalist system. These contradictions are played out at the political, cultural, and ideological levels in a way that obscures the fundamental antagonism, making any radical solution to the problem of fundamentalist terrorism beyond our reach. I examine these contradictions in four different themes around which the issue of fundamentalist terrorism is staged within the hegemonic neoliberal global capitalist order: the clash of civilizations; colonial and postcolonial politics; leftist solidarity; and the failure of all practical solutions in the fight against fundamentalist terrorism. I end the piece with a call for rethinking the issue of fundamentalist terrorism within the *politics of the commons*.

When the tragic news of the most recent terrorist attack in Paris broke out, the Western media coverage of the massacre sounded all too familiar. From the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the Charlie Hebdo massacre, the signs of the Islamophobic narrative about Islamist (not Islamic) terrorism have become too easily recognizable. Nonetheless, the issue of Islamist terrorism in mainstream media is still framed within a neoliberal ideology that fails to look into the root causes of fundamentalist terrorism, Islamist, or otherwise, around the world in relation to the intensification of predatory forms of capitalist development and its corollary apartheid politics and practices of enclosure. Similarly, any analysis of the coverage of fundamentalist terrorism as symptomatic of the racist, Islamophobic public and official discourses in the US get it half right. Politically speaking, global capitalism is turning larger segments of people in the global South into an uncounted and discardable excess who exist outside state power, the market, and the international political order, making them easily vulnerable to reactionary, extremist movements. However, the neoliberal framework makes the struggle, today, between groups that are anchored in their exclusivist, identitarian thinking, rather than between the global capitalist system itself and the “radical universality” of the dispossessed and disposable surplus of the world population.

In this paper, I argue that the issue of fundamentalist terrorism, as it has been framed in the media representation of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, should be understood in the context of the contradictions of living in the shadow of the neoliberal global capitalist system. These contradictions are played out in four different themes that obscure the fundamental antagonism within the hegemonic neoliberal global capitalist order: the clash of civilizations master-narrative; colonial/ postcolonial politics in the new age of empire; leftist solidarity politics; and the failure of all practical solutions in the fight against fundamentalist terrorism. Any radical solution to the problem of fundamentalist terrorism, it is suggested, can be reconfigured only within the *politics of the commons*.

THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AS POST-IDEOLOGICAL WAR

The first contradiction that is staged in the terrorist attack in Paris is the myth of the post-ideological age as embodied in the anachronistic “clash of civilizations” master-narrative. Some politicians still fall back on this master-narrative to interpret international politics; others are redefining its terms. While French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and some Muslim leaders in France described the massacre as a “deafening declaration of war,”¹ French President Francois Hollande was more cautious in his choice of words, describing the terrorist act as a case of “exceptional barbarism,” without resorting to a Manichean view of the world.² No matter how liberal and progressive their comments sound, however, the policies and laws they are passing now in France, as will be discussed below, betray this democratic veneer.

Interestingly enough, US Secretary of State John Kerry broadly redefined the key terms of this master-narrative. He portrayed the massacre as a “part of a larger confrontation, not between civilisations -- no -- but between civilisation itself and those who are opposed to a civilised world.”³ EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini went even further, rejecting the claim that this is “an issue between Europe or the West and Islam,” since “terrorism and terrorist attacks are targeting most of all Muslims in the world so we need an alliance; we need a dialogue there to face the issue together.”⁴

The Muslim scholar, Dr. Tariq Ramadan, however, was unequivocal in his subversion of this narrative, arguing that throwing the idea of religion-based clash of civilization into the mix merely feeds into these violent extremists’ main outlook of the world.⁵ Ramadan thus insists that this is a war against “violent extremists, wherever they are coming from.”

This shift in master-narrative is also accompanied by calls for departing from the American policy on the war on terror and the “shoot first and ask questions later” philosophy. Ramadan pointed out that President George W. Bush fell into the trap of the rhetoric of religious war, even though his campaign was called the War on Terror. Indeed, the *Guardian’s* Simon Jenkins has been warning France and other European countries not to walk down the US path in the global fight against terrorism.⁶

Diverging from the path of American foreign policy is quite sensible in light of the clear differences between 9/11 and the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks. Although both attacks were launched against symbolic cultural and political center of Western power, 9/11 struck the United States empire, in particular, and the Western world in general, in an unprecedented and deeply profound way, because it tapped into their unconscious fears and fantasies that have been conjured up all along in Hollywood disaster movies.

These atrocities would not have been imaginable, as Director Robert Altman remarked, unless they were “seen [. . .] in a movie.”⁷ It is not that, as the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek said on 9/11 “the unimaginable impossible happened,” but that “the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, *America got what it fantasized about*, and this was the greatest surprise.”⁸ As he succinctly puts it, 9/11 constituted the traumatic intrusion of a “screen fantasmatic apparition” into our reality.

It is important that journalists like Jenkins also urged not to call this anti-terrorism campaign a war, in order not to compromise even more of what is left of the civil liberties in the already fragile modern democracies that have become more like surveillance-terrorist states. He thus writes:

Today's French terrorists want a similarly hysterical response. They want another twist in the thumbscrew of the surveillance state. They want the media to be told to back off. They want new laws, new controls, new additions to the agenda of illiberalism. They know that in most western nations, including Britain, there exists a burgeoning industry of illiberal bureaucrats with empires to build.

Indeed, as Žižek maintains, the rhetoric of global war on terror ushered a global state of emergency in which the rule of law is potentially suspended and state sovereignty can be asserted without any transparency or accountability in the name of protecting civil liberties.⁹ More importantly, the truth behind this twist in discourse is the attempt to move beyond ideological struggle, to usher a new “post-ideological” age, where ideology does not only become superfluous but also serves a reason to shirk any responsibility for the unimaginable death and destruction waged in the name of this clash of civilizations.

As Chalmers Johnson wrote in the aftermath of 9/11, “This attempt to define difficult-to-grasp events as only a conflict over abstract values - as a 'clash of civilizations,' in current post-cold war American jargon - is not only disingenuous, but also a way of evading responsibility for the 'blowback' that America's [the United States'] imperial projects have generated.”¹⁰ What this does is simply serve as a subterfuge for war on the economic egalitarian demands of the Arab revolutionary movements, mystifying and displacing the fundamental antagonism, increasing the global gap between the haves and have-nots, and propelling global capitalism so that every struggle is presented as a war between two groups, thereby remaining wrapped in the language of religious, racial, or national, struggles.

THE WAR ON TERROR IN THE AGE OF DEMOCRATIC EMPIRE

The Charlie Hebdo massacre also plays out the contradictions between the democratic and republican ideals and the resurgence of global empires in this new stage of the metastasis of neoliberal global capitalism. Indeed, these terrorist attacks cannot be addressed without taking into account the colonial and post/neo-colonial contexts in which they have unfolded.

In so far as this contextualization is carried out in the name of liberal subjectivization of the *Other's* monstrosity, Žižek is correct to dismiss it.¹¹ This is not simply about giving a platform for sharing the voice and perspective of those whom we consider to be radically different. Rather, the intention here is to acknowledge that every historical configuration is incomplete, and that there is a surplus excess that results from the obfuscation of a cause at the center of the social field. Hence, as Žižek maintains, context is important only in so far as it reveals the extent to which a subject is ideologically constructed in relation to the fundamental antagonism that lurks beneath and behind the system.

Writing for Aljazeera, Victoria Fontan links one of the Algerian culprits' motives to the torture scandal in the American-run Abu Ghraib prison.¹² Cherif Kouachi, Fontan writes, was outraged by the violations of the human rights of Iraqi prisoners and the torture practices, euphemistically referred to as “enhanced interrogation techniques,” that sadistic and psychopathic US military personnel administered at Abu Ghraib.

The scandalous photographs that these prison personnel took as trophies and souvenirs seem to have left their indelible mark on Kouachi and played a significant role in shaping his vengeful vendetta. Indeed, what drew the ire of Kouachi were not Hebdo's caricatures of the prophet Mohammad, but these obscene images from the US-run

interrogation center that reduced Muslim suspects to sub-human entities. [As the story unfolds](#), it has become clear that this terrorist operation was either hatched or inspired by Al Qaeda in Yemen over three years ago.

Fontan also explains that Kouachi's terrorist act must be understood in relation to France's war on terror, especially its most recent military campaign in Mali. Circa November 2014, France launched a bombing campaign and land assault of the northern part of their former colony to ferret out suspected Al-Qaeda fighters and destroy the infrastructure of the area that was under Islamist domination, to prevent them from coordinating any terrorist attacks against the West from Africa. The campaign failed, but for these fundamentalist-terrorists France was now Islam's public enemy number one, and they sought to strike back at the French State.

Other commentators go even further back in history, placing these events within a no less sinister history of French colonization in Africa. Writing for the *Independent*, for example, Robert Fisk summed the brutal 132-year history of French colonialism in Algeria, by saying, "Algeria is the postcolonial wound that still bleeds in France."¹³ The Algerian war of liberation, the "battle of the million martyrs" still serves, according to Fisk, as the foundation of the relations between France and its Arab population.

The French domestic context and the way the republic deals with its Arab citizens is no less significant for understanding these terrorist attacks. These "lumpen-citizens," (to use the words of Houria Bouteldja, the spokesperson of the anti-racist *Mouvement des indigènes de la République*) of Arab descent, Algerians in particular, are alienated from the French national imaginary as colonial subjects, and shamelessly pauperized through its republican-colonial ideals.¹⁴

Indeed, the *banlieues*, where these, in President Sarkozy's words, *racaille* live, are considered "zones without rights," and the banlieues, as A. L. Stoler writes, are still administered by "colonial mechanisms of control."¹⁵ As Bouteldja clearly states, "This imaginary link to colonization and the history of slavery continues to determine how they perceive us . . . and as long as this imaginary is alive, we remain native."¹⁶

Mark LeVine, thus, notes that the "structural racism against France's large Arab/Muslim and African communities, which has included mass murder in the streets of Paris and remains "[rampant](#)" not merely in the [poor suburbs](#) of major cities, where concentrated poverty and marginalisation lead so many to crime, drugs, prison, and, not uncommonly, to radicalisation."¹⁷ Consequently, what these Muslim youth experience in the banlieues is, as the philosopher Alain Badiou mentions, "daily humiliation" and dehumanization.¹⁸

To add insult to injury, the French surveillance-terror State has been selective in its application of freedom of expression laws as well as their double standards in dealing with Muslims, vis-à-vis people of other faiths. French authorities can de-veil Muslim women and hunt down any public signs of Islamic identity, without blinking twice about launching hysterical campaigns that censor and criminalize: Holocaust denial, the *quenelle* salute, pro-Palestinian rallies, an anti-Jihadist Mauritania Muslim film, comments that are allegedly defending terrorism ("l'apologie du terrorisme"), and absurdly persecuting social justice activists like Bouteldja, for allegedly calling white French "sub-dogs."¹⁹

In the last two weeks, Prime Minister Valls has also announced raft counter-terrorism measures, including beefing up security and surveillance to curb radicalization by monitoring 3,000 people suspected of links to Jihadist groups. The civil liberties of French Arab and Muslim minorities will only deteriorate even further if a French version of the *American Patriot Act* [italics added] is considered for adoption in their counter-terrorism

endeavors, leading eventually to the compromise of the democratic rights enshrined in the law.²⁰ As Žižek points out, “The terrorist attacks achieved the impossible: to reconcile the generation of ’68 with its arch enemy in something like a French popular version of the *Patriot Act* [italics added], with people offering themselves up to surveillance.”²¹

The proliferating signs of fascism in the republic are hard to miss, revealing the cruel joke underlying the claim that the consolidation of the security-surveillance-terrorist state reflects the European resistance, as EU Vice President Frans Timmermans said, “to change the nature of our open societies as a reaction to this threat.”²² Nonetheless, linking racism and religious radicalization does not go far enough in explaining the deeper causes of the pauperization of larger segments of the world population that force them to immigrate to former colonial metropolitan centers. Ultimately, this analysis can merely displace the true source of disaffection among European Muslim youth, by identifying it as, in the words of Myriam Francois-Cerrah, “a politico-religious narrative of vengeance against the “west.”²³

RETHINKING LEFTIST SOLIDARITY

The Charlie Hebdo tragedy also plays out the contradictions surrounding leftist solidarity politics that center around multiculturalist issues, racism, and political correctness in the West today. Although many people in the West have expressed their solidarity with Muslim minorities in France in particular, and Europe in general, this solidarity politics has been compromised by oppressive and offensive demands placed on Muslim communities.

Although leading Muslim scholars and representative councils in Europe and around the world condemned the massacre, and although those global condemnations were immediately and widely shared in the [media](#), Muslims have had to work harder at proving their collective disapproval and repudiation of such heinous acts.²⁴ In the past, such denunciations always arrived belatedly to the scene. Moreover, these denunciations were deliberately ignored and under-reported, in order to create the impression that, by their silence, the majority of the Muslim world secretly condoned and relished such horrific acts.

These condemnations make it clear that such barbaric acts do not speak for all Muslims. Rather, they reiterate *ad nauseam* the point that a bunch of Islamist terrorists cannot and should not be conflated with Islam or Muslims, as self-described New Atheist and avowed Islamophobe Richard Dawkins tweeted.²⁵ Moreover, the self-righteous Islamophobe Bill Maher unequivocally stated on the Jimmy Kimmel Show that “Hundreds of millions of [Muslims] support an attack like this. They applaud an attack like this. What they say is, we don’t approve of violence, but you know what, when you make fun of the prophet, all bets are off.”²⁶ Indeed, these ideologues and propagandists share two main ideological strands common in US popular discourses: 1) neo-conservative beliefs, and 2) Zionist Christian evangelism. That is, they are united by an irrational hatred for, and fear of, Islam and Muslims, and they are united by an unwavering support for the Israeli apartheid state and its colonial-settler campaign and genocidal policies in Palestine.

Nonetheless, an increasing number of commentators reject outright these demagogic Islamophobic tactics. Kimmel himself is reported to have pushed back gently, by questioning Maher’s unfounded claims, and Maher is said to have lost the studio’s audience by insisting on these sweeping overgeneralizations. Similarly, many “whites,” including internationally renowned author JK Rowling, came out in scores to condemn Rupert Murdoch’s suggestion that Muslims all over the world should be held responsible for the Charlie Hebdo massacre, until they “recognize and destroy their jihadist cancer.”²⁷

Others are not merely questioning these sweeping generalizations, but are also pointing out the unfairness of these demands and their offensive nature. As Homa Khaleeli correctly notes in *The Guardian*, these “seemingly reasonable” calls for Muslim to condemn these barbaric acts imply that unless stated otherwise, “all Muslims, not just extremists, are implicated or secretly agree with all attacks undertaken by people in the name of religion anywhere in the world.”²⁸ Moreover, Alex Massie, from *The Spectator*, warned that such demands imply that Muslims all over the world “bear some inchoate communal responsibility for the barbarous actions of their co-religionists.”²⁹

No expression of solidarity politics, however, has managed to stage the contradictions about Western leftist politics more than the “#JesuisCharlie” campaign. On the face of it, this campaign of symbolic identification seems like a harmless invocation of universal solidarity with the victims themselves. However, the gesture itself elevates victimization onto an ontological condition in the name of collective institutional signature. In part, the magazine itself, as a cultural institution, cannot be reduced to the lives of its employees—as an institution the magazine has its own logic, which has been recently revealed to be a logic invested in right-wing sympathies, racism, and outright Islamophobic sentiments in particular.³⁰

Moreover, under the sign of the name Charlie, a staged spectacle and photo opportunity presented itself in the so-called “unity march.” This spectacle brought under its umbrella not only extremist right-wing French politicians and activists, but also international leaders who are responsible for waging genocidal war against largely unarmed civilian populations and for the deliberate targeting and assassination of journalists and cartoonists.³¹ The presence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the march, and later at a synagogue in Paris where he exhorted French Jews to return to their “ancestral homeland,” gave legitimacy to Islamophobic sentiments, while at the same time manufacturing the invocation of the spectre of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust to silence any critique of the Israeli apartheid policies and Zionist settler-colonialism in Palestine.

It is no surprise that various commentators brought up the double standard in the media’s coverage of terrorist acts committed by non-Muslim suspects. For example, in an interview with CNN’s infamous Don Lemon, Arsalan Iftikhar, human rights attorney, and *The Muslim Guy* website founder, correctly commented that “When Christians commit acts of terror, we don’t ask priests and pastors to go on national television to condemn these acts, but, sadly, Muslim public intellectuals, thinkers, leaders, and Islamic scholars have that double standard that we have to deal with.”³² Iftikhar failed to mention that Christian terrorists are immediately declared mentally unstable, paranoid, or psychotic individuals in need of psychiatric care rather than arrest, torture, or drone attacks. Indeed, as Žižek has recently argued, this is not simply a matter of Western hypocrisy, but the re-packaging of Western “exploitation and violent domination . . . in the guise of its opposite: freedom, equality, democracy.”³³

The political cartoonist Khaled Albaih gave a different twist to this impasse confronting Muslims in these situations.³⁴ He wrote that Muslims “are constantly asked to apologise [sic] for crimes they neither committed, nor supported, and, although “they, too, are victims of the violence of extremists, still, they are asked to apologise [sic] and somehow atone for these crimes that were committed in the name of their religion.” Consequently, Muslims have to work double shifts to prove their innocence and loyalty to the values of modern civilization, by launching media campaigns declaring that such acts were committed “not in the name of Islam” The other hashtag campaign, “#JesuisAhmed” (“I am Ahmed”),

created in response to the murder of French police officer, Ahmed Merabet, seemed to hold more promise in sending a strong message of solidarity with Muslims. This campaign gives immediate recognition of the names of Muslim victims of these terrorist acts and drives home the important point that the majority of the victims of these terrorist acts are Muslim themselves. More importantly, the name of the campaign itself guarantees that the French surveillance terrorist State cannot appropriate it to further advance its hegemonic power. Nonetheless, as long as such campaigns remain wrapped in religious discourse, the fundamental antagonism will continue to be obscured. No genuine politics of solidarity can come out of such a campaign.

Dr. Tariq Ramadan believes that such acts of solidarity can universalize the value of human life everywhere without exception.³⁵ Ramadan states that “the divergent responses to the deaths of Westerners and those of other individuals around the globe may be partly to blame for the growing appeal of extremist ideology.” Ramadan also appealed to world citizens to “ask our governments for consistency, and then to come to social policy when it comes to equal citizenship to act against racism and anti-Semitism and anti-Islam... I think there is a lack of consistency even in our emotional reactions to the death of people.”

It is doubtful whether such solidarity campaigns can generate a sense of identification with the humanity and the plight of dispossessed and disposable *Other*. For one, the struggle against racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia are different sides of the same struggle for economic justice and liberty. Moreover, the problem with such claims to the humanity of the *Other* can only be articulated through the international human rights regime. The problem here is, as Žižek states, “human rights [for example, the right to privacy] do not directly condone the violation of the Commandments [adultery], but they keep open a marginal grey zone that is supposed to be out of the reach of (religious or secular) power.” The point, as he writes, is that “it is structurally impossible, for the power, to draw a clear line of separation and prevent, only the misuse of a human right without infringing on its proper use, i.e. the use that does not violate the Commandments.”³⁶

Finally, it did not escape some commentators that the attention to the Charlie Hebdo massacre came at the expense of some victims who are simply not considered, in Teju Cole’s words, “mournable bodies.”³⁷ Although this erasure has something to do with the racial, religious, and national backgrounds of the White victims, which overshadowed other genocides whose victims are Palestinians, Africans, or Mexicans, the issue is not simply a function of collusion with Western Islamophobic forces. Rather, it is a function of obfuscating the overall picture and the systematic violence that these imperial states unleash in the world.

Indeed, in these cases, the media serves as an alibi for hegemonic imperial powers in their destruction of human life as they pursue their global capitalist and “democidal” expansion agendas that intensify the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the Middle East and around the world through drones, surveillance technologies, and apartheid walls. As Glenn Greenwald wrote for *Intercept*, “Indeed, concealing stories about the victims of American militarism is a critical part of the US government’s strategy for maintaining support for its sustained aggression. That is why, in general, the U.S. media has [a policy of systematically excluding and ignoring such victims](#) (although disappearing them this way does not actually render them nonexistent).”³⁸

*DID ANYONE SAY FUNDAMENTALISM?
FUNDAMENTALISM IN/AND MODERNITY*

The last contradiction that is played out in the Paris massacre pertains to the failure of all practical solutions in the fight against fundamentalist terrorism within the hegemony of the global capitalist world order. Although commentators on the recent Parisian tragedy acknowledge that terrorism has no easy solutions, most of them end on a high note of “forlorn hope” and despair about the possibility of bringing an end to the problem of global terrorism. For Massie, there is “little room for hope, little reason to expect that this story will change. It is a war, of sorts, in which we trust that reason can somehow – eventually – conquer a rejection of reason. This seems a forlorn hope today.”³⁹

Within the hegemony of neoliberal global capitalism, the only solutions that these commentators can conjure up reiterate earlier pleas to, as Massie stated, “stand for liberalism and reason” or to, as Jenkins put it, “meet terrorism on its own terms” and to “refuse to be terrified . . . not to show fear, not to overreact, not to over-publicise [sic] the aftermath”. This is no way to defeat terrorism.

As long as the problem of fundamentalist terrorism is framed within the neoliberal ideology as a religious or ideological, rather than a social, issue that mystifies the fundamental antagonism, there will never be a real breakthrough in understanding the issue, let alone solving it. The problem here is that most commentators hold largely anachronistic views of Islamist terror. For example, Massie unequivocally calls it a “direct *repudiation* of modernity.” Consequently, pundits like Massie put the blame squarely on the pathological nature of Islam and its followers, whitewashing and absolving Western politicians such as President George W. Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and neocons from any responsibility for the instability and destruction that are wreaking havoc in the Middle East. As Massie writes, “The motivation for this barbarism long pre-dates their time in office.”

Indeed, the origins of all forms of religious fundamentalism today go back more than a decade or two, but they do not precede the advent of modernity and the rise of global capitalism. As Žižek made clear in his writings, religious fundamentalism, including Islamist terrorism, are nothing but “a pure product of the contradictions” of the global capitalist system.⁴⁰ In relation to Islamic fundamentalism, in particular, Žižek insists that “it is something entirely conditioned by Western policy,” adding that it is “purely postmodern.”

Religious fanatics these days are helplessly dependent on modern technology and consumerist global capitalist culture. This can explain the recent Western fascination with ISIL terrorists-brand wrist watches, or ISIL’s “shockingly” slick magazine *Dabiq*—its professional content and graphic design betray the alleged medieval mind-set it is supposed to represent.⁴¹ This can also shed light on the transformation of Muslim sacred sites into “a steel and concrete metropolis,” with “a glittering array of skyscrapers, shopping malls and luxury hotels.”⁴² Mecca, for example, was once the embodiment of a utopian, egalitarian dream. Under the custodianship of the Saudi royal family and with the approval of hardline Wahhabi clerics, however, this desert city has become “a playground for the rich . . . where naked capitalism has usurped spirituality as the city’s *raison d’être*.” One has to wonder whether the 600-mile Great Wall around these holy sites being constructed by the Kingdom (with the help of companies building the Zionist apartheid separation wall in Palestine), is meant to keep out ISIS or those who cannot afford this luxurious lifestyle.⁴³

Žižek, thus, states that Islamic fundamentalism “has nothing to do with a tradition supposedly restored,” and consequently, it becomes imperative to stop projecting one’s own

fantasies on Islam and Muslims and “concern yourself with the dramatic impasses of capitalist modernity.” Islamic Fundamentalism, as he says about the Balkans in the Western imagination, is abhorrent to Westerners because “they themselves introduced [it] there; what they combat is their own historical legacy run amok.”⁴⁴

Although his statements are usually taken as a not-so-thinly-veiled condemnation of Islam, Salman Rushdie’s comments on the Parisian massacre made this link clear. He writes that, “Religion, a mediaeval form of unreason, when combined with modern weaponry becomes a real threat to our freedoms.”⁴⁵ The antiquated forms of supernatural beliefs and fundamentalism sustained a thriving multicultural scene in the Islamic world to the extent that European visitors to Turkey in the age of Enlightenment deemed the Turks backward due to the religious cosmopolitanism of their big cities. In Chris Hedges’ words, “the evil of predatory global capital and empire has spawned the evil of terrorism.”⁴⁶

Žižek also links the rise of fundamentalism in the Arabo-Islamic world with the traumatic impact of modernization on Muslim cultures. In contrast to Europe, where the impact of modernization was absorbed over centuries through *Kulturarbeit*, or the “formation of new social narratives and myths,” Muslim cultures experienced the shock of modernization directly, without mediation, a “protective screen or temporal delay,” in a way that shattered their “symbolic universe . . . even more brutally.”⁴⁷ As such, fundamentalism emerged as a “psychotic-delirious-incestuous” expression of a religious experience that has direct access to the “divine Real” in all its terrifying ramifications, including “the vengeful return of the obscene superego divinity who demands sacrifice.”

REPEATING FUNDAMENTALISM

Drawing on this reinterpretation of religious fundamentalism, two solutions can be proffered to curb the global threat of fundamentalist terrorism. The first is a culturally radical solution, which is, nonetheless, developed within a religious framework that calls for reclaiming the positive and authentic meaning of fundamentalism, and disassociating it from the destructive history of fundamentalist terrorism.

In his book *Violence*, Žižek maintains that true fundamentalists do not harbour any feelings of envy or resentment towards other people. Indeed, they are so confident about their worldview and convictions that they are completely indifferent toward, and unthreatened by, other people’s beliefs or way of life, however perverted or obscene they may look to them. Žižek thus notes, “The terrorist pseudo-fundamentalists are deeply bothered, intrigued, fascinated by the sinful life of non-believers,” because they are merely projecting on other people their own temptations and desires. He concludes by saying, “Fundamentalists are a disgrace to true fundamentalism.”⁴⁸

A “strong ideological response,” as the Palestinian writer and journalist Daoud Kuttab writes, is urgent today. However, it is very difficult to expect Arab and Muslim intellectuals to offer “alternative role models and alternative ideas that they can adopt in this struggle of ideas,” as he suggest, without dismissing or offending the beliefs of these so-called “fundamentalists.”⁴⁹ The fundamentalists themselves need to internalize this difference between a fundamentalist and a fundamentalist-terrorist in order to traverse the fantasy of fundamentalism.

In so far as fundamentalist terrorism is a global issue, the international community can be well served not by criminalizing faith or banning this or that religion, but by helping spread the true of message and meaning of fundamentalism and separating it from any

associations with violence and terrorism. The message to fundamentalists is: Knock yourself out, if you wish, but live and let live. This solution, however, will remain incomplete, since it still disconnects the problem from its structural causes and roots, --global capitalism and its imperial designs.

THE POLITICS OF THE COMMONS

The more radical solution, and the only solution, today, however, is tackling the root causes of fundamentalist terrorism and linking those causes back to the fundamental antagonism. Since fundamentalism is the product of the contradictions of global capitalism, what is needed is the restructuring of the totality of social relations or the mode of production today, i.e., global capitalism through collective emancipatory and egalitarian projects that guarantee the equitable distribution of wealth and reverse the global trend toward more apartheid politics, exclusion, surveillance, torture, and extermination politics.

To keep things in perspective, it is important to remember that the global capitalist system that pushes these men to religious radicalization is the same system that pushes increasing numbers of young men and women from families with lower income to join the US military. Studies have shown that racial minorities are overrepresented in armed service, compared to economic elites in the US.⁵⁰ This number is expected to increase, because the US military is recruiting immigrants by using service in the military as a major path to citizenship and naturalization.

To this extent, [Kuttab's call](#) for reforming autocratic Arab regimes, as well as Western racist and Islamophobic institutions, does not go far enough.⁵¹ Reforms are not going to undo the increasing global polarization of wealth between the 1% and the 99%; reforms are leaving, untouched, the causes of alienation and pauperization of the thousands of young men who are marked as excess in this global capitalist system.

What we need to keep in mind is that, at its core, fundamentalism is an opportunistic ideology that intervenes in contingent (revolutionary) contexts only to displace the anti-capitalist revolutionary spark underpinning this socio-political unrest, and ideologically mystifies it through religious rhetoric and theological sophistry. In the absence of a formidable radical or revolutionary left in the Arabo-Islamic world, and, as a result of the "red scare" during the Cold War, fundamentalist terrorism has easily slipped in to fill the gap, and did not have to do much to attract these men.

Žižek discusses, after a report in *The New York Times*, the story of the Taliban in Pakistan, who, in 2009, exploited the grievances of landless tenants against wealthy landlords in order to stage "a class revolt."⁵² Quoting Walter Benjamin's correlation between the rise of Fascism and revolutionary debacle, "every rise of Fascism bears witness to a failed revolution." Žižek notes that fundamentalist ideology merely covers up a botched revolutionary movement.

Similarly, the re-emergence of the religious Shas party in the Israeli apartheid state can be directly correlated with the increasing number of the "rejected and excluded" from the Ashkenazi establishment. This bottom 20 percent "has a color," said the editor of radical cultural magazine [Café Gibraltar](#), Ophir Toubul, including "the Mizrahis, the Russians, the Ethiopians, the Druze, the Bedouin, [and] the Arabs" in his list of the lower disenfranchised class.⁵³

These fundamentalist-terrorist groups, as Žižek maintains in a different context, become "the mirror image of state terror, for a murderous fundamentalist sect taking over and ruling by terror, not for the overcoming of state terror through popular self-

organization.”⁵⁴ Rather than making these young men more vulnerable to the ideological lure of fundamentalist terrorism, these young men can be integrated into society through a radical political project that can re-imagine alternative utopian modes of social relations. In the words of Martin Luther King, "Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism."⁵⁵

In so far as they occupy a shadowy and spectral existence outside the hegemony of the neoliberal capitalist regime, these youth can be considered a part of the world's increasing number of surplus and uncounted communities. There is some truth, therefore, to the sarcastic comments on the French government's new infographic signs that can allegedly help in identifying a jihadist—no friends, no family, no athletic activity, and no baguettes (the sign the infographic used to allude to the changing eating habits of the would-be jihadists).⁵⁶ As one of the retweets quips, “In fact, the campaign to #StopDjihadism isn't about identifying potential jihadists, it's about describing unemployed people.”

In Žižek's political theory, unemployable people constitute a point of inherent exclusion or exception, or the “very site of political universality.” In their lack of a determinate place in the system, these surplus and disposable populations “stand directly for universality.”⁵⁷

Universality, for Žižek, is not about abstract neutrality, because the abstract universal fails to include its particular content, thereby becoming, itself, something particular over and against the particulars it cannot include. In this sense, universality is a “process or a sequence of particular attempts that do not simply exemplify the neutral universal notion but struggle with it, give a specific twist to it – the universal is thus fully engaged in the process of its particular exemplification; that is to say, these particular cases, in a way, decide the fate of the universal notion itself.”⁵⁸

As such, universality is reconsidered in terms of its constitutive exception—the particular cases of the excluded determine what the universal is. Hence, universality is hegemonized by including the exception under it, and hence “it is only through the exception that it becomes the rule, that is, a universalized function.” In this sense, they stand out as a singular or concrete form of universality in the sense that they stand “alone among the other particulars, not as a particular kind over and against them (which would make it only particular) but as an exception to the very idea that it is a ‘kind’ at all.”

Needless to say, these excluded in the increasingly expanding modalities of apartheid are not the classical Marxist subjects of the proletariat. As Žižek notes, one is lucky to be an exploited worker today; the real issue is that more and more people are not simply unemployed, but *unemployable* and discardable refugees, slum dwellers, surplus populations, bedoons, and homo sacers (to use Giorgio Agamben's phrase). Jacques Ranciere put it in a nutshell: they are the “part of no part,” and “the object of disciplinary measures and/ or even humanitarian help, but not ‘full citizens,’ who have no determinate place” in the system and who are kept at a proper distance through technologies of surveillance, torture, and death.

As Žižek makes clear, it is only by identifying with the uncounted and discardable that the moment of the truth of the global capitalist system can be reached. Žižek explains: “. . . when you have in a certain social totality those who are 'below us' -- the negated or outcast -- then precisely insofar as they are the abject, they stand for universality.”⁵⁹

Although their cheap, disposable labor sustains the global capitalist profit machinery, there is no recognition of their rights within the law, and their humanity is denied in the system itself. In other words, these surplus groups are constitutive of the global capitalist

system, while they stand outside its notion of the good in relation to the market (they cannot indulge in the absolute enjoyment of consumption), the nation (they are consigned to spaces of abjection outside the purview of citizenship), and the republic (they are denied the democratic rights that are enshrined in the law).

Angela Davis recently made the same observation, when she related that “the increasing shift of capital from human services, from housing, jobs, education, to profitable arenas [such as the prison industrial complex] has meant there are huge numbers of people everywhere in the world who are not able to sustain themselves.” These populations “are made surplus, and as a result they are often forced to engage in practices that are deemed criminal.”⁶⁰

Žižek, thus, maintains that the “part of no part” embodies the failure of universality, and stands for the lie of the existing universal system and “what is wrong with society.” He, thus, writes that their “abject position stands for the lie of the existing universality and it doesn't necessarily have a direct positive dimension. In this sense the universality here is not fake, because it only embodies what is false in the existing universality. It gives body to the failure of universality and does not have any positive content.”⁶¹

Any sense of radical universality that can oppose global capitalism must be theorized from the perspective of the larger segments of the world population who are kept at a distance from the ideological construction of itself as an excess that is relegated to a position of abjection. What is needed, then, is to rethink the inequality and injustice of the global capitalist system from the perspective of this “part of no part,” who are kept at a distance from the system by virtue of these technologies of apartheid and enclosures (such as prisons, separation walls, and gated communities,), which embody the proliferating forms of capitalist privatization.

For Žižek, the “progressing ‘enclosure’ of the commons” is the correlative of the “proletarianization of those who are excluded from their own substance,” and, as such, can operate as the grounds for a new configuration of solidarity based on the politics of the commons.⁶² Thus, the *politics of the commons*, as postulated by contemporary continental philosophers, calls for liberating the commons of our shared existence, inaugurating an alternative radical revolutionary project that can mobilize people outside the market and outside state control.

Politics of the commons links diverse global struggles in anti-globalization and anti-capitalist practices that aim to reverse the oppressive technologies of apartheid, and bring an end to the horrible policies of enclosure. *Politics of the commons*, to be brief, addresses the “antagonistic struggle, which, rather than taking place between particular communities, splits each community from within, so that the ‘trans-cultural’ link between communities is one of a shared struggle.”⁶³ Although demanding such a revolutionary change might, within the current taboo political codes, be easily dismissed as too impractical and utopian (i.e., Marxist or communist), it is the only way to defeat fundamentalist terrorism by restoring the commons to collective humanity.

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