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Philosophical Hermeneutics and Comparative Political Theory

Evgenia Ilieva

This paper examines Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its appropriation by Fred Dallmayr as a powerful alternative to Orientalism and political theory's parochialism. Drawing on Gadamer, a number of comparative political theorists similarly invoke the tropes of provocation, self-disruption, and self-dislocation to highlight the benefits that ensue from cross-cultural dialogue and the encounter with non-Western texts. But absent a more concrete theorisation of how dialogue may unsettle and disrupt our self-understandings, the repeated invocation of this trope remains just a phrase. The aim of this paper is to problematise the easy separation of dialogue from power that prevails in much CPT literature. To this end, I use Joshua Casteel's account of the encounter between an interrogator and detainee in his *Letters from Abu Ghraib* as an example of the kind of transformative self-disruption that comparative political theorists invoke but do not theorise.

Keywords: Gadamer, Dallmayr, dialogue, power, Orientalism, Comparative Political Theory

Whereas recent assessments of Comparative Political Theory (CPT) tend to describe the subfield as a distinctive and inevitable response to the dilemmas of globalisation, it is important to recall that in some of its earliest iterations the rationale behind the emergence of CPT also included a concern with moving beyond Orientalism and Eurocentrism.¹ Among those CPT scholars who have taken up Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, we can isolate two responses to his work. One approach, exemplified in the work of Leigh Jenco (2007, 2011) and Farah Godrej (2011), proposes deep immersion in local cultural contexts as an "exit" from the traps of Orientalism and Eurocentrism. A second approach, most closely associated with the work of Fred Dallmayr, finds an alternative to Orientalism and political theory's parochialism in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

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1 For the most recent assessment of the aims, scope, and implications of the subfield of comparative political theory, see Diego von Vacano (2015).

In this paper, I examine Gadamer's hermeneutic approach and its appropriation by Fred Dallmayr as the preferred mode of engagement with non-Western texts.² Specifically, the paper focuses on Dallmayr's reading of Gadamer, who finds in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics a powerful response to Orientalism. As Dallmayr argues, Gadamer's insights can help us steer a course between "Eurocentrism" and "Euro-denial." More importantly, Dallmayr writes, Gadamer's hermeneutics can assist us in finding "the balance or 'mid-point' between self and other where alone dialogue can flourish" (Dallmayr 2002, 5). Dallmayr's invocation of dialogue should come as no surprise. Indeed, we must recall that one of the central ethico-political ambitions of CPT as a field of study is to foster a dialogue of cultures, or a dialogue among civilisations. For Dallmayr in particular, dialogue is the only way in which we can learn to live together peacefully in a deeply globalised world. "In the long run," Dallmayr argues, "[dialogue] offers the only viable alternative to military confrontation with its ever-present danger of nuclear holocaust and global self-destruction" (13). Although Dallmayr is aware that dialogue is not the only mode of civilisational encounter – and that historically it even appears to be one of the less likely modes of intercultural engagement – he has nevertheless sought to establish its normative primacy and preferability over conquest, missionary conversion, assimilation/acclulturation, cultural borrowing, liberal neutralism, and class conflict (see Dallmayr 2002, 12-13; and Dallmayr 1996, 3-31).

My aim in this paper is to explore the roots of CPT's faith that dialogue can provide an antidote to Orientalism and the will to dominate. What is meant by dialogue? In which sense do CPT scholars use the term? If dialogue is possible only in conditions of equality, how should one proceed when such equality is absent? The paper begins to answer these questions by foregrounding Dallmayr's engagement with Gadamer's hermeneutics. My aim here is not to challenge the "correctness" of his interpretation of Gadamer. Rather, in undertaking this task, I seek to draw attention to the ways in which Dallmayr brings out the dialogic dimension of Gadamer's argument, how he himself puts it into practice, and how he makes the case for its relevance to CPT and cross-cultural studies more broadly.

While on the face of it dialogue appears to be self-evidently good, I argue that the concept remains under-theorised by comparative political theorists. Despite acknowledging some of the difficulties that might impede cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, I argue that, following Gadamer, there is a tendency among comparative political theorists to portray the movement of dialogue as a bit too easy and smooth. Drawing on Gadamer, a number of comparative political theorists

2 For similar critiques of Dallmayr's project, see Andrew March (2009) and Megan Thomas (2010).

similarly invoke the tropes of provocation, self-disruption, and self-dislocation to highlight the benefits that ensue from cross-cultural dialogue. But absent a more concrete theorisation of how a dialogue may unsettle and disrupt our self-understandings, the repeated invocation of this trope remains just a phrase. In so far as dialogue and the productive self-disruption it engenders has relevance beyond the realm of textual interpretations, and in so far as it is described as holding the key to real political violence in the world, it becomes imperative to give some specificity to what such self-disruption actually entails. As such, the aim of this paper is to problematise the easy separation of dialogue from power that prevails in much CPT literature. To this end, I use Joshua Casteel's account of the encounter between an interrogator and detainee in his *Letters from Abu Ghraib* as an example of the kind of transformative self-disruption that comparative political theorists invoke but do not theorise.

My interpretive strategy of taking a closer look at Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and its appropriation by CPT scholars allows me to expand on the philosophical and political importance of dialogue, as well as to question the possibility of genuine dialogue, especially when such dialogue occurs against the backdrop of immense economic and political inequalities. Let me also note two caveats here. First, although I take seriously CPT's views on the normative value of the necessity for dialogue, I also seek to draw attention to the less sanguine elements of the process of dialogue, those elements that comparative theorists have left unexplored. As Ashis Nandy (2004) has suggested, dialogues need not always be egalitarian; they can also be hierarchical.

Second, while this paper takes a critical approach to the notion of dialogue I do not wish to suggest, as some commentators have done, that the dialogical strand of comparative political theory, together with its attempts to forge a global dialogue of cultures, constitutes an "utopian exercise in impossibility" (Freedman and Vincent 2013, 7). To dismiss dialogue merely as a naïve endeavor is to lose sight of the fact that one of the animating impulses behind CPT is a renewed concern with learning how to live with others in the context of deepening globalisation. With these caveats in place, the paper proceeds as follows. In the first section I offer an overview of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, focusing on six themes in his theory that are of particular relevance to comparative political theorists. The second section is devoted to tracing the ways in which Dallmayr has appropriated Gadamer's hermeneutics. Finally, in the last section I offer an example of a concrete hermeneutical encounter that both problematises and broadens the notion of dialogue advanced by comparative political theorists.

Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

Rather than attempt an exhaustive treatment of Gadamer's work, in what follows I isolate those elements of his theory that are useful in understanding the dialogical dimension of philosophical hermeneutics and its relevance for cross-cultural learning more broadly. To this end, I focus on the following themes: tradition, authority, prejudice, fusion of horizons, dialogue, and openness.

One relatively simple way to enter into Gadamer's thought is to note that he developed his hermeneutic philosophy to address the challenge of how we may understand the meaning of texts that are historically distant from us. As Lauren Barthold (2010, xiii) observes, "[f]rom its earliest days hermeneutics has concerned itself with distance: how are we to cope with the divide between the alien and the familiar?" Building on Heidegger's insight that mind and world are not ontologically separate, Gadamer argued that every interpreter is always already situated within a particular tradition that cannot be set aside, and from within which she approaches any given text. Taking issue with the legacy of Cartesian inspired approaches that posit a neutral observer capable of suspending her "prejudices" in pursuit of "objective knowledge," Gadamer sought to retrieve a positive conception of prejudice as "prejudgment" and argued that prejudice, so defined, plays a central role in understanding (Gadamer 2004, 271).

Following Heidegger, Gadamer similarly maintains that there can be no presuppositionless interpretation and understanding. Countering the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" (273) and prevailing notions that prejudices necessarily exercise a restrictive influence upon our thinking, Gadamer argues that prejudgments are in fact a necessary condition for understanding (278). To get a better grasp of the central role that the concept of prejudice plays in Gadamer's thought, we must explore two other concepts that Gadamer seeks to rehabilitate: tradition and authority. Like Heidegger, Gadamer likewise asserts that we are more than just observers in the world. Rather, we are always already situated within, and participate, in a given tradition that is also the source of our prejudices. As something that is always part of us, tradition both conditions and is the condition for our understanding. Tradition for Gadamer, writes Richard Palmer, is like "a stream in which we move and participate, in every act of understanding. [It] is not over and against us, but something in which we stand and through which we exist; [...] it is so transparent a medium that it is invisible to us – as invisible as water is to fish" (Palmer 1969, 177). This is what Gadamer calls the "authority" of tradition. When comparative political theorists invoke Gadamer to speak about Western thinkers' "rootedness" in a tradition, this is what they have in mind.

If tradition is invisible to us in the sense just described, how can we ever become

aware of our prejudices or prejudgments for which tradition is the source? Here we must note that Gadamer (2004) distinguished between “true” or fruitful presuppositions that enable understanding and “false” prejudices that can lead to misunderstanding, that can prevent us from seeing and thinking (298). Crucially, he insisted that the only way we can come to understand which of our prejudices are “blind” and which of them are productive of understanding is by “testing” them through an encounter with otherness (the otherness of tradition, the otherness of a text, etc.). As Gadamer explains, “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation. For what leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity” (298). It is only when something addresses us in this way, Gadamer argues, that understanding can begin.

The Conditions for Understanding: Openness, Dialogue, and the Fusion of Horizons

The encounter between an interpreter (her prejudices) and the traditionary text, or simply the encounter with otherness, initiates a process of question and answer. The text “addresses,” “tells,” or “says” something to us, and this is experienced as a “question” by the interpreter. While the encounter alone does not lead to understanding, it is a crucial component of the process of interpretation because it means that an opening for *dialogue* has occurred. As Gadamer (1976) writes, “Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us” (9). Our prejudices or presuppositions, in being “provoked” by the encounter, open us up “for the new, the different, the true” (*ibid.*). The encounter, in effect, is what allows our prejudices to become visible to us; it allows us to foreground and expose our prejudgments both to our own doubt as well as to the rejoinder of the other (Gadamer 1989, 26). In becoming apparent to us through the encounter, our prejudices can in turn become the focus of questioning – both self-questioning and questioning by the other. As Gadamer (2004) writes, “prejudice[s] become questionable in view of what another person or a text says to us” (298). This means that they are capable of being modified, revised, and potentially discarded.

If the encounter with the unfamiliar is what provides the opening for dialogue, it is in the process of dialogue itself that understanding can occur. Gadamer (2004) invokes the model of dialogue or conversation to argue that understanding is the dialogic interaction between the reader and the text where co-creation of meaning occurs. “To reach an understanding in dialogue,” Gadamer writes, “is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communication in which we do not remain what we were” (371).

In his *Truth and Method*, the interpreter and the text assume the role of partners in a dialogue, where the goal is to reach some kind of accord concerning the matter at hand: “Just as each interlocutor is trying to reach agreement on some subject with his partner, so also the interpreter is trying to understand what the text is saying” (370).

That which enables us to understand the text or the “other” is what Gadamer calls our *horizon* -- the larger context of meaning within which we are situated, and which suggests the localised, perspectival nature of knowing. To have a horizon, Gadamer explains, “means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it” (301). Rather than think of this horizon as a prison from which there is no escape, Gadamer emphasises that the horizon can never be truly closed; rather, it “is something within which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving” (303). While a horizon is limited and finite in the same sense that each human life is also finite, Gadamer insists that our horizon is nevertheless open, fluid, and changing (*ibid.*).

The aspect of Gadamer’s hermeneutics that is of particular interests to comparative political theorists can be brought to light once we pose the question of what happens when we try to understand a horizon that is other than our own. In so far as understanding can be seen as a process of coming to an agreement about a subject matter, Gadamer describes the process of coming into contact with another horizon as oriented toward achieving a “fusion of horizons.” It is important to note that Gadamer’s discussion of the horizon occurs in the section of *Truth and Method* devoted to explaining how we can come to understand the relationship between the interpreter and the text, or the present (which we inhabit) and the past (the tradition within which we place ourselves). “Are there really two different horizons here,” Gadamer (2004) asks, “the horizon within which the person seeking to understand lives and the historical horizon within which he places himself” (303)? For Gadamer, we would be wrong in assuming that the ability of an interpreter to understand a text from the past depends on her capacity to transpose herself into this distinct, alien horizon. What Gadamer seeks to establish is that the horizon of the present and that of the past are not entirely separate; rather, there is continuity between them. When we transpose ourselves into historical horizons, he writes,

[T]his does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. Everything contained in the historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon. Our own past and that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition (Gadamer 2004, 303).

To understand an alien tradition requires that we have a historical horizon. But it is not the case that we acquire this horizon by an act of empathic transposition into a historical tradition. As Gadamer makes clear, we are always already situated within a horizon of meaning that allows us to transpose ourselves into another, alien tradition. When we attempt to understand a historically distant text, we move into its horizon while simultaneously bringing our horizon with us. Gadamer describes this process as akin to putting ourselves into someone else's shoes. It is only by placing ourselves (together with our horizon) in another's situation that we can "become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person" (304). Transposing ourselves in this sense is not an act of empathy but "involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our particularity but also that of the other" (ibid). Applied to this context, the concept of horizon "expresses the superior breath of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have" (ibid). As Gadamer elaborates, "to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and its truer proportion" (ibid). The attempt to understand the other, therefore, necessarily throws us back upon ourselves, to a reexamination of our presuppositions and historical tradition. This to and fro movement between self and other, between our present and the heritage of our past, leads to a deepening and widening of our horizon and, in the process, both self and other are transformed.

In rejecting the existence of ontologically closed, distinct, or reified horizons, Gadamer thereby also disallows the possibility of incommensurability and affirms the intrinsic openness of the hermeneutical experience. If the historical horizon is fluid so too is the horizon of the present.

But why speak of a fusion of horizons if there is no such thing as isolated, distinct horizons? As Gadamer asks, why not simply speak of the formation of a single horizon "whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition?" (305) Every encounter with tradition, Gadamer explains, "involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present" (ibid). Elsewhere in *Truth and Method* Gadamer describes this tension as the polarity between familiarity and strangeness (295). The task of hermeneutics is to consciously bring out this tension, this inbetweenness, not to conceal it "by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two" (305). This is why, Gadamer elaborates, "it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present" (ibid). And as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded by our present horizon (306). By projection Gadamer here means the conscious act of reconstructing the past. Consciousness of the present, however, is inseparable from and requires consciousness of tradition – that is an awareness of the way in which the past is

contained in the present. This movement of projecting and superseding is another way of describing the process of understanding. It is in this sense that understanding can be said to involve a “fusion” of horizons. Stated differently, fusion, in this sense, refers to the active and ongoing nature of understanding, not to a static process. It refers to the creation of a common language of meaning that emerges between the interpreter and the text, between self and other, between past and present.

The upshot of Gadamer’s dialogic model for comparative political theory is that it places the interpreter in an attitude of openness towards the alien tradition. “Hermeneutical experience,” Gadamer reiterates, “is concerned with *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is *language* – i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou” (352; emphases in original). A Thou, Gadamer reminds us, is not an object but always stands in a certain relationship with us. In other words, for Gadamer the relationship between past and present (or between historically effected consciousness and tradition) has an analogue in the I-Thou relationship. Of the three modes in which the I can relate to the Thou, Gadamer favors the I-Thou relationship characterised by a genuine openness to the Thou. In human relationships, Gadamer argues, “the important thing is [...] to experience the Thou truly as Thou – i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs” (355). This openness, Gadamer clarifies, does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, “anyone who listens is fundamentally open” (ibid). In this relationship, the I does not project its meaning on the Thou but lets the Thou address her. This mode of orientation to the other implies an openness that “wills to hear rather than to master.” It is an openness that recognises the possibility of being challenged, modified or transformed by the other. As Gadamer (1989) eloquently writes, “One must lose oneself in order to find oneself.” Importantly, “one never knows in advance what one will find oneself to be” (57).

The strong emphasis on non-mastery and non-domination that emerges from this account of the relationship between self and other is what comparative political theorists find attractive about Gadamer’s approach. In this account, as Richard Palmer summarises, the interpreter emerges not as one who “masters” what is in the text but as one who becomes the “servant” of the text. The interpreter “does not so much try to observe and see what is in the text as to follow, participate in, and ‘hear’ what is said by the text” (Palmer 1969, 208). On this view therefore – a view that I argue is also shared by proponents of CPT – Gadamer’s hermeneutics emerges as an approach that is geared towards restraining or chastening the interpreter’s “will to master.” As such, we can begin to see how Gadamer’s insistence that an interpreter should remain open to the voice of the other begins to lead us away from Orientalism and its hegemonic posture towards non-Western thought traditions.

While Gadamer's approach might be helpful in pointing to a way out of Orientalism, the element of his account that CPT scholars uncritically adopt is Gadamer's portrayal of dialogue as the necessary opposite of domination. In the following sections, I seek to show that the uncritical embrace of a Gadamerian notion of dialogue leads CPT to the conclusion that a commitment to dialogue will necessarily issue in more sympathetic and enhanced understanding of non-Western traditions of thought. My aim is to problematise this assumption by highlighting the ways in which dialogue may not always remain free from power and as such is not always non-dominative. To set the stage for my critical intervention, in the next section I outline Dallmayr's engagement with Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Dallmayr's Appropriation of Gadamer

While some scholars (Mehta 1985; Panikkar 1988; Kogler 1999) have questioned the applicability of Gadamerian hermeneutics to the context of cross-cultural interaction and exchange, Fred Dallmayr is among those who do not see any reason why Gadamer's model should be inapplicable to endeavors geared towards cross-cultural learning. To fully appreciate Dallmayr's contribution, I outline his attempt to rescue Gadamer from charges that his theory is ultimately unable to accommodate the thought of radical alterity (e.g., Haidu 1990; Bernasconi 1995).

In Defense of Gadamer

One of Dallmayr's first extended elaborations on the significance of Gadamerian hermeneutics to cross-cultural studies – and comparative political theory in particular – appears in his *Beyond Orientalism*. Rather than offer a comprehensive exegesis of Gadamer's magisterial *Truth and Method*, Dallmayr (1996) shifts the focus of attention to some of Gadamer's later work in which we can find his reflections and commentaries on “larger global and geocultural concerns” (40). The explicit focus on this dimension of Gadamer's work has as its goal the task of clarifying how philosophical hermeneutics can be extended to the realm of contemporary cross-cultural encounters. As Dallmayr notes, “Gadamer has persistently reflected and commented on the significance of European (or Western) culture, alerting readers both to its intrinsic grandeur and to its tragedy of impossible limitations” (ibid). Reading Gadamer alongside Jacques Derrida's late reflections on Europe in *The Other Heading*, Dallmayr discovers in their work the groundwork for a “hermeneutics of difference” – a hermeneutics that can serve as the foundation “for the emerging global city and a dialogically constructed global ecumenicism” (ibid).

Dallmayr acknowledges the presence of a kind of linguistic idealism in Gadamer's work up until and including the publication of his *Truth and Method*. Here Dallmayr is essentially referring to one of the most common critiques leveled at Gadamer's

dialogical hermeneutics, namely, the reliance on an implicit consensualism necessary for the eventual “fusion of horizons” between self and other, or reader and text, where alterity is ultimately overcome in favor of reaching some kind of harmonious agreement devoid of any conflict (ibid, 41; Dallmayr 2009, 27). As Robert Bernasconi (1995) has articulated this problem, “it is not clear whether Gadamer succeeds in freeing himself from the prejudice of representing difference or otherness as a problem to be resolved” or overcome (180). If the strange or the foreign is the initial precondition that sets the process of understanding in motion, there is a tendency in Gadamer’s theory to reduce alterity to a moment that is to be overcome in the search for a fusion of horizons. Bernasconi notes that Gadamer’s treatment of alterity has led to charges that the model of dialogue he elaborates is monological rather than dialogical (186).

While Dallmayr is sensitive to these charges, he believes that in many respects they are misleading and do not do justice to the complexity of Gadamerian hermeneutics. On Dallmayr’s account, a number of experiences contributed to Gadamer’s modification of his hermeneutic theory. Among the most formative Dallmayr identifies Gadamer’s turn to Heidegger’s later writings, his engagement with French post-structuralism, and his turn to the poetry of Paul Celan. Gadamer’s engagement with these traditions of thought led in his later writings to a “steady distantiating from fusionism in favor of a stronger recognition of otherness in the context of reciprocal encounter” (Dallmayr 1996, 32).

Turning to Gadamer’s late work on the poetry of Paul Celan, Dallmayr suggests that here readers can find a direct acknowledgement on Gadamer’s part of the non-transparency of language which can lead to a rupture or failure of (complete) understanding. If *Truth and Method* displays a tendency towards consensualism, Gadamer’s reading of Celan reveals a greater attentiveness to the “ambiguity, multivocality, and indeterminacy unleashed by the poetic text” (Dallmayr 1996, 44). Ruminating on the task of the interpreter when confronted with the hermetic poetry of Celan – a poetry which Celan himself described as a “message in a bottle”, implying that it is entirely up to the reader to decode that message and even to determine whether the bottle contains any message at all – Gadamer approached Celan’s poems by respecting their poetic distance. In Gadamer’s response to the otherness of Celan’s texts Dallmayr finds “a willingness to refrain from willful penetration, that is, a readiness to leave blank spaces intact and thus to honor the interlacing of said and unsaid and of word and silence” (ix).

In his later work, then, Gadamer acknowledges the possibility of non-communication (or ruptured communication) by highlighting the difficulties of reaching understanding. But the recognition that understanding can be disrupted or impeded is already present in his *Truth and Method*. As Dallmayr (1984) points out,

there are two “limits or boundaries of conversational understanding in Gadamer’s treatment” (199). The first of these limits becomes evident in those cases where “the effort at understanding is lacking or insufficiently developed,” or where there is no desire to reach understanding in the first place (*ibid*). For example, this occurs when the partners in dialogue, because of indifference or haste, are not concerned with promoting a true “I-Thou” relationship. In such instances communication is reduced to idle chatter where conversational exchanges consist of nothing more than the exchange of clichés and linguistic stereotypes. According to Dallmayr, this type of interpersonal indifference is also evident in scientific inquiry, where ordinary language is replaced by an artificial or technological idiom (199-200).

The second limit case becomes apparent in those situations where the desire to reach understanding is not lacking, but where there is difficulty in reaching it due to “the intricacy of an explored topic or from unfamiliarity with a given language” (200). As Gadamer (2004) himself states, it is precisely “in situations where coming to an understanding is disrupted or impeded [that] we first become conscious of the conditions of all understanding” (386). The encounter with a foreign-language text presents a special kind of barrier to understanding the overcoming of which necessitates the presence of a translator. In translation, there is always a gap between “the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction”, a gap which can never be completely closed (Gadamer 2004, 386). As Gadamer correctly points out, “even the most faithful translation cannot remove the fundamental gulf between the two languages” (387). At every step of the translation process the interpreter is faced with difficult decisions. If a translator should choose to highlight a particular dimension of the text under examination, this means that she is simultaneously required to downplay other features of the text. This process of highlighting and downplaying is ongoing and continuous, and occurs even in those “borderline cases” where “something is in fact unclear” to the translator (Gadamer 2004, 388). As Gadamer explains, in such situations where there is lack of clarity (and lack of understanding), the interpreter is nonetheless required “to state how he understands” a given passage, text, etc (*ibid*). At the same time, however, since the translator “is always in the position of not being able to express all the dimensions of [the] text, [she] must make a constant renunciation” (*ibid*).

Gadamer is right to highlight the fact that “every translation that takes its task seriously is at once clearer and flatter than the original. Even if it is a masterly re-creation, it must lack some of the overtones that vibrate in the original” (*ibid*). Yet as Dallmayr (1984) points out, despite the fact that the distance between the original and its translation appears unbridgeable, ultimately for Gadamer “translation presents no absolute bar to understanding and only highlights general hermeneutical dilemmas” (200). On Dallmayr’s account, rather than translation

Gadamer viewed poetry or poetic language as a more extreme type of unfamiliarity and an obstacle to understanding. Gadamer defines poetry “not as a mode of representation or description, but as a mode of disclosure ‘opening up a world of the divine and human’ or a ‘new vision of the world’” (Dallmayr 1984, 200). But just as was the case with translation, in *Truth and Method* Gadamer ultimately downplays “the innovative and radically unfamiliar character of poetry” suggesting instead that the “poetic word” is just an “intensification of everyday speech” (quoted in Dallmayr 1984, 200).

Against this background, we gain a clearer picture of how Gadamer refined his understanding of poetry and poetic exegesis in his later work on Paul Celan. On Dallmayr’s reading, the engagement with the “hermetic nonexpressiveness” of Celan’s poems led to a modification of Gadamer’s notion of understanding. Gone is the emphasis on a harmonious fusion of horizons; in its place is a greater attentiveness to the obstacles that impede communication. In the case of Celan’s work, these obstacles include the interpreter’s (reader’s) confrontation with a type of poetry that is cryptic, impenetrable, and full of idioms and manipulations of the German language. How does one translate, how does one understand the impenetrable? Indeed, how does one engage with a poetry that “approaches...the breathless stillness of silence in the word turned cryptic cipher” (Gadamer quoted in Dallmayr 1996, 42)?

Gadamer counseled that on such occasions the reader must display a willingness to listen to the “breathless stillness of the word” (Dallmayr 1996, 42). At the same time, Gadamer also cautioned that sensitivity to the opacity of texts need not mean that we must abandon the search for understanding. On the contrary, as Dallmayr points out, Gadamer sought to steer a path between understanding and non-understanding, or between complete appropriation and renunciation – i.e., a middle course that would be sensitive to the silences of language and leave “blank spaces intact” (44). As Dallmayr interprets him, Gadamer did not simply wish to advocate the renunciation of understanding when confronted with the impenetrability of Celan’s poetry. For Gadamer it is not enough “merely to register the failure or rupture of understanding; rather, what is needed is an attempt to look for possible points of entry and then to inquire in which manner and how far understanding may be able to penetrate” (Dallmayr 1996, 44). The goal of this type of interpretation “is not to render transparent what is (and must remain) concealed, but rather to comprehend and respect the complex interlacing of transparency and non-transparency in poetic texts” (ibid).

For Dallmayr, Gadamer’s approach to the poetry of Celan and his emphasis on “interpretive perseverance” is instructive as it both advocates and reflects a “disposition or a ‘good will’ to understanding, [i.e.] a disinclination to let rupture

or estrangement have the last word” (44-5). What Dallmayr finds valuable about Gadamer’s hermeneutical engagement with Celan is not only his emphasis on the importance of being attentive to the “said” as well as to the “unsaid,” but also the fact that in his later work Gadamer “tends to underscore [the] embeddedness in a common world” of readers and texts (45). This is important, Dallmayr argues, as it suggests that Gadamer ultimately does not endorse a radical, unbridgeable separation between interpreters and texts. Instead he develops a notion of understanding where exegesis is now understood as a kind of “struggle or [...] agonistic engagement, proceeding along the pathway not so much of a pre-established consensus but of something like an “agonistic dialogue” (ibid).

While Gadamer makes much of the fact that “interpretive honesty” demands that in those instances when one is confronted with the radical otherness of a text it is preferable to admit that one does not understand, he does not seek to elevate non-understanding into a general maxim nor to endorse a subjective relativism. Rather, in response to some of his critics Gadamer sought to refine his theory of understanding by re-elaborating hermeneutics as a type of “agonal engagement” or an “engaged dialogical encounter” (Dallmayr 1996, 49). Gadamer likens the type of dialogic encounter he has in mind to the Socratic method of self-reflection through questioning and mutual contestation. In Socrates Gadamer finds an approach to hermeneutic inquiry which counsels that one must seek to understand the other even at the risk of self-critique; given that all understanding involves a kind of stepping outside oneself and a movement towards the other, an agonal engagement entails that one must be willing to admit that one could be in the wrong and, by extension, that the other could be right (48-9).

The Legacy of Europe

Viewed as an agonal engagement, Gadamer’s hermeneutics has resonance beyond the realm of textual interpretation. As Dallmayr (1996) suggests, Gadamer’s “later writings on hermeneutical understanding are pertinent to our emerging ‘global city,’ to an incipient world order marked by a contestation among cultures and by a growing resistance to one-sided Western hegemony” (49). Dallmayr distills Gadamer’s views on the socio-political significance of contemporary cross-cultural encounters from *The Legacy of Europe (Das Erbe Europas)*, a study published almost a decade after Gadamer’s encounter with Derrida. In these essays, Gadamer concerned himself with the status and role of Europe in the emerging context of globalisation and European unification. As Dallmayr writes, “the issue is neither to distance the other into the indifference of externality nor to absorb or appropriate otherness in an imperialistic gesture” (52). Dallmayr follows Gadamer in looking to the history of Europe as offering a model for the type of coexistence or co-being that both advocate. As Gadamer argues, “it is one of the special advantages

of Europe that – more than elsewhere – her inhabitants have been able or were compelled to learn how to live with others, even if the others were very different” (quoted in Dallmayr 1996, 52). Indeed, the coexistence of a great diversity of nations, cultures, languages and religions on the European continent is, for Gadamer, the distinctive legacy and “promise” of Europe to the world and the emerging world culture. Specifically, he argued that the special “gift” that Europe could bequeath to the rest of the world was its “multicultural and multilingual composition [...] its historical practice of cohabitation with otherness in a narrow space” (Dallmayr 2009, 32). Experienced as a constant struggle and challenge, this cohabitation, Gadamer argued, implies a lesson for humanity at large. Based on these observations, Gadamer concludes that the European model of “unity in diversity” – a model characteristic of hermeneutical dialogue where, coming from different backgrounds, each partner seeks to discern the other’s meaning – must become a global formula, one that should “be extended to the whole world – to include China, India, and also Muslim cultures” (Gadamer quoted in Dallmayr 2009, 33). Following Gadamer, Dallmayr uncritically embraces this proposal.

Dallmayr is perhaps too generous in his interpretation of Gadamer’s reflections on Europe. To support the claim that Europe, more than any other place in the world, offers a successful example of coexistence, easily opens both to charges of historical amnesia as well as Eurocentrism. One need only remember the devastating wars of religion that decimated the continent in the 16th and 17th centuries, along with the long history of religious persecution in the region, to look with some amount of suspicion on this claim. Moving closer to our own time, the rise over the past decade of Islamophobia and nationalistic right-wing parties in Europe casts further doubt on Gadamer’s claim. As such, one wonders whether Gadamer’s elevation of Europe to the status of model and teacher for the rest of the world – and Dallmayr’s ringing endorsement of it – does not in the end jeopardise the very exit from Orientalism/Eurocentrism that hermeneutics promises to offer.

If hermeneutics is premised on the self’s openness to the perspectives of the other, why does Gadamer not engage with those other voices that, as Dallmayr (1993) recognises, have not experienced Europe (and the West) as the “welter of cultural diversity and multiplicity, but rather as a monolithic structure bent on standardising the globe under the banner of Western science, technology, and industry” (525)? In an earlier iteration of the same argument, Dallmayr (1993) acknowledges that Gadamer’s vision of the legacy of Europe must be counterbalanced against another European/Western legacy, namely, the legacy of “imperialism, colonialism and politico-economic spoilage” (525). What seems like an opening towards a more balanced assessment of the European tradition is quickly foreclosed when Dallmayr writes that an emphasis on this second, negative legacy threatens to “obliterate

Europe's more benign and humanistic contributions" (ibid). To illustrate this point, Dallmayr directs readers to Samir Amin's critique of Eurocentrism, arguing that Amin's portrayal of modern Western culture as synonymous with capitalist exploitation and domination works to hide from view the "kinder" face of the West. For Dallmayr (1993), Amin's approach is ultimately detrimental for cross-cultural encounters. "Viewed strictly from the vantage point of Eurocentrism," Dallmayr writes, "modern Europe no longer is a partner in cross-cultural dialogue, but an enemy to be defeated and destroyed" (357).

Dallmayr offers Amin's book as an exemplar of a narrow perspective that fails to adequately appreciate the positive, non-dominative, and non-imperial elements present in the history of the West. In other words, as a kind of perspective that falls short of Gadamer's dialogic hermeneutics. And yet, Amin's book, in so far as it seeks to shed light on an alternative, non-Eurocentric conception of world history – one that seeks to include previously marginalised voices into the picture – can be viewed precisely as the kind of work that should be welcomed by Dallmayr. Far from seeking to portray Europe as an enemy that needs to be defeated and destroyed, Amin sought to show why and how modernity (and capitalism) came to be perceived as phenomena that could only have emerged in the West (from where they could then be "gifted" to the rest of the world). To challenge, as Amin's book does, the West's dominant self-understanding is not at all the same as calling for the West's destruction. That Dallmayr should draw this conclusion from Amin's text seems puzzling. After all, does not the central premise of philosophical hermeneutics tell us that, in the encounter between self and other, one must risk one's prejudices, hold them open to revision, correction, and possible modification? If we see Amin's book as the "other" that challenges the Western "self" that Dallmayr seeks to defend, then in Dallmayr's hasty dismissal of Amin's text – a dismissal that amounts to a rejection of the postcolonial perspective – I believe we are witness to a clear betrayal of the hermeneutic potential that he otherwise so vehemently defends. Because Dallmayr refuses to be challenged by Samir Amin's perspective, here we come across one of the limit cases that impede the possibility of genuine, mutually transformative dialogue I discussed earlier. That is to say, here we are confronted with a situation in which, as Gadamer said, there is no real desire to reach understanding in the first place, at least no such desire on the part of one of the interlocutors.

Implications

There are three important elements that emerge from Dallmayr's reading of Gadamer that have resonance for the enterprise of comparative political theory. First, Dallmayr embraces an understanding of dialogue as "agonistic," a view that he clearly derives from Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. Modeled on Socratic

dialogue, an agonistic dialogue depends on our willingness to risk our prejudices and a readiness to admit that we may in fact be wrong. Dallmayr comes to this position via an attempt to “rescue” Gadamer from charges that his hermeneutic theory portrays the process of understanding as a smooth blending of views devoid of any struggle or conflict. Dallmayr shows us that Gadamer acknowledged the existence of obstacles that can impede understanding, and guides readers towards the conclusion that the best interpretive approach is a dialogic one, i.e., one that steers a middle course between “understanding and non-understanding” or between “appropriation and renunciation.”

Dallmayr (2009) makes recourse to similar polarities when he defines dialogue as the “exploration of the ‘otherness’ of interlocutors on the far side of either assimilation or exclusion” (23). While Dallmayr is right to suggest that one should not abandon the search for understanding even when confronted with the opacity of otherness, his proposal that one should strive to aim for this middle ground is devoid of any specificity. For example, what would such a middle ground look like? Dallmayr never broaches such questions. Instead, readers are left to conclude that some form of understanding will occur regardless of the obstacles that may be placed in its path. In this sense, Dallmayr’s middle ground begins to look very much like the pole of complete, undistorted understanding that he wishes to avoid. What is lacking in both Gadamer and Dallmayr is an adequate conceptualisation of what stands in the way and impedes (cross-cultural) understanding in the contemporary world.

A second, related element that Dallmayr draws from Gadamer’s hermeneutics is the notion of “good will,” i.e. the premise that understanding in dialogue will not be reached unless both parties display a “good will” to try to understand one another. Such an orientation towards one’s interlocutor implies a readiness and willingness to listen to what one’s interlocutor has to say. As was the case with his uncritical embrace of Gadamerian dialogue, in this case Dallmayr similarly does not interrogate this assumption. For example, he overlooks the possibility that even with “good will” we may still impose hierarchical biases on what we are seeking to understand with “openness.” Finally, Dallmayr’s analysis of the conflicting legacies of Europe – its history of multicultural coexistence on the one hand, and its imperial past on the other – illustrates well some of the political implications of the embrace of philosophical hermeneutics. In insisting on the importance of highlighting the “good,” anti-imperial legacy of Europe, Dallmayr simultaneously works to deemphasise the negative elements in European history.

It is crucial to note that Dallmayr invokes Gadamer’s writings in *The Legacy of Europe* on three separate occasions, in the course of elaborating on the work of the German thinker. As I discussed earlier, in his 1993 essay titled “Self and Other:

Gadamer and the Hermeneutics of Difference,” Dallmayr references Europe’s imperialist legacy as a way of tempering Gadamer’s one-sided impressions about Europe’s multiculturalism, but quickly takes the discussion in a different direction. A revised version of the same argument appears in *Beyond Orientalism* (1996), and more recently in Dallmayr’s 2009 article. What stands out in these two later iterations of the argument is that here the references to Europe’s imperialist legacy are entirely left out. Although this may not have been Dallmayr’s explicit goal, the fact that he chose to withhold the imperialist dimension of Western history could easily be interpreted as an attempt to cleanse the West of its less flattering historical legacy. This disavowal forces us to raise anew the question of the possibility of critique within the framework of Gadamerian hermeneutics.

The Power in Dialogue

In the previous sections I drew attention to the value of Gadamer’s model of understanding as elaborated in the work of Dallmayr. For Dallmayr, the greatest strength of philosophical hermeneutics is its open-ended nature and the fact that it is “hospitable to multiple and expanding horizons” (Dallmayr 2002, 27). Dallmayr finds especially appealing Gadamer’s emphasis on the fact that, in dialogue, no one has definitive answers. Instead, the attention shifts to questioning and remaining open to being questioned (be it by the text or by another person). In the context of CPT this means that no one civilisation can claim a monopoly on truth.

In this section I offer an example of a concrete hermeneutical encounter as a way of theorising the kind of self-disruption comparative political theorists speak of. I draw my example from Joshua Casteel’s book, *Letters from Abu Ghraib*, a collection of email messages that Casteel sent to his family and friends while he served as a U.S. Army interrogator and Arabic translator at Abu Ghraib from June 2004 to January 2005. The dialogic exchange described below highlights the positive impacts of the kind of self-disruption extolled by comparative political theorists, but also challenges the Gadamerian framework of dialogue on which they rely.

The Interrogator and the Detainee

Joshua Casteel was raised in an Evangelical Christian household where, as he recounts, he was taught to equate love of country with love of God. Coming from a military family, he describes himself as “a child of home-schooling and Bible quizzing” (Casteel 2008a, 72). As he writes, “I was not supposed to be the kid who gets upset by violence, ambition and proto-imperialism...I was supposed to ascend the ranks of the military, then the ranks of Washington” (ibid). His plans were derailed. Casteel enlisted in the army soon after September 11th, 2001 and found himself stationed at Abu Ghraib as part of the “clean up” unit sent to overhaul the

prison in the wake of the 2004 prisoner abuse scandal. A deeply religious man, a reader of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jacques Derrida, the collection of emails Casteel sent to his friends and family chronicle his struggle to reconcile his Christianity with the fact of war. While the letters themselves do not contain much information about daily life at Abu Ghraib, they nevertheless grant readers access to Casteel's inner life. On the one hand, we see a 24-year-old man torn between the deception integral to his line of work as interrogator and his Christian obligation to tell the truth. We also catch glimpses of an idealistic (even self-righteous) individual eager to depart for Abu Ghraib, confident that nothing like the prisoner abuse would occur under his watch. At the same time we also become privy to his profound doubts, to the side of him that wonders "what a blond, blue-eyed Iowan boy is doing in Iraq in the first place...with Caesar's body armor and an M-16" (Casteel 2008b, 4). Readers hear Casteel equate his job as interrogator to that of a Father Confessor: "As a confessor you cannot coerce a person to reveal that which they wish to hide. A confessor's aim is to help the one confessing to be sincere. [...] I do not coerce" (14, 36). A few emails later, in an email sent to his father, this self-righteous tone gives way to a profound doubt: "Being a man's inquisitor in the name of secular justice feels so often like fraud (27). [...] I am constantly falsely accusing people of things, using a man's emotions of vengeance for self-gain. I am an intimate partner in the killing of men without trial" (90). The Father Confessor has become an inquisitor; the defender of truth has become a deceiver. The distinctions begin to blur.

One encounter in particular during his time at Abu Ghraib proved transformative for Casteel. After five months of interrogating mostly innocent Iraqis (schoolboys, taxi-drivers, fathers, and Imams), it was during one such interrogation that Casteel finally came face to face with a self-declared jihadist, a 22-year-old Saudi Arabian man who had been picked up by coalition forces just two weeks after he had entered Iraq. "So, I just experienced why it is I am here in Iraq," Casteel writes. "I just 'met' my reason – a young foreign jihadist who said he might kill me if he had the chance (that is, as long as I am a US soldier in Muslim lands)" (101). From the very start of the interrogation, Casteel recounts that he was frustrated by the Saudi Arabian man, namely, by the fact that he was submitting to Casteel's authority not out of a feeling of fear but quite willingly, even with a show of confidence. Unable to "trip up" the jihadist with his rapid stream of verbally aggressive questioning, Casteel decides to switch tactics and asks the man why he had come to Iraq to kill. The reply comes in the form of an unexpected question, "Why did *you* [Joshua] come here to kill?" (Casteel 2007). From this point onwards the entire dynamic of the interrogation changes. The questioner becomes the questioned.

Casteel responds that he had come to defend the Iraqi people, and out of a duty to his country. The Saudi man challenges Casteel by saying, "If the military didn't

want people to be killed they would have sent someone else, not soldiers. Soldiers are sent when people need to be killed” (Casteel 2007). Casteel is struck by the irony of the situation. Two men, an interrogator and a prisoner, both claiming to have come to Iraq to do what each understood to be their respective duty; both devoted to their religions, and both willing to kill to defend their people. Attempting to convert Casteel to Islam, the jihadist challenges Casteel’s beliefs as a Christian: “You said you are a Christian, but you don’t follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Your Lord, our prophet Isa, tells you to turn the other cheek, to love those who hate you. Why do you not do this?” (Casteel 2008b, 102) It is at this moment, Casteel recounts, that he realised the Saudi man was right. As he writes, “I lacked the power to challenge him in any way that I did not challenge myself, because such ideas of ‘love’ and ‘forgiveness’ and ‘compassion’ are not fully manifest and incarnate in me, tangibly and practically to be seen and felt” (ibid). Giving him what essentially amounted to a lesson about The Sermon on the Mount, the jihadist’s challenge forced Casteel into the realisation that he was not living by the principles he preached. Realising that he had lost all objectivity as an interrogator, Casteel stops the interrogation: “I left and I prayed I would be given the chance to see him one day in the future when I could say, ‘I left that world behind me, so can you’” (102). As he recounts, he had stopped the interrogation because he had begun to see the Saudi man as his counterpart, as someone who was trying to convert him in the same way that Casteel was trying to convert the jihadist.

Casteel does not tell readers what became of the Saudi man. But we do learn that this encounter crystallised Casteel’s decision to apply for conscientious objector status. His application was approved, and he was honorably discharged from the army in 2005. He converted to Catholicism soon after. Following his return from Iraq, Casteel became an outspoken critic of the war and joined the Iraq Veterans Against the War. In 2011 he was diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer, an illness which he believed was a result of being exposed to the toxic fumes from the burn pits in Iraq. Casteel passed away in August 2012 at the age of 32.

What can we learn from this encounter between the Christian interrogator and the Saudi jihadist? Does it illustrate the Gadamerian fusion of horizons, or does it exemplify a missed encounter? I use this example in order to begin problematising the notion of dialogue advanced by CPT scholars. Dialogue can take on many forms, depending on the interlocutors, the subject matter discussed, and the location where the dialogue takes place. Depending on who is authorised to speak, dialogues may promote exclusion just as much as they can encourage the inclusion of certain voices. The encounter just described offers an example of the kind of transformative self-disruption that may occur in the course of a meeting with the new and unfamiliar. As CPT scholars would tell us, such disruptions can lead to

profound transformations of self, ultimately resulting in the loss of the will to dominate. In different ways, all of these characteristics are certainly recognisable in the context of the encounter between the interrogator and the detainee. In the case of Casteel, the encounter leads him to the realisation that his work as a military interrogator is incompatible with his deeper aspiration to follow and live by the teachings of the Gospel. Ultimately, this leads him to renounce his military life, adopt a new religion, and become a critic of the war.

How does Casteel's response to the encounter measure up against the kind of transformation that Euben (1999), Dallmayr, Godrej, and other CPT scholars argue is ultimately beneficial for the self? Is this encounter a dialogue of the sort that, following Gadamer, comparative political theorists embrace? To answer these questions we must recall the three main components of dialogue that Gadamer posits. The first requirement for dialogue is that "the partners do not talk at cross purposes" (Gadamer 2004, 360). As Gadamer elaborates, "to conduct a [dialogue] means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented" (360-361). A "genuine" dialogue, therefore, has as its main objective the sincere attempt by each participant to unravel the truth with regards to the subject matter (Swartz and Cilliers 2003, 3). Although Gadamer argues that in order to achieve understanding in dialogue there must be an explicit attempt to reach agreement about the subject matter (292), nevertheless, and as Lauren Barthold (2010) points out, this does not mean that agreement will be reached easily or at the expense of the otherness of the other (103). In dialogue we open ourselves to a new experience. Because for Gadamer (2004) all experience has the character of productive negativity, the openness of dialogue implies that we also expose ourselves to suffering (347). We risk our prejudices, we risk critique, and we risk being misunderstood.

A second fundamental precondition for dialogue is the "good will" of the participants to try to understand one another (Gadamer 1989, 33). When invoking the notion of good will Gadamer refers to Plato's "eumeneis elenchoi" – the hermeneutical attitude of openness, of acknowledging that we may have something to learn from the other. As Gadamer explains, in a genuine dialogue "one does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to prove that one is right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other's viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating" (55). Different from an argument, the aim of dialogue is not to "argue the other person down," to score points, or to win them over to one's side; rather, the goal is to consider the weight of the other person's opinion (Gadamer 2004, 361). This implies a willingness to listen to what the other person has to say as well as to offer reasons and justifications for one's view (Barthold 2010, 106). Finally, a third pre-condition

for dialogue requires an admission of ignorance on the part of both interlocutors akin to Socrates' declaration that "one knows that one doesn't know." It suggests forsaking the position that one already knows the answer in advance.

The encounter between Casteel and the detainee both fulfills but also problematises the terms of the Gadamerian notion of dialogue. Because dialogue has the structure of play, Gadamer argues that we cannot be forced into a dialogue but already find ourselves in it. Play presupposes a willingness to play on the part of the participants. But, as Gadamer (2004) notes, "even within his readiness to play [the player] makes a choice. He chooses this game rather than that" (107). Gadamer defines play as a process that does "not have its being in the player's consciousness or attitude." On the contrary, "play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit". In turn, "the player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him" (109). In order to truly play, we must allow ourselves to be swept away into play, to be drawn away from ourselves – i.e. away from our perspective but not from our historical situatedness. As Gadamer writes, the attraction of a game consists in the fact that it masters the players. Play plays us, so to speak (106).

Conclusion

The encounter discussed above takes place under conditions of war. One of the interlocutors (the detainee) has no other choice but to submit to the interrogation. In this sense, the encounter and ensuing dialogue are forced, staged, and scripted. There is clear evidence of coercion in so far as the detainee is forced to sit on his hand and to look straight ahead. All of these elements violate the Gadamerian requirements for dialogue. However, we also know that the reason for Casteel's initial frustration with the detainee is that the latter, in confidently submitting to Casteel's orders, was quite willing to play the interrogation game. It is this very openness that seems to have altered the course of the conversation, taking it in a direction that could hardly have been anticipated by Casteel. Such openness to experience and the unexpected outcome fit well into Gadamer's schema. As it turns out, in having to explain and justify his decision to come to Iraq, Casteel is forced into realising the fundamental contradiction between his service as a soldier and his desire to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ, to love his enemies, to turn the other cheek. In the jihadist's accusation Casteel catches sight of that other dimension of his self (here also understood in the broader sense of his own culture and tradition) – the non-militaristic aspect of his self, the self that had to be suppressed for the sake of assuming an imperial identity.

In its effect on Casteel, this exchange perhaps represents the best of what comparative political theorists suggest can happen as a result of a hermeneutic encounter – a transformative self-critique that does not leave us as we were before. At the same

time, Casteel's encounter with the detainee also points to a weakness in the CPT literature. CPT scholars have not made clear how the disruptions they argue occur in the process of crossing borders into "other" perspectives have been used to redefine or even critique existing political thought. Although comparative political theorists conceptualise the process of dialogue as a back and forth movement between "self" and "other," they have been reluctant to clarify the impact of this dialogue for the canon of political thought. This suggests two things: either such an impact has not occurred, which means that dialogues need not always be self-transformative; or that this impact has been ignored. If the latter is the case, then this brings us close to Goto-Jones's (2013) suggestion that comparative political theory is simply a code name for "colonial tolerance" (160).

The encounter between Casteel and the detainee is instructive in another way as well. It shows that what the metaphor of play and the notion of dialogue miss in this context is the fact that in the give-and-take of the interrogation, any question, any answer may determine the detainee's fate. This aspect of power – having power over someone's life – is hidden from view in Gadamer's conceptualisation of dialogue. In many respects, power is also held at a distance in Casteel's *Letters from Abu Ghraib*. As such, it becomes conspicuous by its absence. But it also becomes apparent in Casteel's attempt to re-describe his job as interrogator as that of a father confessor:

A confessor provides the opportunity for a safe disclosure, offers a way out of secrecy. Interrogation is like a chess match, a battle of wits. But it is also a relationship of understanding, where I try to use a person's internal belief scheme to encourage them to narrate dishonorable actions with their own words. This tactic takes far more time and patience, but is far more effective in the long run and far more unsettling to the extremist Muslim who has been trained to prepare for torture. The aggressive approach reinforces their preconceptions that America is Satan and that the coalition is a Zionist conspiracy bent on their destruction. Empathy, if it is authentic itself, is far more unsettling, and forces a person to question the legitimacy of their training and indoctrination (Casteel 2008b, 32).

Casteel's *Letters from Abu Ghraib* opens up a tension. On the one hand, it shows that dialogue need not be incompatible with military confrontation. In so far as interrogation is a form of dialogue, it goes hand-in-hand with war. On the other hand, as I have already shown, the book also offers an example of the transformative aspect of dialogue emphasised by comparative political theorists. Importantly, in trying to separate the coercive aspect of interrogation from the empathetic dimension that he associates with the role of father confessor Casteel, perhaps unwittingly, ends up showing how the two roles actually blur. In the context of the war, rather than being its opposite, the father confessor is simply the "kinder" face of empire.

In the introduction to this paper I referenced Dallmayr's separation between dialogue and power, which is evident in his declaration that dialogue offers the only alternative to military confrontation. In many respects, this paper has sought to highlight the ways in which comparative political theory has constructed its identity by consciously drawing a sharp dividing line between dialogue and power. But in order to accomplish this move, CPT has had to portray its "other" (the Western canon) as ethnocentric and exclusive so that it (CPT) could define itself as global and inclusive (see Goto-Jones 2013). In doing so, however, it has become blind to the fact that dialogue need not be incompatible with mastery and the will to power.

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The 'Comeback of Christendom' or a 'Christian Cosmopolis'?: Dialogical Possibility in the work of John Milbank

Angus M. Slater

Often taken to be largely hostile to engagement in inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue, contemporary forms of conservative post-modern Christian theology such as Radical Orthodoxy have been dismissed as irrevocably closed to the possibility of meaningful dialogue taking place between them and alternative religious traditions. This rather fraught relationship has recently come to the fore through exchanges on the ABC.net.au website between Joshua Ralston, and John Milbank and Adrian Pabst over the relationship between Radical Orthodoxy and Islam. However, this article demonstrates that while Milbank's later practice has indeed been characterised by a resort to a stance of out-narration in the context of inter-religious engagement, this does not fully reflect the space for dialogical possibility he allows for in his 1991 article, 'The End of Dialogue'. Instead, the article examines the early proposal as containing within it an allowance for an alternative strand of engagement by Radical Orthodoxy, based on mutual co-operation of differing religious traditions where they share 'coincidences of outlook'. The adoption of this strand as an addition to, not replacement of, the strand of out-narration displayed in Milbank's mode of practice seems to point the way forward towards a more equitable arena of engagement for Radical Orthodoxy with manifestations of religious plurality, but also offers resources for a better representation of the internal foundational characteristics of the Radical Orthodoxy reading of the Christian narrative.

Keywords: Radical Orthodoxy, inter-religious dialogue, dialogical practice, conservative post-modern Christian theology

The 'Comeback of Christendom' or a 'Christian Cosmopolis'?: Both / Neither in the Early Work of John Milbank

Recent discussions on the website of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation between Joshua Ralston, John Milbank and Adrian Pabst have brought to the fore the need for a sustained account of the practical methods by which engagement with alternative religious faiths, or alternative positions, might be conducted within the sphere of conservative post-modern Christian theology. Negotiations

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surrounding the place of Islam in Radical Orthodoxy's schema have exposed the absence of any coherent or settled understanding. While this aspect has always been an underdeveloped area in Radical Orthodoxy's attempt at a systematic theological account of society, the increasing incidence of religious and political plurality within our societies has made its resolution and exploration an progressively more important issue. Recent exchanges between Pabst's 'Beyond Ukraine and Gaza: The Battle for the Soul of the Wider West', Ralston's 'Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom: Riposte to Adrian Pabst', Milbank and Pabst's response 'Christian Cosmopolis, Bastion of all Believers: Response to Joshua Ralston' and (for now) the final response from Ralston 'How Political Theologians Should (Not) Engage with Islam: Responding to John Milbank and Adrian Pabst', have shown a deep need for a sustained exploration of the possibility of engagement and dialogue within the broader theological matrix of conservative post-modern Christian theology more generally (Hyman 1998: 394)¹ but also specifically within the Radical Orthodoxy movement. If, as seems to be hoped by its originators, Radical Orthodoxy is to provide a sustained account of a plural society that more adequately preserves difference and move beyond its current parochialism, this moving beyond talking about engagement and platitudinous gestures towards dialogue with the religious other becomes a necessity.

The move beyond the current fruitlessness of pluralistic forms of inter-religious dialogue and the parochialism of Radical Orthodoxy's attempts at the out-narration of alternative religious meta-narratives requires further explanation of the current space available for inter-religious engagement and dialogue within the Radical Orthodoxy movement itself. It is with this goal in mind that this article attempts to tease out the implications of Milbank's original rejection of liberal pluralistic forms of dialogue (Milbank 1991: 176-177) in his article 'The End of Dialogue', taking a second look at the possibility for a different form of dialogue to be developed from his original proposal. Given the possibility that a worthwhile proposal for the continuation of dialogue exists, Milbank's own practice must come under scrutiny if his talk of the viability of a Christian cosmopolis protecting and defending the religious liberty of others is to be taken as a serious proposal (Milbank & Pabst 2014). In doing so, Milbank's own practice in inter-religious engagement can be contrasted with the potential offered by alternative thinkers within Radical Orthodoxy and similar non-Christian movements which share practical concerns over the narrative of modernity, contemporary secular political formations, and the place of religious communities in society. Through this I hope to demonstrate the ability to develop a practical account of how engagement between differing

1 The term 'conservative post-modern' term stems from Hyman (1998: 394) where it is used to draw a distinction between the 'conservative' post-modernism of Milbank, Williams, and Surin and the 'radical' post-modernism of Taylor, Altizer, and Cupitt.

religious traditions might be structured, constructed, and developed within the Radical Orthodoxy paradigm that moves beyond the current dysfunction recently seen on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's website and better reflects its own internal ideals.

The Current Debate

The discussion currently taking place on the ABC.net.au website between Milbank, Pabst, and Ralston represents the latest in a long line of critical readings of Radical Orthodoxy's relation to alternative religious traditions, in this case Islam. The interesting development is the response provided to Ralston's initial critique by Pabst and Milbank which offers further depth to an account of this vital issue for Radical Orthodoxy.

The articles under discussion begin with a piece, written by Adrian Pabst, entitled 'Beyond Ukraine and Gaza: The Battle for the Soul of the Wider West' (Pabst 2014) which deals with an overview of contemporary geo-political issues in Europe and the Middle East, before using these as the background to a broader call for Christian unity between the West and Russia in the form of a covenantal commonwealth based on the 'enduring legacy of Christendom in East and West' (Pabst 2014). In proposing this, Pabst opens the article by drawing attention to forms of Islamic fundamentalism, arguing that their main enemy 'is not primarily the liberal West or the imperial United States, but instead Catholic and Orthodox Christendom' and that this threat overrides any internal division between the 'the remnants of Christendom' to be found in (Catholic) Europe and (Orthodox) Russia. He highlights this threat by writing that:

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed leader of the Islamic State stretching from Iraq to Syria, has called on Muslims to rally behind his pan-Islamic project:

"Rush O Muslims to your state. It is your state. Syria is not for Syrians and Iraq is not for Iraqis. The land is for the Muslims, all Muslims. This is my advice to you. If you hold to it you will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills."

This should come as no surprise to anyone. For decades Sunni jihadists have waged war on Christian oriental communities across the Middle East and North Africa, while other Islamic extremists are fighting Russian Orthodoxy in the Caucasus and throughout Central Asia. In novel and frightening ways, this pits the militant strands of Sunni Islam not only against the more traditional forms of Sufism, including the Alawites in Syria, but also the remnants of Christendom. (Pabst 2014)

Dealing with the validity of this argument is not the aim of this piece and some important aspects will be drawn out through its engagement by Ralston in the proceeding article. For now, I merely wish to highlight the various characteristics Pabst believes will be better served by his particular proposals for society, in order to better judge the type of relationality and existence that Pabst, and the wider Radical Orthodoxy movement, value and desire.

The characteristics delineated by Pabst are alluded to in his closing argument, where he frames the creation of this Christendom inflected social order as both an overcoming of (Russian) chauvinist nationalism and (European) abstract cosmopolitanism, and as a necessary bulwark against the shared threat of Islamic fundamentalism. As he writes:

An imaginative approach to international affairs by the West would call to abandon false and dysfunctional either-ors in favour of strangely possible paradoxes. Not Pacific or Europe, state or market, religion or the secular, or nationalism versus globalisation. Instead, intimate reciprocities in ever-widening circles from your street to the planet can dimly reflect a family of nations and peoples in which states and markets serve the needs of persons, communities and associations within and across state borders. (Pabst 2014)

This article, and much of Radical Orthodoxy's general oeuvre, suggests that it is only by rejecting the false binaries produced by modernity that a truly harmonious society can emerge which lives *within* the difference expressed. As Pabst goes onto note:

Compared with the logic of abstraction that underpins realist, liberal and cosmopolitan ideas, such an alternative would link political to economic and ecological purpose in the name of mutuality, reciprocity and social recognition. (Pabst 2014)

Therefore it is these characteristics which Pabst suggests will be better served in his renewal of a type of neo-Christendom – mutuality, reciprocity, social recognition, non-binarism, and the servicing of the needs of communities and societies across state borders towards mutual flourishing. These characteristics, heavily reminiscent of Milbank's earlier ecclesiological and sociological exposition (Milbank 2006), define the alternative that Pabst envisions and provide the ground on which to judge movements towards alternative political formulations.

It is the broader argument put forward by Pabst that Ralston aims to engage with in his follow up piece 'Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom: Riposte to Adrian Pabst, not just in content but also in the way in which Pabst chooses to connect Islam with his wider proposal. In utilising references to Islam in a particular

way, it is Ralston's argument that Pabst engages in a reductive Islamophobic account in order to heighten the fear of Islam in the West in an attempt to make his proposal of a neo-Christendom more attractive. As he writes:

Islamophobia aids and abets Radical Orthodoxy's theo-political project of renewing Christendom. Why else would Adrian Pabst begin his recent article on Ukraine, Russian and Western Europe by invoking the spectre of ISIS and its pretender Khalifya, al-Baghdadi?. (Ralston 2014)

This highlights the extent to which he wishes to engage with the aim of Pabst, renewing a form of Christendom, but also the way in which he objects to Pabst's use of Islam in order to promote this aim. As Ralston goes on to note, it is not only Pabst that is guilty of reducing Islam to only the diametrically opposite of the Christian narrative but is also a recurring feature of much of the work of John Milbank. Ralston's argument extends from a particular critique of Pabst's positioning of Islam in his article to a broader critique of the way in which Radical Orthodoxy as a whole relates to, and treats, the narrative of Islam in its discussion of the revitalisation of the Christian narrative within secular modernity.

In connection with this general trend towards the reduction of Islam in the work of Radical Orthodoxy that Ralston identifies is the further identification of the purpose that this reductive account serves in both Pabst's original piece and in Milbank's wider work. Ralston argues that while Milbank does gesture in places, such as *The Future of Love* (Milbank 2009), towards 'something like a comparative political theology that might draw his own project into conversation with Islamic and Jewish thought' (Ralston 2014) ultimately the engagement of Islam by Radical Orthodoxy remains a resolutely Islamophobic one that denigrates and reduces the variety and diversity apparent within the tradition, represents Islam as Christendom's eternal rival, and applies differing standards of academic conduct and respect to Islam than to the Christian narrative which Milbank and Pabst both wish to promote. Beyond this is an identification of hypocrisy between the rhetorical call made by Pabst 'for grand bargains that resist "false and dysfunctional *either-ors*"' and the practical inscribing of exactly that form of either / or binary between the pure form of Christendom and the reduced and monolithic account of Islam offered.

Ralston's critique of Pabst and Radical Orthodoxy more generally is that the rhetorical narration of the Christian narrative in the form of calling for a renewed Christendom, fails to reflect in practice those characteristics initially identified as ultimately at the centre of Radical Orthodoxy's vision for a harmonically peaceful society that rejects false modernist binaries. However, Ralston has not gone unchallenged in this reading of Radical Orthodoxy. The two preceding articles elicited a response from both Pabst and Milbank, entitled 'Christian Cosmopolis,

Bastion of all Believers: Response to Joshua Ralston' (Milbank & Pabst 2014). This piece responds to Ralston's critique by accusing him of doing the same thing that he critiques Radical Orthodoxy for having done to Islam. While agreeing with Ralston on the need for a condemnation of all forms of religious fundamentalism and a rejection of the essentialisation of religious traditions, Pabst and Milbank reject Ralston's reading of their aim and his reading of their representation of Islam. As they write:

...to claim as he does that "Islamophobia aids and abets Radical Orthodoxy's theo-political project of renewing Christendom" is a grave charge. This accusation is closely connected with Ralston's rather insidious insinuation that Radical Orthodoxy is but a reactionary plot aimed at restoring the absolute power of the papacy and launching a new crusade against Muslims.

For all his talk about the need "to muster a more honest and coherent theological and political analysis of the forces that threaten the lives and well-being of people" in the Middle East and beyond, Ralston completely caricatures our position and misconstrues the current context. (Milbank & Pabst 2014)

In addition to this rejection of Ralston's critique, Milbank and Pabst also develop more fully the way in which they visualise the interaction between the renewed neo-Christendom proposed and the narrative of Islam. Arguing that the tolerance expressed by the secular is fundamentally damaging to the coherent polity of Islam (and Christianity) by only allowing space for the private and personal expression of religion, Milbank and Pabst argue that a Christian polity, one that is based on a total vision of society and a promotion of religious ideal and faith in politics, is better able to grasp, engage with, and provide space for a similar religious polity than the secular sphere.

This claim, developed by arguing that the 'idea of an alliance of all religions against secularisation is advanced where there is one religion that is culturally and politically pre-eminent' (Milbank & Pabst 2014), rests on the idea that the Christian polity as a total religious vision for society can respect alternative proposals for a total religious vision that come from differing religious traditions. Beyond this, the promotion of that religious vision for the whole of society cannot be shared between religious traditions or made up of a synthesis or base area of agreement between them. Rather, Milbank and Pabst argue that 'a genuinely "religious culture" has to be religious in a *specific* way' (Milbank & Pabst 2014) rejecting a "general religiosity" (as in the United States)' and 'neutral religious pluralism of the multiculturalist variety' as expressions on of the triumph of secularised social and political norms. Generally, therefore, Pabst and Milbank are engaging with the critique of their content offered by Ralston, rather than the critique offered of their practice. It is

this issue that becomes even more clear in the final piece of this exchange, Ralston's 'How Political Theologians Should (Not) Engage with Islam: Responding to John Milbank and Adrian Pabst'.

Ralston's response, while admitting certain rhetorical faults over his comparison between Radical Orthodoxy and Pope Urban II and his slightly reductive representation of Radical Orthodoxy as solely a project of anachronistic pre-modern retrieval, narrows in on this failure of Milbank and Pabst's response to adequately deal with the way in their representation of Islam in practice damages both the cohesive and coherent whole of the Islamic tradition, and the persuasive and rhetorical power of the Christian narrative as presented by Milbank and Pabst. In doing this, not only have Milbank and Pabst misrepresented certain aspects of the Islamic tradition in order to further their own project but they have simultaneously undermined the ability of their project to represent those things they wish it to - mutuality, reciprocity, social recognition, non-binarism, and the servicing of the needs of communities and societies across state borders. As Ralston notes:

For them, Islam remains fundamentally a rhetorical "other" invoked without sufficient nuance - a strategy that serves to reinforce the claim that only a Christendom political ecclesiology grounded in a participatory metaphysics is capable of interfaith cooperation and political pluralism. (Ralston 2014a)

It is this positioning of Islam as oppositional to the Christian inflected critique of secular modernity that makes up the Radical Orthodoxy project that drives Ralston's argument that the use of Islam in these articles is fundamentally Islamophobic, that is the misrepresentation of issues like the relationship between Salafism and Sunni Islam, the place and value of reason and the intellect in the tradition of the *Shari'ah*, the over-representation of violent and oppressive periods of Islamic history, and the place and history of the Caliphate, only exists within the position sketched out by Milbank and Pabst in order to heighten the fear of Islam within the western societies at which their Christendom project is aimed. In doing so the aim is not a dialogue or an engagement with Islam in a real sense, expecting no new knowledge or response from the Islamic tradition, but only the use and misuse of the symbol of Islam for their own ends.

As Ralston goes on to note, Milbank and Pabst fail to rise to the challenge of the constructive proposals initially offered about the possibility of useful and constructive exchange between 'Radical Orthodoxy's best insights and creative Sunni Muslim thinkers who offer constructive critique of our contemporary condition - marked as it is by violence, nationalism, the hegemony of the market, the militarisation of policing, and religious fundamentalism' (Ralston 2014a). As we have seen throughout this exchange there is a dysfunction at work within the

relationship between Radical Orthodoxy and Islam in practice, in the way in which the tradition of Islam is engaged with and represented within the wider work of Milbank. This current dysfunction exposed in the exchange at ABC.net.au emerges out of the underdeveloped way in which dialogue is approached and theorised within conservative post-modern Christian theology. The attempts at engagement that do occur lack the kind of integrity that comes about through a sustained link between practice and theory (Williams 1991: 140; Williams 1990). While it is perfectly possible to narrate one thing and act in a completely different way, this disruption between internal narration and external practice has been seen to have a profoundly negative effect on the reception of Radical Orthodoxy, having been a central focus of a number of direct and indirect critiques (Doak 2007, Hedges 2012, Sargent 2010). While, generally, the area of inter-religious dialogue or engagement has been an underdeveloped part of the broader conservative post-modern theological scene, and an underdeveloped part of the Radical Orthodoxy project in particular, this is not to say that the area has not been touched on at all. Due to the prominence of the narrative struggle against secular modernity, the appearance and place of alternative religions within broader society has taken on a somewhat lesser importance than might be expected or hoped for. As has been alluded to by Ralston those incidences of practice that have come to characterise Radical Orthodoxy and its engagement with alternative religious traditions do not represent the totality of the possibility for a radically orthodox approach to dialogue. The rest of this article considers the extent to which this displayed disconnect is a necessary part of Radical Orthodoxy's approach to matters of inter-religious dialogue and whether there potential for a differing method of practice to emerge from between Radical Orthodoxy and thinkers in the Islamic tradition.

The 'End of Dialogue'?

One of the few areas where Milbank addresses the relationship between the Christian narrative and alternative religious narratives is the rather early article 'The End of Dialogue'. The context of the publication of this essay within *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (D'Costa 1990) is particularly important. The volume was written as a deliberate response to the earlier publication of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion*. This volume, edited by John Hick and Paul Knitter, attempted to argue for a generally pluralistic understanding of religions and for 'a move away from the insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity towards recognition of the independent validity of other ways' (Hick & Knitter 1987: viii). As a rebuttal, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* rejects the premise of the preceding book, containing a variety of diverse positions all sharing a rejection of, or suspicion about, the pluralistic model of dialogue and religious relation proposed in *The Myth*. This opposition between the two books, and the positions proposed by

each of them, leads to a particular polemical relationship between the two that can most clearly be seen in the constant referencing between them, both book to book and also by individual authors engaging with the particular arguments contained in the opposing book. This can be seen in Milbank's reference and rebuttal of Panikkar, Reuther, and Suchocki, (Milbank 1990: 175-182) in differing parts of his contribution to the volume. In particular, this relationship between the two books has had an impact on the rhetorical strategies employed by the various contributors to *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, leading towards a more aggressive and polarised discussion.

Milbank's position in this article stems from a broad rejection of the currently dominant pluralistic methodology of inter-religious engagement that, he argues, privileges a secular conception of religious belonging and a western conception of the definition and practice of religion. In addition to this, Milbank also identifies the assumption of similarity between religious traditions and the assumption that specifically western understandings of concepts such as justice or the good can be universalised into ideals for dialogue and dialogical practice between religious traditions as problematic areas for the pluralistic models, especially given the self-described aims of the pluralistic model. While Milbank does call for an end to, and narrates against, the typically pluralistically formed style of dialogue with other religious traditions, his desire to sound the death knell of dialogue in response to the model deployed in *The Myth* has led to the overlooking of some of the more subtle points he makes by secondary readers and commentators². Moving beyond an outright rejection of all forms of dialogue in favour of a stance solely made up of out-narration, the re-presentation of 'an alternative mythos, equally unfounded, but nonetheless embodying an 'ontology of peace' (Milbank 2006: 279) in contrast to the violence seen as inherent within the liberal secular pluralistic model, Milbank instead defines religions as sharing a consideration about "what there is". He writes that:

The commonness that pertains between the different religions is therefore not the commonness of a genus, or of a particular specified mode of human existence; instead it is the commonness of Being (Milbank 1991, 177).

In his criticism of a chapter within *The Myth* written by Raimundo Panikkar, Milbank repeats this point more forcefully: 'These theoretical and practical problems with the ontologically pluralist position reveal that while religions may be incommensurable, this does not mean that they can be envisaged as lying peacefully side by side, without mutual interference' (Milbank 1991: 189). These

2 I feel this is particularly true of Sargent's reading of Milbank's position of epistemic isolation and incommensurability in his critique (Sargent 2010, 822-823).

particular clarifications highlight the way in which Milbank's proposals maintain a form of relationship between religious traditions even while calling for the end of pluralistically formed dialogue. For Milbank, it is their shared attempt to 'provide varying accounts of Being itself or of "what there is"' (Milbank 1991: 188) that make up the communal features of religion rather than an attachment to a particularly western conception of religiosity or religion. This shared feature opens a space for a type of exchange based on conversion or conversation within his theoretical modelling undertaken in 'The End of Dialogue' rather than merely the assimilation that he has exposed is at work within the pluralistic model, or the pure out-narration of which he has been accused.

These aspects make it clear that while Milbank sounds the end of dialogue in the fashion proposed by the contributors to *The Myth*, presenting an alternative narration to oppose their own fundamentally secular reading of the possibility for a religious challenge to the meta-narrative formation of secular modernity, he concomitantly suggests that it is necessary for the Christian tradition to continue to converse with other religions in a purposeful fashion that avoids the same fall to assumed similarity and acceptance of secular norms evidenced above. This conversation proposed not only attempts to respect the integral difference of the Other, in a way that the pluralistic model does not, but also seeks to emphasise the very apparent differences between religious traditions in the name of comparison and preservation. As well as pointing the way in which such an encounter can lead a Christian into a deeper understanding of the Gospels, this furthers Milbank's reference to the possibility of a dialogue between religious traditions based around 'coincidences of outlook' (Milbank 1991: 185) in the desires of the differing discourses. These coincidences allow for the possibility of inter-religious engagement within Milbank's model around shared coincidences in outlook between religious traditions. As an example of these, Milbank identifies a 'widespread opposition to usury' (Milbank 1991: 185) in religious traditions as a specific example, but also the more comprehensive search for 'modes of cultural existence not under the aegis of liberal capitalism' (Milbank 1991: 185) as a point of possible joint narration and engagement between differing religious traditions.

The possibility of this new kind of dialogue, a tangential comparison of aims and themes rather than an attempted comparison of differing religious traditions within a specified constructed genus or type based on the particularities of the western, secular, experience of the category "religion", is made more apparent when Milbank writes that:

in certain circumstances, and in the context of a search for modes of cultural existence not under the aegis of liberal capitalism, and more respectful of religions as social projects than the sovereign liberal state can dare to be,

these coincidences could indeed provide the religions with something useful to talk about. (Milbank 1991: 185)

For Milbank, the joint experience of resistance to the narrative of secular modernity is the starting point for the possibility of a new model of inter-religious relation, providing a better ground for practical discussion and co-operation than the reduction seen in the implementation of the pluralistic model. This break-out from the confines of liberal pluralistic dialogue through a discourse not based on issues like social justice or a nebulous conception of the Good, but instead on fleeting instances of shared outlooks or shared points of resistance to secular modernity, opens the door to comparisons and evaluations of the way in which religious traditions can take a joint stand on certain issues that impact them all.

The criticisms expressed of the pluralistic model of inter-religious dialogue are therefore not heralding the end of all possible dialogue as may be inferred from Milbank's 'The End of Dialogue' title, but rather a hopeful statement of the end of a particular and, in Milbank's view, fatally flawed method of engaging in dialogue. His proposal therefore ends up being a balance between space for a constructive dialogue around shared points of mutual interest, and a polemical attempt at out-narrating the liberal pluralistic approach to matters of inter-religious relation. While the pluralistic model may see agreement between religions as an example of a wider, meta-level, agreement with a universalised notion of religion, the non-pluralistic model allowed for here brackets the agreement from any deeper resonance, focusing only on the fleeting agreement between the differing traditions brought about by a shared coincidence of outlook. This attempt to restrict the impulse toward systematisation based on similarity also necessitates a place for difference within the model, a difference that is equally as significant for the understanding of the relationship as the points of similarity are. For a cogent explication of another religious tradition, the points of difference between that tradition and the Christian tradition are as vital as the points of similarity as they provide meaning in a way that is reduced and ultimately extinguished when similarity is the sole focus of engagement. Instead space is provided for a dual model that can tend towards the preservation of tension between the simultaneous similarity / difference expressed in the complex multiplicities of relation and exchange between religious traditions in religiously plural societies.

Following on from this hesitancy about universalising instances of agreement or disagreement between religious traditions, is a space for a greater and more authentic respect for the self-hood of the other discourses involved in the instance of inter-religious dialogue. While Milbank is focused on the process of conversion and out-narration in his wider project, his delineation of non-pluralistic dialogue is somewhat more nuanced, relying on a mutual engagement by religious traditions

in narrating their shared place in opposition to the modern secular narrative. In bringing this joint placement to the fore, a certain respect for the true otherness of the alternative religious tradition, both to the narrative of secular modernity and to the Christian narrative, is unfolded. This would require, a placement of the other into the instance of dialogue in such a way that an authentic totality or representation of the other is respected, by bringing those parts of the alternative narrative that disagree, as well as agree, with the Christian narrative into play in instances of non-pluralistic dialogue. There are therefore two strands to the possible proposal unfolded here. First, a stress on the difference between the religious traditions that requires a stance of mutual suspicion, while secondly as a counter to this, Milbank also sees room for a shared narration by religious traditions against the discourse of secular modernity. This balancing between the two strands apparent in the model allows for the possibility of preserving the sense of Christian out-narration apparent within Radical Orthodoxy, while also allowing for the possibility for a certain form of dialogue to remain viable without the reduction of difference implied by the pluralistic appeal to a minimal sense of tolerance.

Between these two approaches floats a broader opposition to violence, whether the violence Milbank identifies within alternative religious traditions, or the form found within the meta-narrative of liberal, secular, capitalistic, modernity. In this, Milbank's proposals for inter-religious engagement are not just a reduction to a combative out-narration, but contain the possibility for a constructive strand to inter-religious engagement as well. Although this strand is only hesitant and remains under-developed, its identification remains important for an analysis of later instances of inter-religious engagement. Milbank's practical interventions and engagements can then be judged in the light of a better understanding of his original theoretical and conceptual modelling of the purpose of inter-religious engagement, allowing the revelation of how well this conceptual modelling has been delivered in his practice of inter-religious engagement.

Practical Engagements

While Milbank's 'The End of Dialogue' lays the ground for two approaches to the issue of religious plurality, one of out-narration and conversion from violence into peace, the other of a form of dialogue and mutual narration between religious tradition over shared political and social positions, Milbank's actual engagement in instances of inter-religious contact has ultimately failed to mirror this dual approach. Throughout his work, Milbank has relied on out-narration as his favoured and it seems, only, approach to the presence of religious plurality in contemporary societies. This significantly weakens the wider Radical Orthodoxy project, especially in its ability to relate to and interact with alternative religious narratives and their communities. This inability to effectively relate to plurality has become an increasingly prominent

issue for the systematic account of society proffered by Milbank, particularly given the significance that this religious diversity has come to play in the negotiation of our contemporary multicultural and multi-faith societies.

In his more recent work, the matter of alternative religious traditions has remained a minor issue, usually only addressed in the context of a wider, and specifically Christian, narration. Further to this, the engagement, when it occurs, has tended to only focus on Islam rather than any sustained engagement with, or attempt at out-narration of, any other non-Christian religious narrative (Milbank 2009, 397). Milbank's use of Islam reinforces the shift towards an adversarial relationship between Christianity and Islam, but also between the particular narration of his own understanding of the Christian narrative over and against those alternative forms. Milbank distinguishes the particularity of Catholic Christianity most clearly when he writes:

A contemporary gloss might conclude that it is Islam, Judaism and Protestantism's lack of a magisterium which encourages both anarchic and state terror to be conducted falsely in their name (Milbank 2009: 395).

There is no appearance of a conciliatory, mutually respectful out-narration of modernity by all religions as we saw space for in his original and early proposals. Instead we find a re-assertion of the priority of the specifically Anglo-Catholic Christian narrative that Milbank narrates. We find this assertion of the opposition of Christianity to other religious narratives in the same way that Milbank sees an opposition between the narratives of modernity and Christianity is carried through into the sphere of social and political action that forms a large part of his message in this article. This is continued in the section '*The Politics of Paradox*' in the same volume, where Milbank attempts to sketch out the arena in which the Christian narrative now finds itself, writing:

The second sphere of Radical Orthodoxy's practical involvement is the political. As Philip Blond has suggested, there are now three crucial global forces in the world: capitalist rationality, Islam and Christianity. And of the latter two, the global reach of Christianity is far more serious and far more likely to prevail in the long-term. (Milbank 2009: 397)

In this, Milbank sets up a direct opposition between both Christianity and Islam, as well as between Christianity and capitalist rationality. While previously, Islam has been seen as a possible ally to the Christian narration against secular modernity, here it is a direct competitor. Milbank's dismissal of the threat seems to run counter to this interpretation however, in aligning himself with Blond's conception, Islam has an equal importance to the narrative of capitalist rationality as an opponent of Milbank's neo-Christendom.

Milbank's practice of inter-religious dialogue and his mentions of Islam in *'The Radical Orthodoxy Reader'* have a different character to the earlier passages examined. We can see movement from the 'coincidences of outlook' model as present in *'The End of Dialogue'*, to a confrontational model where alternative religious traditions – especially Islam – have become rival narratives to Christianity, of the same order as the rival narrative of secular modernity. Other religious traditions have begun to take on a more prominent role in Milbank's writing from this point, with an increasing focus on political forms of Islam and the relationship between Christianity, Islam and the West. While this is unsurprising, given the increased importance of political forms of Islam over the last decade, Milbank's reaction to the increasing role Islam is playing in world politics is one that is not in alignment with his previous expression of solidarity between religious out-narrations of secular modernity, nor with the social and ecclesiological characteristics identified as the goals of the broader Radical Orthodoxy movement. What has happened is the formation of a sustained and systematic methodology of out-narration and appropriation which has come to characterise Milbank's practical approach to the matter of inter-religious relation (Hedges 2012). This tendency is particularly clear in his recent attempts to engage with a more popular audience through the medium of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, specifically in his article 'Christianity, the Enlightenment, and Islam' (Milbank 2010), written in response to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, where the use of Islam showcases an appropriative attitude towards part of the narrative, while adopting a rather reductive account of other aspects. While it caused a storm on the internet blogosphere for some comments about the "lamentably premature collapse of the Western colonial empires", in general terms Milbank uses Islam to give his proposal for a joint narration between Christianity and the Enlightenment more force. For example, reversing his earlier position, he writes:

Yet in important ways Christianity has more in common with the Enlightenment legacy than it has with Islam. Both see the role of reason as central and both favour tolerance and open debate, whereas Islam, on the whole, is more equivocal about these values. (Milbank 2010)

At this point Milbank has reversed his earlier positioning of Islam as a narrative more closely entwined with Christianity than secular modernity that became apparent in his attempt at polemical out-narration in *'The End of Dialogue'*. He is drawing attention to those points of coincidence or shared outlooks between the narrative of Christianity and secular modernity in an attempt to build a consensus for shared narration. This perfectly outlines the driving motives behind Milbank's appropriation of alternative narratives to Christianity – a strengthening and reinforcement of his Christian narrative. Whenever the possibility of a coincidence of outlook or a shared aim becomes apparent between Christianity and another narrative, then Milbank is willing to appropriate it, even if this runs counter to his

previous attempts to narrate against that narrative. We also see within *'Christianity, the Enlightenment and Islam'* an attempt at the co-option of the alternative narrative of modernity, rather than a purely tangential alliance. This represents an important further step to the model of dialogue proposed by Milbank in *'The End of Dialogue'*, succumbing to the problems he highlights with the liberal pluralistic forms of dialogue he is attempting to out-narrate. When Milbank writes:

It is also true that radical Islamists are systematically infiltrating Western educational institutions. I would agree with Ayaan that in the face of all this Christians need to take a more militant approach to mission and that, in the name of freedom, secularists should welcome such a venture,(Milbank 2010), he is looking for a way to subsume the narrative power of the secular modern meta-narrative within the wider strategy of specifically Christian narration. This sublimation bears a striking similarity to the same 'reduction to the same' that Milbank accuses the pluralistic models of inter-religious dialogue as being complicit with and highlights the pragmatic nature of his engagement with other religious traditions.

This pragmatic appropriation of narratives when it suits the tactical need of Milbank's Christian narrative reveals itself again in the closing paragraph of *'Christianity, the Enlightenment and Islam'*, where Milbank attempts to separate the idea of the modern Enlightenment from the 'ravages of Western capitalism'. He writes:

Political Islam offers itself as a new international, but non-colonial, vehicle for Third World identity. Unfortunately, it also perpetuates over- simplistic accounts of the imperial past and fosters a spirit of resentful rather than self-sustaining and creative response to the ravages of Western capitalism. (Milbank 2010)

In this passage Milbank takes a reductive attitude to the plurality of contemporary Islam, ignoring the variety and depth of Islamic critiques of modernity, instead reducing this possible narrative ally only to the marker of 'Political Islam'. In doing so, he separates the idea of 'political Islam' from the type of Islam that he approves of³, thereby not only employing a reductive understanding of the nature of Islam as a religion, but also dividing the narrative opposition to Christianity between 'political' and 'non-political' Muslims. In his criticism of Islam, Milbank has pre-figured the same rhetorical outcome that has been identified by Ralston, an

3 *Christianity, the Enlightenment and Islam*, p.3: "What the West needs to do, I maintain, is to encourage the growth of more mystical forms of Islam, which are also the forms that stress a religious mode of organisation that is not directly a political one, or even necessarily a legal one".

account of Islam that seeks to criticise its reductivism, used solely in opposition to the Christian narrative, and the misrepresents or fails to engage with the depth of material available. Although more focused on a few of Milbank's earlier pieces, this account can also be discerned in his discussion of *Shari'ah* law in 'Shari'a and the True Basis of Group Rights: Islam, the West, and Liberalism' (Milbank 2010a) and his discussion of the terror attacks of 9/11 in 'Sovereignty, Empire, Capital, and Terror' (Milbank 2002: 306) where Islam is engaged with seemingly not as a valid expression of a differing account of "what there is" but rather as a tactical tool for the purposes of broader out-narration. Although this aspect is somewhat tempered in his more recent work, including *Beyond Secular Order* (Milbank 2014a), and there is a certain clarification of position brought forth through his ABC.net.au articles 'We Have Never Been Secular: Rethinking Religion and Secularity in Britain Today' (Milbank 2014b) and 'Christian Cosmopolis, Bastion of all Believers: Response to Joshua Ralston' (Milbank & Pabst 2014), each of these newer works skirts around an actual instance of engagement with alternative religious narratives, specifically Islam, instead gesturing towards the possibility of engagement in order to postpone its actual necessity.

In focusing solely on the process of out-narration in his interaction with alternative religious narratives to the exclusion of the dialogical encounters that he provides space for in his original model, Milbank has only reinforced some of the issues for which his wider project is more generally criticised. His tendency towards employing out-narration as his approach has led to an appropriative and reductive account of alternative religious traditions being foregrounded within his work, often, as Hedges and others have noted, presenting them as significantly different to contemporary academic understandings in order to further his argument (Hedges 2012 125). This reductive tendency does violence to the self-understandings of the alternative religious traditions, as well as only providing Milbank with a short term, tactical, advantage in the process of out-narration. While this may be useful in the short-term, the nature of his practice of out-narration reduces the possibility of dialogical engagement of the kind he proposes in 'The End of Dialogue' occurring, as, in adopting this approach, Milbank undermines the ability of alternative narratives to engage co-operatively with him where coincidences of outlook do occur, reduces the possibility of the necessary trust and integrity for dialogical encounters of that kind to occur, and re-inscribes the very political marginalisation of religious communities he critiques the liberal, pluralistic, model of dialogue for. In doing so, Milbank fails to model in his practice the theoretical commitments of the 'unfounded mythos' that he attempts to narrate.

Milbank's practical interventions into the arena of religious plurality have therefore over-emphasised the out-narration strand of his original model, to the detriment of

his relationships with alternative religious traditions within society. This detriment is clearly seen in the intense criticism that his practice of engagement has drawn not just from Ralston, but also from others working in the same area. Milbank's instances of engagement since the publication of 'The End of Dialogue' show the necessity of practicing both strands of the non-pluralistic model originally shown to be available. While the process of out-narration and conversion is undoubtedly an important part of this model, Milbank's engagements have shown that an over-emphasis on this aspect can lead to the violent intellectual reduction of the very alternative narratives with which a joint narration against the meta-narrative of secular modernity is proposed. This violence undercuts the Christian meta-narrative's claim to peace in harmony, while also neglecting the possibility of shared positions in resistance to secular modernity between religious communities and traditions. Given this, Milbank's current practice can be seen as a deformation of the original possibility of inter-religious engagement within the context of conservative post-modern Christian theology, through its over-emphasis on the strand of out-narration and its concomitant neglect of the dialogical strand. This deformation has not only had an impact on the particular sphere of inter-religious engagement within Milbank's project but, through its appropriative, reductive, and violent attitude and practice, has undercut the central claim of 'peace in harmony' being found within Milbank's conceptualisation of the Christian narrative.

Conclusion

The identification of a split between Milbank's earlier conception of the way in which plurality can, and should be, understood within society and his later practice in instances of engagement naturally leads onto questions of how a resolution or amelioration of this difficulty and dysfunction can come to be. While the over-emphasis, and over-practice, of the out-narration strand of original model has led to significant criticism of Milbank's approach to matter of religious plurality, particularly in the arenas of ecclesiology and politics (Doak 2007: 370), the original proposal offers space for the balancing of this strand of out-narration with the possibility of dialogical and co-operative encounters between religious traditions such as those suggested by Ralston between Radical Orthodoxy and contemporary Sunni critics of Islam. While this has not occurred to any great extent in Milbank's actual engagement, this is not to say that it could not or, given the objections raised to Milbank's practice, should not occur in the kind of situations envisioned in the original proposal. These circumstances, coincidences of outlook between competing, but broadly aligned, religious traditions in response to their shared construction and positioning by the meta-narrative of secular modernity, offer up a distinct and balancing possibility for the practice of inter-religious engagement that remains within the broader bounds of the Radical Orthodoxy project. A renewed focus on this co-operative strand of engagement seems to offer the possibility for

a redress of current practices of engagement towards a more equitable and less appropriative stance that better fulfils the desired demonstration of Christian peace than current instances of engagement.

Of the three Islamic thinkers mentioned by Ralston (Ralston 2014), I would point to Khaled Abou El Fadl as offering perhaps the best mix of authenticity, centrality, and relevance for an engagement between Islam and Radical Orthodoxy based on the co-operative mode identified earlier in this article. His situation as a scholar in the West, working within the context of a minority religious community provides a similar frame of outlook to the position of Radical Orthodoxy as a sub-movement with the broader stream of Christian theology, while his reformist project towards the Law better reflects the substantive process of retrieval and representation (Abou El Fadl 2001) also attempted by Milbank in his wider project (Milbank 1991a). Although this article does not aim to develop this point, further research in this area seems to offer the possibility of a fruitful cross-tradition engagement around issues such as secularism, political theology, as well as methodologies for the practice of inter-religious relationships and engagements, between Milbank and Abou El Fadl. Ralston himself notes the promise of engagements like these but, perhaps distracted by Milbank's deformative over-practice of out-narration, misses the possibility of an alternative approach apparent in Milbank's original proposals. The renewal proposed here requires a serious commitment to attempting to display in practice those characteristics deemed integral to the theoretical conceptualisation of the Christian narrative in Radical Orthodoxy's broader project. As the Christian community or narrative comes to be associated with reductive or appropriative practice in dialogue this necessarily has an impact on the seriousness with which its narration of internal characteristics like peace and harmony will be taken by other narrative communities undermining the persuasiveness of the unfounded narrative provided by Radical Orthodoxy.

This article hopes to have clarified some important issues raised by the ongoing conversation between Milbank, Pabst, and Ralston played out on ABC.net.au, as well as sketching out the possibility for moving beyond the rather hostile exchanges displayed there. Milbank's original proposals regarding the place of religious plurality within contemporary society provide space within them a two-stranded model of engagement, flexing between the need for out-narration over areas of disagreement, and co-operative dialogue over areas of agreement such as against the construction of religious narratives within the meta-narrative of secular modernity. While Milbank's later practice in this area has been almost completely characterised by a resort to the practice of out-narration, and an intellectually reductive, appropriative, and violent form of out-narration, this does not characterise the totality of approaches available to Radical Orthodoxy, nor to conservative post-

modern Christian theology more generally. Instead this article hopes to have sketched out some possible resources for the beginning of a development of a model of practice for the co-operative strand of dialogue originally envisioned. This model of practice, involving the better display of fundamental characteristics of the Christian narrative in instances of dialogue through the rejection of violence and respect for the other, offers up hope that religious traditions in our plural societies can both jointly narrate against the meta-narrative of secular modernity, and also co-operate effectively around those coincidences of outlook that they share. By engaging with religious plurality in a way that is characterised by the two-stranded approach examined here, Radical Orthodoxy is offered a way strengthening both its narration against secular modernity and its practical mirroring of key ethical commitments internal to the story of Christ. Through this a better reflection of the Christian cosmopolis envisioned by Milbank can come to be.

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From Violence to Dialogue: Responding to Terrorism and the ‘War on Terror’

Joseph A. Camilleri

In what is now the vicious circle of violence that pits ‘terrorist’ and ‘counter-terrorist’ is there a place for dialogue? Can dialogue feasibly restrict the spread and intensity of violence? More ambitiously perhaps, can it set in train a process that might bring healing to the deep wounds that have been festering for decades? To explore these questions this paper begins by clarifying the nature and scope of the problem as it has unfolded over time. It delineates the scope and modalities of the conflict: its historical roots, the way it has manifested itself in the politics of the Muslim world, the interests of the United States and its allies, and the tensions that have accompanied the rise of substantial Muslim minorities in several Western countries. The paper then goes on to consider the efforts made thus far to bring the philosophy and method of dialogue to bear on the Islam-West divide, and its offshoot the terrorism-counterterrorism dynamic. Reflecting on the lessons to be drawn from these earlier endeavours, the paper sets out the new conceptual and practical innovations that should inform the dialogue agenda in the years ahead.

Keywords: War on Terror, Terrorism, the West, dialogue and Islam

Terrorism and the ‘war on terror’ are now integral to the difficult relationship between the West and the Muslim world. In a speech to the counter-extremism summit held in Washington a few weeks after the *Charlie Hebdo* killings in Paris (7-9 January 2015) President Obama attempted to portray the conflict as limited in its reach and rationale (White House 2015): ‘We are not at war with Islam. We are at war with people who have perverted Islam.’ However, this formula, variations of which are often used by Western governments to explain the conflict and their response to it, can do little to conceal the palpable tensions that now characterise relations as much within as between countries.

As this paper makes clear, we are not dealing here with a simple or single relationship but with an extraordinarily complex set of overlapping and intersecting relationships. Involved are states and their security and military establishments,

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great powers, their allies and clients, fragile and failed states, warlords and fiefdoms, terrorist organisations and networks, majority and minority communities within states, religious groupings with some operating locally, others nationally or transnationally, a bewildering array of political parties, and cultural societies, think-tanks, research centres, and intellectual networks that span virtually the entire ideological spectrum. To this long list must be added a great many business interests, not least those engaged in the oil, arms and narcotics industries, and a good number of intergovernmental bodies, including the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union, the Arab League, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The upshot is a murky web of competing interests and perceptions, which even the well-informed observer can find difficult to disentangle, let alone comprehend. Given the long history of mutual suspicion and mistrust and deeply felt grievances that remain largely unaddressed, it is hardly surprising that opposing parties should periodically resort to force in order to prosecute their respective objectives and priorities.

The question arises: in what is now the vicious circle of violence that pits ‘terrorist’ and ‘counter-terrorist’ and inevitably kills and maims innocent civilians and destroys entire neighbourhoods and cities and does irreparable damage to societies and the world’s cultural heritage is there a place for dialogue? Can dialogue feasibly restrict the spread and intensity of violence? More ambitiously perhaps, can it set in train a process that might bring healing to the deep wounds that have been festering for decades? To pose this question is to invite a number of more specific, often neglected yet crucial questions: what exactly does dialogue involve? Where and how might it begin? Who should be involved? What are desirable outcomes in the short to medium term? Who can exercise agency in initiating or facilitating the process? These and related questions are disarmingly simple, yet the answers are unavoidably complex and contentious.

The applicability of dialogue principles cannot be determined in the abstract. Such an examination presupposes an appropriate degree of contextualisation. We must first clarify the nature and scope of the problem as it has unfolded over time. We need to delineate, at least with a broad brush, the scope and modalities of the conflict: its historical roots, the way it manifests itself in the politics of the Muslim world, predominantly but not exclusively in the Middle East, the interests of the United States and its allies, and the tensions that have accompanied the rise of substantial Muslim minorities in several Western countries. Such a step will enable us to sketch the ground that dialogue needs to cover, and the obstacles it has to overcome along the way. Secondly, we must consider what efforts have thus far been made to bring the philosophy and method of dialogue to bear on the Islam-West divide, and its offshoot the terrorism-counterterrorism dynamic. We might then be

better placed to pose two critically important yet all too often neglected questions: What lessons, if any, can we draw from these efforts, limited though they have been in scope and outcome? And what fine-tuning and perhaps new conceptual and practical approaches might we profitably explore if the dialogue agenda is to move beyond the current impasse?

Rethinking the Terrorism-Counterterrorism Syndrome

Since 11 September 2001, terrorism and the 'war on terror' have been at the centre of national and international political discourse. Yet, the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, Bali, Madrid, London, Copenhagen and Paris, to name a few, cannot be considered a new phenomenon in international relations. In the 1992 Rwandan genocide some 800,000 people lost their lives in the space of ten to twelve weeks, to which could be added the tens of thousands killed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Darfur, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland and the Basque conflict in Spain. The use of terror as a political instrument has a long history. In its modern form it can be traced back to the French Revolution. During *le Règne de la Terreur* (which introduced 'terror' into the modern political vocabulary) more than 300,000 suspects were arrested and more than 17,000 were executed.

Even in the Islamist context, the use of violence against Western targets dates back to the 1970s. However, several factors converged in the late 1990s, and most dramatically in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the United States, to give the terrorist threat unprecedented prominence in Western media and make it a centrepiece of the security policies of Western governments. Modern technology coupled with increased cross-border mobility endowed terrorist groups with greater destructive capacity and geographical reach. They could now organise on a global scale, and even in the absence of an effective organisational structure could use social media to spread their message to a wider audience, and significantly enhance their recruiting potential. Centred initially on the Middle East, Islamists would soon transplant their operations to Africa, Asia and importantly to several Western countries. Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups made the strategic assessment that, given the awesome firepower arrayed against them, bombings, suicide attacks, hostage taking, hijackings and hoaxes, by concentrating on soft targets and exploiting the dramatic quality of the terrorist weapon, was the most effective way of spreading fear and anxiety, and exposing the vulnerability of the opponent (Camilleri 2008).

As for Western governments generally and US administrations in particular (White House 2011) the overriding objective has been to destroy the human and material infrastructure of terrorist organisations of Islamic provenance, and to inflict exemplary punishment on those who harboured, financed or in any way supported

them. The ensuing global war on Islamist terrorism, both on home soil and in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle East, and other parts of Africa and Asia, though it has proven a costly campaign in both human and financial terms, shows little sign of stemming the tide of terrorist attacks. It is estimated that over the last 14 years there have been over 48,000 terrorist incidents claiming over 107,000 lives. The evidence suggests that since 2000 terrorist activity has increased at least fivefold. In 2013 terrorist attacks were carried out in 87 countries, with 24 of these experiencing at least 50 fatalities. The ten countries most affected were Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Syria, Somalia, India, the Philippines, Yemen and Thailand (Global Terrorism Index 2014).

On assuming office President Obama indicated a commitment to winding down the US military presence in Iraq, quickening the pace of military withdrawal from Afghanistan and generally addressing the excesses of the 'war on terror' that had included widespread human rights abuses, use of torture in both Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, and the CIA program of 'extraordinary rendition' which enabled suspected terrorists to be secretly moved to foreign countries, where they could be indefinitely detained and interrogated without having to charge them with any crimes. Some six years later the US troop presence in Afghanistan was wound back from about 100,000 at the height of the war to 10,800, with all combat forces expected to leave by the end of 2016. However, about 4,000 special operations troops would continue to carry out raids against insurgents and assist the Afghan military with airstrikes, supplies and even ground forces in the event of a heightened terrorist threat (Mazzetti 2014). In Iraq the last US combat troops were pulled out in December 2011, but a year later about 1,500 troops were sent back to fight Islamic State militants that swept in from Syria and took control of large parts of the country. By 2014 the number of US troops had doubled with thousands more supporting the effort from multiple bases in the region. Under Obama the 'war on terror' rhetoric was toned down, but the securitisation of politics continued unabated (Hirsh & Oliphant 2014). Indeed, the counter-terrorism narrative, as articulated by political leaders and security agencies and supported by important media outlets, appears to have created the psychological and political conditions for steadily rising constraints on freedom and privacy in the United States as in other Western countries. Additionally, against a backdrop of fear, the counter-terrorist campaign has been feeding anti-Muslim hostility with the perpetrators of racial and religious vilification portraying themselves as defenders of liberal or Christian values.

As for the terrorists themselves, their profile remains elusive and at best ambiguous. To ask what makes the 'terrorist' tick is to pose an unanswerable question. There is no single 'terrorist' type. There are leaders and followers, each with clearly different

psychological profiles (Varvin 2003). There are those who dream of the resurgence of Islam or the birth of a new caliphate, others who feel that it is time to challenge the dominance and moral decadence of the West or to avenge the past misdeeds of infidels, others still who crave power and see in the current upheaval sweeping different parts of Islam, and in particular the Arab world, an opportunity to carve out fiefdoms for themselves (Gaffney 2003). There are those who feel it is an avenue for settling scores with local religious or political foes, others with violent pasts who think they can put to rewarding use their criminal skills, others who yearn for excitement and adventure and seek to bestow meaning and even nobility to their otherwise dreary or unsatisfying existence, and others still who see in martyrdom a once in a lifetime opportunity to earn the rewards of paradise. Binding these diverse and potentially conflicting psychological drives is the common language of Islam, though for most knowledge of the sacred texts is often patchy and command of the scholarly traditions of Islamic jurisprudence highly problematic.

How then does this heterogeneous cohort of Islamist adventurers relate to the wider Muslim Ummah? Few Muslim believers, it is true, have joined the ranks of militant Islamist organisations and seldom do terrorist tactics attract majority support. A Pew survey (Pew 2013a) found that 16 per cent of respondents in Turkey considered violence against civilian targets to be justified often or sometimes. For Indonesia, Pakistan and Jordan the proportion was 6 per cent, 3 per cent and 8 per cent respectively. Nevertheless, the grievances, objectives and demands as articulated by the leaders of these organisations and the sacrifices their followers were prepared to make appeared to strike a responsive chord in much of the Muslim world. Another Pew survey in the same year (Pew 2013b) found that in many Muslim countries a large number supported a significant role for Islam in politics (Jordan: 80 per cent; Malaysia: 82 per cent; Afghanistan: 82 per cent; Indonesia: 75 per cent; Egypt: 75 per cent; Palestinian Territories: 73 per cent).

The counter-terrorist strategies adopted by the security establishments of the United States and its allies may well have exacerbated rather than lessened or contained the terrorist threat, in part because they have been so preoccupied with removing the symptoms of the threat rather than addressing its underlying causes. At play here are two closely related dynamics: the ideological justification – part religious, part political – terrorists offer for their actions and the resonance which the sentiments they express have found with large Muslim audiences, even when the latter take issue with the targeting and killing of innocent civilians. The key to understanding this paradox lies in the troubled relationship between Islam and the West.

Historically, in spite of prolonged cultural, intellectual and commercial interaction bursts of co-operation have often alternated with conflict and even violence. For Muslims generally and Arabs in particular, the relatively recent past is associated

with European ascendancy, and though colonization and occupation have for the most part come to an end, they see few signs of a thorough-going reappraisal of the relationship. For many the West is still driven by a powerful, almost instinctive disposition to maintain its political and economic dominance at the expense of the Muslim 'other', and to make co-existence and collaboration dependent on Muslim acceptance of such dominance (Sayeed 1995).

Islamic hostility to the West is not reducible to a single explanation. The depth and basis of resentment have varied considerably with time and place. A number of recurring themes do, however, appear central to the Islamic critique of Western assumptions and objectives. Of these the first and most obvious is the widespread hostility to Western, and especially US economic, political and military support for Israel. In Arab eyes in particular successive US administrations and the security establishments on which they rely for policy advice and implementation have been firmly committed to the defence of Israel's security and its continued military supremacy in the Middle East. Apart from relatively mild and irregular criticisms of Israel's heavy-handed use of force and expanding settlements in Palestinian territories, the tendency has been to turn a blind eye to Israel's transgressions and to its nuclear weapons capability. The failure of the United States to use the immense diplomatic and military leverage at its disposal to press for the establishment of a Palestinian state is seen as evidence of its bias and duplicity.

Closer to home for many Muslims is the poor performance of their economies as reflected in widespread poverty, high unemployment and inadequate health care. The deep social discontent arising from these economic conditions was one of the powerful drivers of the Arab spring (Mulderig 2013, Cammet and Diwan, 2013). Internal political debates, especially among the younger generation, tended to focus on institutionalised forms of corruption, clientilism and mismanagement. For many the shortcomings in the political and economic fabric of their societies was attributable to the corrupt practices of authoritarian regimes that often relied for their survival on Western support, with bureaucratic, business and military elites serving as conduits for the preservation of Western interests. The regimes of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Saleh in Yemen were among those that would in due course become casualties of rising public anger (Inbar 2013).

The contentious nexus between domestic and external factors was not, however, confined to the experience of economic hardship. Dependent on external sources of support, including military aid and large-scale arms transfers, many of the oil-rich Gulf states had been willing to provide the United States and its allies secure and cheap access to oil supplies and to act as a buffer against more radical Arab regimes inclined to adopt a less accommodating stance vis-à-vis US strategic and diplomatic priorities. Simply put, many in the Arab world were deeply critical of the failure of

Arab governments to challenge pro-Israel and other Western policies through more effective use of the oil weapon.

A more general source of discontent merits close attention. In Muslim eyes, much of Western practice and discourse constitutes an affront to religious sensibility. The tendency of the United States and its allies to embark on military interventions in Islamic countries with little or no prior consultation with the societies that are to bear the primary burden of war is widely regarded as insensitive and shortsighted. The willingness to use military force even during the Holy month of Ramadan has been interpreted as a calculated and provocative insult to the Islamic faith. Especially galling is the stationing of US military facilities and personnel on Islamic soil, which, in the case of Saudi Arabia, was equated by many with desecration of Islam's holiest places. In this highly charged atmosphere, in which multiple sources of discontent converge, a powerful undercurrent has developed across an otherwise religiously and politically divided Islamic world that views the West as contemptuous of the richness and creativity of the Islamic tradition, and bent on stereotyping and demonising the other.

The same mindset is said to colour not only relations with Islamic states but even attitudes to Muslim communities in seemingly pluralist, tolerant western societies. The decision taken in France to ban Islamic headscarves and other conspicuous signs of religious affiliation from French state schools in 2004 was followed by the introduction of the Burqa ban in 2011. A highly charged debate ensued on the place of Muslims in French society, accompanied by frequent attacks on Muslim women and increasingly vehement calls to curb expressions of Muslim faith, whether by refusing permits for the construction of mosques, bans on praying in the street or controls on the supply of halal meat. The depiction of the Prophet Mohammed in cartoons that have periodically appeared in Danish, French and other European newspapers and online news websites (The Telegraph 2015) has been viewed by Muslims everywhere as deeply offensive and provocative. Given such an unsympathetic, not to say hostile, environment, it is tragic but not altogether surprising that young men and increasingly young women and even girls should be intent on defending the Islamic cause by travelling to war zones in Syria and Iraq in order to join the Islamic State or other terrorist networks (Ramdani 2014).

These disquieting developments are but a further manifestation of the complex ways in which violent Islamism and the war on terror have become inextricably linked to the wider divide between Islam and the West. They point to the multiplicity of actors involved, the diverse and at times competing interests and priorities they are pursuing, the fluid and at times blurred religious, cultural and civilisational currents they represent, often with little understanding or mastery of the turbulent seas they have to navigate.

Tentative Steps to Dialogue

Given the current maelstrom of religious, political and ideological mistrust and hostility we have briefly surveyed, can dialogue play a part in establishing more effective lines of communication and in the process help to create relationships animated by a sharper sense of the value of diversity in its various settings?

Dialogue across cultural boundaries is not a new idea. Relations between and within the world's major religions and civilizations have fluctuated between enormously rich and creative intellectual and artistic encounters and bursts of outright hostility and even gruesome violence. Interreligious dialogue, an important subset of the of the dialogue enterprise, has itself has quite a long history, with several notable initiatives going as far back as the edicts on religious tolerance which Indian Emperor Ashoka issued at different times during his long reign (269-232 BCE). The most significant development in the Modern era was the World Parliament of Religions, convened in Chicago in September 1893, which marked the first global gathering of representatives of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.

In the twentieth century two world wars, the horrors of the Holocaust, and more recently the conflicts that have devastated parts of the Middle East and Africa, Afghanistan, and the former Yugoslavia have provided renewed impetus to the advocacy of dialogue. However, it is only in the aftermath of Huntington's controversial *Clash of Civilizations* thesis (Huntington 1996) that both established and new organisations consciously set out to institutionalise dialogue processes aimed specifically at rebuilding trust between Islam and the West. The main thrust of Huntington's argument was that in the post-Cold War era international conflict would come to be defined by cultural and civilisational fault lines, notably between the dominant West on the one hand and the Sinic and Islamic worlds on the other. Though many questioned the conceptual and empirical validity of the Huntington thesis (Said 2001, Fox 2002, Russett 2000), the notion of a latent or emerging civilisational clash had considerable psychological and political resonance with conservative policy-making elites in the United States as well as with militant Islamic constituencies.

It was with a view to neutralising this potentially self-fulfilling and dangerous prophecy that Iranian president Mohammad Khatami sought to popularise in a series of eloquently crafted and highly influential speeches the countervailing notion of the *dialogue of civilizations* (Petito 2007). Having secured the endorsement of the concept by the Organisation of Islamic Conference in 1997, Khatami took the proposal to the UN General Assembly in November 1998, which adopted a resolution proclaiming the year 2001 as the *Year of Dialogue among Civilizations*. It also adopted the *Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilisations* (United Nations

2001), which has in turn given rise to a great many governmental and non-governmental initiatives

The UNAOC initiative

In 2005, largely in response to September 11 and its aftermath, Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero launched in partnership with the Turkish prime minister the idea of an *Alliance of Civilizations*, which the UN subsequently endorsed. The United Nations Alliance for Civilizations (UNAOC) initiative was specifically designed to address the fault line that separates the Western and non-Western worlds, the Occident and the Orient, and merits therefore particular attention. As a first step UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed a High Level Group whose report released in November 2006 recommended that the roots of extremism should be addressed by promoting understanding, dialogue and empathy for different cultures, religions and civilizations through targeted interventions in four sectors: media, youth, education and migration (UNAOC 2006). In the initial implementation stage, the emphasis was on developing networks and partnerships with governments and other actors which accorded with UNAOC objectives and priorities, with a particular focus on relations between Islam and the West.

To assist with implementation of its agenda, the UNAOC formed the Group of Friends (a network of governments and international organisations). Membership of the Group grew from 44 in 2007 to 130 in 2011 (Camilleri and Martin 2014, 11). Projects undertaken have included (UNAOC 2015): *Entrepreneurs for Social Change* (a training program for aspiring young social entrepreneurs from the Euro-Med region), a *Fellowship Scheme* (a cultural exchange program for 15 emerging leaders from the Arab world and 15 from the Western world who meet and exchange ideas with decision makers, grassroots organizations, media, local communities and religious groups), *Intercultural Innovation Award* (provides monetary and in-kind support to innovative grassroots initiatives working to alleviate identity-based tensions and conflicts), *Intercultural Leaders* (skills and knowledge-sharing platform for addressing cross-cultural tensions), *PLURAL+* (a youth video festival and competition), a *Summer School* (one-week training for youth to help address global challenges within the context of cultural and religious diversity), *Youth Solidarity Fund* (provides seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives) and a range of projects for engaging media, especially around migration and other cross-border movements.

Perhaps the most visible element of the UNAOC program has been its Global Forums, the first of which was held in Madrid (January 2008), followed by Istanbul (April 2009), Rio (May 2010), Doha (December 2011), Vienna (February 2013) and Bali (August 2014). These were large gatherings attracting between 1000 and 2000 participants representing governments, intergovernmental and non-

governmental organizations, the media as well as the corporate sector. Accompanied by a number of side events, they attempted to showcase and acknowledge the contribution of a large number of projects, most of which were animated by civil society and conducted nationally or more often in regional or global settings. With the momentum generated by these forums and other high profile events and the prestige accorded to a UN initiative enthusiastically supported by the UN Secretary-General, the UNAOC was able to register a significant global media presence (Camilleri & Martin 2014, 12) enabling the “alliance of civilisations” to match and in some years surpass the media attention received by its antithesis the “clash of civilizations”.

Notwithstanding its achievements over a relatively short period, this like many other UN initiatives has had serious shortcomings. Perhaps the least important of these is the choice of the word ‘alliance’, which, when placed in a geopolitical context, carries unfortunate connotations of conflict and the use of force. ‘Dialogue’ rather than ‘alliance’ would seem a far more effective discursive tool to expose the pitfalls of the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis. Moreover, while UNAOC has been right to focus on the Islam-West divide, it has not been able to go far beyond the symptomatic dimensions of the problem and has been viewed by many as first and foremost an instrument Western governments can use to promote a particular interpretation of the terrorist phenomenon and a counter-terrorist narrative closely aligned to their strategic interests and priorities. Also problematic has been the uneasy marriage between the governmental and non-governmental wings of UNAOC – with most of the energy coming from civil society but key decisions remaining the prerogative of states, and the UN uneasily navigating between the two. The lack of enthusiasm or even interest shown by many governments, not least the United States, has been compounded by the internal wrangling often associated with the UN’s arcane bureaucratic politics.

Other governmental and intergovernmental initiatives

The dialogical response to terrorism and the war on terror has involved a good deal more than UNAOC. It is worth remembering that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded as far back as November 1945 as a specialised UN agency, with the express purpose of creating conditions for genuine dialogue on the basis of respect for shared values and the dignity of each civilisation and culture. UNESCO and UNAOC did cooperate on a number of joint projects, including the creation of the UNESCO-UNAOC UNITWIN Global Chair on Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue. However, as a broad generalisation the opportunities for cooperation and complementarity on the one hand and the risks of overlap and duplication on the other were inadequately explored. In any case, in the aftermath of September 11 the

UN system directed much of its attention to the dual tasks of dissuading would-be terrorists from resorting to violent extremism and developing state capacity to defeat terrorism. To this end it channelled most of its energies through the United Nations Development Programme, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Department of Political Affairs and the Secretary-General's special representatives and envoys.

Other key multilateral players were regional organisations or governments acting together in regional settings. The European Union placed much emphasis on widening its political dialogue with third countries to include counter-terrorist strategies and projects. Counter-terrorism dialogues aimed at creating more effective policy making and expert networks on both sides of the Mediterranean were conducted with governments in Arab countries, Israel and Turkey as well as with the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union. Over time attention turned increasingly to the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon and to efforts needed to stem the tide of fighters travelling to conflict regions and managing their return.

A number of national governments in the West have also attempted, with varying degrees of commitment and insight, to develop channels of communication with their respective Muslim communities. But the processes of consultation have had at best mixed results. Governments have generally applied pressure on Muslim leaders to preach the virtues of moderation, and devised educational and other programs aimed principally at 'deradicalisation', without any corresponding willingness on their part to consider the deeper grievances held by members of these communities, let alone their implications for the formulation and execution of foreign and security policies (Laurence 2012, Angenendt 2007). As for Christian minorities in Muslim countries they have been subjected to mounting pressure in most parts of the Arab world and Christian churches, schools and homes have been the target of frequent Islamist attacks. Dialogical interventions in the sensitive area of Sunni-Shia relations have been few and far between. To some observers the religious dialogues initiated by the Yemeni Government in 2002 were a promising beginning, but they were conceived largely in the context of deradicalisation (ICPVTR 2010, Birk 2009). With government agencies offering little effective support and detainees subjected to arbitrary arrests, indefinite detentions, torture and other human rights violations, the project was discontinued in 2005.

In the case of Southeast Asia, the site of several terrorist attacks notably in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, a number of governments joined to convene regional interfaith dialogues, first in Indonesia (2004), followed by the Philippines (2006), New Zealand (2007), Cambodia (2008) and Australia (2009) and Indonesia (2012). A Regional Interfaith Network was launched in 2011. For their part, multilateral institutions, in particular the ASEAN Regional Forum and

the East Asian Summit, made periodic declarations of support for interfaith and intercultural dialogue (Camilleri 2013, 29-31). The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) made a more substantive contribution, with ASEM conferences setting priorities in the fields of education and training, cultural and intellectual exchanges, cultural tourism and protection of cultural resources. By 2015 the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF 2015), established by ASEM in February 1997 with a mandate to promote mutual understanding between the two continents, had implemented some 650 projects engaging some 17,000 participants. Intent on promoting the Malaysian brand, Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, in line with his notion of *Islam Hadari* (or *civilisational Islam*), hosted a series of international conferences during 2006-2009 under the theme 'Islam and the West: Bridging the Gap'. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2010, his successor, Najib Razak, announced the establishment of the *Global Movement of Moderates* (GMM). At this and numerous other forums he presented the Malaysian initiative as a call to moderation, based on the Islamic concept of *Wasatiyyah* understood as the mid-point between two bad extremes. Moderates from different religious and national backgrounds were entreated to reclaim the centre stage and with moderation as their guide to respond to the global challenges of our age.

Interfaith Activism

Important as the contribution of governments and multilateral organisations has been, in many ways the rapid growth of the interfaith movement has been perhaps the most striking expression of the dialogical movement in the aftermath of September 11. The ground had been prepared by a series of initiatives in previous decades. Notable milestones included: the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (originally the Secretariat for Non-Christians), an official Catholic body set up in 1964 in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council; the World Conference of Religions for Peace (subsequently renamed Religions for Peace) which convened for the first time in Kyoto in October 1970 with the express purpose of bringing together people of faith to cooperate for peace; and the 'Declaration toward a Global Ethic' signed at the Parliament of the World's Religions gathering in 1993 by more than 200 leaders from some 40 different faith traditions and spiritual communities.

In the minds of many extremism couched and justified in religious terms called for a religiously framed response. Significant initiatives, including public pronouncements, prayer services, vigils, conferences, educational and other joint projects were launched by authoritative personalities and institutions, including Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis, Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury and his successor Justin Welby, the World Council of Churches, the Grand Muftis of Egypt and Syria, and Iran's Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, to name a few.

Complementing these high-level encounters has been the ongoing work of such international organisations and networks as Religions for Peace, Parliament of the World's Religions, the United Religions Initiative, the International Council of Christians and Jews, the Gülen (or Hizmet) movement and its large international network of dialogue societies, the Soka Gakkai International movement and the more recent Cordoba Initiative. But by far the most notable and somewhat unexpected development has been the proliferation of localised groups and initiatives primarily but not exclusively in the United States, Western Europe, the UK, Canada and Australia. These have been aptly described as 'a fluid network of people and organizations working to advance tolerance, understanding and genuine respect for the religious "other" (plural) and the positive appropriation of religious diversity.' (Heckman 2013) With the benefit of funding and logistical support provided by municipal and provincial governments, local and regional interfaith projects and groups were able to mount a wide ranging programme aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of different faiths, that is, of their respective beliefs, texts and religious practices, including fasting and prayers. Interfaith activities have included visits to one another's places of worship and even homes, as well as joint prayer services, forums and discussions.

This cursory survey of religious and secular contributions to the dialogical groundswell of the last fifteen years points to a movement, which though fragmented and inchoate, was nevertheless widespread, sustained and able to resonate across diverse cultural and national settings.

The Dialogical Imperative: Future Possibilities

Though much has been accomplished under the general rubric of dialogue in response to the insecurities of the post-September 11 environment, not all initiatives have been equally helpful. Some have been little more than cosmetic exercises, with governments often appropriating the language of dialogue to conceal or embroider an agenda driven by quite different interests and objectives. But even those initiatives that can generally be described as genuine and constructive attempts to contain extremist discourse cannot be said to constitute, either individually or collectively, a coherent or comprehensive response to the fluid, often ambiguous yet pervasive challenge that confronts the international community.

The countless actions/reactions that have thus far punctuated the evolution of the terrorism-counterterrorism dynamic over the last twenty or more years now threaten to generate a potentially uncontrollable spiral of violence. If dialogue is to help contain and eventually reverse this spiral, then dialogical interventions need to be lucidly conceived, carefully prepared and patiently applied. This will necessarily be a multidimensional process that rests on the active participation

of diverse stakeholders, each having different priorities and pursuing different ambitions, each bringing different ideas and proposals to the table. Indeed, the shape of the table, the issues to be canvassed and the desired outcomes will vary substantially from dialogue to dialogue. It is neither feasible nor desirable that the dialogue be straitjacketed into some kind of uniform or all-encompassing format or structure. Much theorising on dialogue is defective in its inclination to generalise or to be more precise in its tendency to resort to abstraction where the complexity and untidiness of concrete situations can be conveniently swept under the carpet. Yet, attention to diversity or the uniqueness of each situation does not mean that the dialogical enterprise has to proceed without reference to dialogical values. It is these values that distinguish dialogue from notions of communication, negotiation, conflict resolution or dispute settlement. As the more profound dialogical thinkers have argued, dialogue is not just or even primarily a set of techniques that can be mastered over time; it is first and foremost a mindset that animates and sustains the enterprise (Buber 1947; Gadamer 1992; Bohm 1996). Three values are critical to the dialogical mindset: acceptance of difference, mutual listening and a readiness to revisit history.

Diversity or even sharp differences need not stand in the way of effective dialogue either within or between political, cultural or religious groupings. Dialogue stands to gain as much from diversity as from commonality. To engage in dialogue is not merely to recognise or tolerate cultural, religious or political difference, it is to acknowledge that no culture, religion, society or political grouping has a monopoly on wisdom. Dialogue thus becomes an encounter across cultural, religious, philosophical, ethical, civilisational or political boundaries, in which each participant listens to the other, becomes open, sensitive, even vulnerable to the other. Dialogue thus becomes an exercise in 'mutual listening' in which each participant engages in a journey of self-discovery as well as discovery of the 'other'. It follows that through dialogue participants are encouraged to hold their respective practices up to critical examination, and to consider ways of adapting them to new circumstances. Dialogue works best when it fosters soul-searching, at times painful, within as much as between faiths, cultures and political entities.

Dialogue, it must be said, is a difficult undertaking, and nowhere more so than in situations of conflict or tension. Whether it is in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Christian-Muslim divide, or any of the other deeply divisive conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan or parts of Africa, dialogue must somehow elicit the mental and emotional energies that make possible empathy and compassion for the 'other'. Long held fears and animosities must somehow be revisited. Communities in conflict situations have often suffered from past violence, and continue to suffer today. Yet, many of these same communities have

themselves inflicted violence on others. If dialogue is to move, however tentatively, towards reconciliation, the participants need to share their stories (Glover 2005), listen to one another's experience of pain, acknowledge past wrongs, as a prelude to accepting responsibility for righting the wrongs of the past.

A critical first step in the dialogical journey envisaged here is the deconstruction of the very terms 'terrorism' and 'counterterrorism'. Such a project can in principle engage anyone who is so inclined. In practice, it is critically important that such a dialogue be conducted in the West, in particular in the United States and its principal allies in the 'war on terror', and that it engage on the one hand policy-makers, military planners and security agencies and on the other important voices in civil society, including scholars, journalists, religious and community leaders, lawyers and public interest organisations. The aim here is twofold: first to clarify what we understand by terrorism, the diversity of motives, drivers and interests which it encompasses, and its relationship to the broad religious and political tent that is Islam; secondly, to explore appropriate national and international responses to the phenomenon in the light of the competing demands of security, peace, justice and liberty.¹ Placed against this unavoidably larger backdrop, dialogue offers an opportunity to ask often neglected questions that lie at the core of the West's understanding of itself and its place in the world. It also invites a far-reaching reassessment of the role of religion in the public sphere, the meaning of religious fundamentalism, and the need to revisit the relationship of religion to the secular order, a mainly Western construct developed in the aftermath of the European wars of religion (Camilleri 2012).

When it comes to the question of how to respond to the 'terrorist threat' posed by Islamist groups, there is a strong case for Western states that are the principal targets of such attacks to pursue dialogue in three other contexts, each of which involves overlapping domestic and international arenas and actors. The most obvious, often neglected yet pressing need is for these states, in particular their legislative and executive arms, to initiate a respectful and sustained dialogue with their Muslim minorities. Several considerations shed light on the strategic role of such dialogue, the issues to be canvassed and the communicative approach most likely to bear fruit. For Western societies, where different versions of secularism coexist with a Christian legacy of varying degrees of influence and visibility, this is a critical

1 For an insightful deconstruction of the terms and their implications for dialogue see Habermas, Jurgen (2003) *Philosophy in a time of Terror: Dialogues with Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. Significantly, Habermas views terrorism as a unique modern phenomenon, and specifically as a symptom of the failure of dialogue, as a communicative pathology that leads through the spiral of uncontrolled violence to the breakdown of communication.

test case of their ability to construct a viable relationship with Islam. If such an outcome is not feasible within the United States, Canada, Germany, Britain, France or Australia, it is much less likely to be achieved in relations with Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran or Libya. Muslim minorities in the West are also crucial interlocutors by virtue of the fact that they retain strong family, professional, business and political links with their countries of origin, many of which are at the centre of the conflicts that have proven fertile breeding grounds for various forms of terrorist activity. Simply put, the input of Muslim minorities offers a rewarding pathway to a more sophisticated understanding of Arab and other Muslim societies and an invaluable source of advice on the formulation and execution of foreign policy goals. With appropriate acknowledgment of past mistakes and a willingness to refashion existing policies and discursive practices, Western governments could go a long way towards addressing the religious and political grievances and legitimate socio-economic aspirations of Muslim communities, thereby reducing the attraction for young Muslims of violent or extremist reactions usually born of a deep sense of victimhood, humiliation and severely constrained life chances.

In coming years the Western world will face another increasingly difficult dialogical challenge. The entire post-Cold War period has hitherto been characterised, especially on the part of the United States, by a tendency towards unilateralist policies, most markedly in the field of security policy. Nowhere has this tendency been more pronounced than in relations with the Middle East and more broadly with the Islamic world. The response to terrorism, even prior to the attacks on New York and Washington, was shaped by a policy making elite intent on retaining America's unchallenged military supremacy, and inclined to view friends and allies and even multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, as little more than appendages to US diplomacy. An open-ended and sustained dialogue that encompasses not only friends and allies but recalcitrant and even so-called 'rogue states' can help reverse the widely shared impression of a power unable to break with its imperial past. Effective and durable responses to the rise of IS in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in Somalia or state failure in Yemen and Libya (in no small measure the result of ill-conceived Western policies) can be developed only in the context of patient dialogue between relevant stakeholders and the direct involvement of the United Nations and regional organisations viewed not as diplomatic sideshows but as significant spaces for mutual listening. Such a dialogue would necessarily go beyond the symptomatic diagnosis of the problem that more often than not privileges military solutions and clandestine operations.

There is yet another arena where dialogue may prove especially relevant to conflict resolution, and which is of particular concern to non-governmental organisations conducting humanitarian and peace building operations. These are organisations

whose work is often severely impeded by the direct and indirect effects of counter-terrorism strategies. Counter-terrorism legislation in the United States, the UK and elsewhere has been especially troublesome in that it has severely restricted mediation and dialogue initiatives. Providing representatives of groups listed as 'terrorist' organisations with training in dialogue facilitation and negotiation or courses in international humanitarian law can carry the risk of prosecution. Proscription of this kind tends to undermine the prospects for dialogue and remove viable alternatives to violence, thereby strengthening the hard-line, extremist elements within a group. By limiting the documentation of peace processes, it can prevent the application of 'lessons learnt' from a given conflict to other comparable contexts.

Finally, a word about dialogue with terrorist organisations. To some this may seem an unthinkable option. Inviting or even allowing terrorists to participate in dialogue might well be used by them to enhance their legitimacy whether with a domestic or international constituency. Moreover, terrorist groups are notoriously difficult to locate, communicate with, and integrate into a reasonably structured dialogical encounter. It is also the case that, given the intent of terrorist organisations to wreak havoc and spread panic, authorities have a responsibility to deliver a measure of security and stability. Yet, there is another equally respectable argument that acknowledges the risks and sensitivities involved yet sees value in engaging armed groups in dialogue. With appropriate forethought and preparation such dialogue can open previously closed channels of communication and reduce isolation, suspicion and mistrust (CIAN 2006). Mediation and dialogue activities can also be useful instruments in dissuading potential recruits from joining or supporting terrorist groups. Asked to comment on these as yet inadequately explored possibilities, Pope Francis, while firmly denouncing the evil of terrorism, offered the following perspective: 'I never count anything as lost. Never. Never close the door. It's difficult, you could say almost impossible, but the door is always open.' (Zaimov 2014). At some point in any conflict violence has to give way to a political solution, for which purpose dialogue becomes an unavoidable intervening step. In Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Nigeria – countries with porous boundaries, devastated economies, large dislocated populations and deeply entrenched ethnic or religious tensions and hatreds – ideal conditions exist for the virus of terrorism to thrive and spread. Strategies that rely on the external use of force as the primary tool for the containment and eventual elimination of the virus are simply not plausible. As we have emphasised more than once, terrorism is the outward manifestation of a deeper ailment that afflicts the entire relationship between Islam and the West. If this is so, then attention must focus sharply on the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions that sustain the ailment and on appropriate remedies. While not offering a panacea for treating all the ills of terrorism and the 'war on terror', dialogue has, nonetheless, a critically important role to play.

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The Principles of the Construction of the “Other” in Fethullah Gülen’s Thought

Özgür Koca

The *Hizmet* (Gülen) Movement is a transnational phenomenon. In the last two decades, the participants of the movement have managed to establish a large number of educational institutes, interfaith and intercultural dialogue centres, humanitarian aid organizations, media institutions, and business associations functioning around the globe. The *Hizmet* movement is to date an evidently admirable faith inspired movement interacting with diverse religious traditions, secular ideologies, and cultures in more than 150 countries. Questions arise here: what motivates and enables the participants of the *Hizmet* Movement to engage with the religious, cultural, and ideological “Other” so successfully? How do they perceive the Other? And how do they justify their construction of the Other in relation to their faith? To help answer these questions, this article aims to provide a preliminary research on and critical analysis of how Fethullah Gülen, the inspirer of the *Hizmet* Movement, constructs the Other in his writings.

Keywords: Gülen, Hizmet, Other, Qur’an, the Prophetic Tradition, Sufism, Ethics, Peace,

The idea of the construction of the religious, ideological, and cultural Other as a partner in dialogue and in constructive collaborative social and political activism, is a much discussed topic. There are differing theoretical and practical approaches to the problem. Some argue that such constructions are an expression of practical needs in today’s pluralist world. Daniel Yankelovich, for example, describes the increase in dialogue activities between faith groups and individuals in the United States as a response to the individualising and isolating effects of technological advancements and political necessities on the one hand, and to the compartmentalising influences of modern ways of life and economic prerequisites on the other. “We find ourselves facing problems that require more shared understanding with others than in the past” (Yankelovich 1999: 12). The construction of the other as a dialogic partner is important not only to develop personal attachments but also “to solve problems” in the increasingly intertwined and complex world.

For Martin Buber it is our essential nature to establish relationships with the Other. It is, however, important to develop what he calls an I-You (*Ich-Du*) relationship to abstain from the pitfalls of I-It (*Ich-Es*) relationships. In the former, the two things expose their authentic existences and they live in the presence of each other without imposing any pre-constructed mental image on one another. *Ich-Du* relationships require a total openness and waiting for the Other to come. In *Ich-Es* relationships, however, the perceiving subject sees the other in terms of itself. It thus

transforms the Other into a tool to be used and experienced. In Buber's account, the construction of the Other is an inescapable process. That is to say it is not only a necessity dictated by the complexities of the modern world but also, and more importantly, an essential aspect of human condition (Buber 1958: 19-23).

Emmanuel Levinas emphasizes the importance of face-to-face encounter (*rappport de face à face*) with the Other. Such encounter negates all imposed "sameness" and unearths nuances. For in the "destitution and nudity" of the face one realises the uniqueness of the Other in a way that cannot be negated. The face of the Other "resists possession" (Levinas 1979:197). "The face is what forbids us to kill" (Levinas 1985: 86) the Other to an extent that one cannot be "able to be deaf to that appeal" (Levinas 1975: 200) The impossibility of exhausting the Other or, in other words, the realisation of the "infinity" of the Other leads to a more responsible, compassionate, and humble interaction with the Other.

Others approach the question of the construction of a dialogic relationship with the Other from the perspective of its process and consequences. These approaches value the dialogic relationship of diverse groups because in an environment where different tendencies learn from each other the feasibility of interaction increases. Muslim philosopher al-Fârâbî gives an early expression of this perspective in his famous Virtuous City (*al-Madîna al-Fâdila*). In his ideal state, he envisages a complete freedom and equality. To this state "people from outside flock" and this would result in "a most desirable kind of racial diversity." Al-Fârâbî values the idea of the encounter with the equal and diverse Other in a free environment because it would guarantee the flourishing of talented individuals such as philosophers, scientists and poets. There is nothing like the harmonious coexistence of different minds for artistic, philosophical, and scientific production (Rosenthal 1960).

Similarly, Jurgen Habermas emphasises the role of rationality and transparency in the process of the encounter with the Other and its effects on "the structural transformation of the public sphere." Such a dialogic encounter that is based on the assumption that the Other is a rational and equal partner is what renders the activity itself a socially and politically productive one. This "communicative action" has a transformative effect on the political sphere for it is the basis for rendering information available to the wider public and allows their input into the system (Habermas 1998).

The traditionalist school, represented by such luminaries as Rene Guenon, Fritjhof Schuon, and S. Hossein Nasr, exhibits a rather unique approach to the question of the construction of the Other, provided that the perspective seems to be limited to those inspired by the spiritual and universal core of religious traditions. The traditionalist school sees religion as a totality of exoteric and esoteric teachings.

There is a transcending unity in esoteric teachings but necessary divergences in the exoteric expressions. The differences in the symbolic languages of religions make them adaptable to different cultural environments. There is no hierarchical relationship between religions for they are all capable of realising the desired “discernment” between the relative and the Absolute and “attachment” of the relative to the Absolute by means of spiritual contemplative practices. Accordingly these writers see the dialogic relationship with the Other as a form of polite encounter resulting from the discernment of the deeper commonality, not a disguised attempt to convert the Other, or even teach (Nasr 2005: 14-5).

How can one locate Gülen's views on the construction of the dialogic relationship with the Other in this discussion? Gülen speaks as a Muslim scholar and formulates his ideas by departing from the fundamental sources of Islamic tradition. In accordance with the majority of Muslim scholars Gülen sees Islam as a continuation of the Abrahamic tradition and the unsurpassable culmination of all previously revealed religions. The Qur'anic revelation is a supersessionist event abrogating (*naskh*) prior religions. Islam is, at once, continuation and unsurpassable culmination of the revelatory process. These are obviously absolutist claims that could easily pave the way for theological and eschatological exclusivity. It is important to recall that such absolutist claims constitute the core aspects of self-understanding of not only Islam but almost all major religions.

What is interesting in Gülen's case is that while religious absolutist claims are usually followed by intolerant and belligerent attitudes towards the Other, Gülen's belief in the uniqueness of Islam does not lead him to a theological hubris and a confrontational encounter with the Other. But how? Can the absolutist claim to finality be reconciled with an *authentic* esteem toward the Other within an Islamic framework? Gülen's answer is in the affirmative. Without renouncing the core aspects of Islam's vision of itself as a final and complete religion, Gülen constructs an inclusive Islam, because that vision of itself does not entail the adoption of a Manichean world view and dehumanisation of the Other. His strategy is to accentuate the inclusive potential of the Qur'an and *Sunna*. He also frequently turns to Islamic spiritual, exegetical, theological, and jurisprudential tradition to bolster his claims. In Gülen it is interesting to observe how socially and religiously expansive and embracive a theologically absolutist position can be.

I. The Essentiality of the Other

As a devout Muslim scholar, Gülen sees the Qur'anic contextualisation of the Other as essentially important. To this end one of the most cited verses by Gülen is the following: “O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes that ye may know one another (not that you despise

each other).” (Qur’an 49:13) This and similar verses allow Gülen to see diversity as essential. The primary message Gülen draws from the content of the verse is that we will never be homogeneous, and more importantly, diversity is not a curse from God. It is a blessing and a source of richness. In diversity we are challenged, and usually only after we are challenged do we discover our hidden potentialities and we flourish. Diversity breathes fire into life, vibrates life, and creates synergies. There is nothing like harmonious coexistence and interaction of creative minds fuelling innovation and discovery, outwardly and inwardly (Gülen 2002a). Engage with the Other in a spirit of learning (Gülen 2002b: 40). Be authentically curious, leave your cognitive comfort zone, challenge your misconceptions, break the intellectually suffocating routine of life, and emancipate yourself from prejudices (Gülen 2002b: 39-40).

Thus, Gülen interprets the existence of the Other as an inescapable aspect of creation. Pluralism is irreducible and uniformity is impossible. For in diversity we are saved from the withering effects of uniformity, from the boredom of sameness. Diversity dynamises the world and enriches us.

2. Coexistence and Collaboration with the Other

In accordance with these thoughts, Gülen often cites one of the ecumenical calls of the Qur’an: “O People of the Book! Let us come to a formula common between us- that we shall not serve anyone but God, that we shall associate none with him.” (Qur’an 3:64) For Gülen the idea of unity expressed in this verse seems to exist in the essence of all religions, providing the widest grounding “on which members of all religions could agree.” (Gülen 2002b: 38) That is to say, in accordance with the content of the verse, the essential message of Islam and other religions (especially Christianity and Judaism) includes that there is one Absolute Being and everything else owes its existence and continuation of its existence to it; and that we should live our lives in this consciousness; and that we should attach ourselves to this One Absolute Being through contemplative and spiritual practices. If the followers of religious traditions live in accordance with these principles, then we have the much needed common ground on which we can build coexistence and collaboration. If not, we can still be polite to each other, but we will definitely lack the powerfully uniting alchemy of acknowledging and appreciating the truth in the Other.

He also writes that this inclusivist spirit has been manifested in Muslim societies in their tolerant behaviour towards other religions, especially in the early periods of Islam. One must also acknowledge that it was occasionally ignored due to the socio-political context in which Islamic Jurisprudence evolved (Gülen 2002b: 41).

Aside from purely religious and spiritual content, Gülen’s referral to this verse to

encourage the followers of different traditions to seek the common ground stems from very practical and immediate concerns as well. There is instability, inequality and injustice in this world. Problems like environmental crisis are threaten us all. One group of people, one nation or one sect cannot face the challenge. Global problems require global action. To act collectively we need to stand collectively on a common ground. For Gülen this seems to save a soteriological space for the followers of other traditions.

His message can be summed up as the following: it seems that if only we learn to accept the Other as oneself, without denying the particularity of the Other as Other, we may be able to cultivate a culture of coexistence and collaboration between cultures, religious traditions, and civilizations to address these problems. Here the Other emerges as the co-healer of the world.

3. Peace with the Other

Verses such as “God does not forbid you to be kind and just to those who had neither fought against your faith nor driven you out of your homes. In fact Allah loves the just.” (Qur’an 60:8) allow Gülen to depict peace with the Other as the norm of the human condition, as the ideal state of being (Gülen 2002b: 17, 40). Once he centralises the aforementioned verses, conflict becomes an aberration and deviation from the norm (the ideal). Conflict with the religious Other is an abnormality, an incidental, disdained condition. He establishes peace as a substantive value. He cites from the Qur’an: “Establish, all of you, peace.” (Qur’an 2:208)

But it is also important to come to terms with seemingly exclusive verses which are sometimes harsh in tone and highly critical of other traditions, such as “O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another.” (Qur’an 5:51; see also verses 2:191, 4:89, 9:23 as example) Gülen resorts to different exegetical possibilities to construe these verses. First of all, he contextualises and localises them to an extent that they no longer indicate universal moral injunctions regulating our interaction with the Other at all times. They are functional in their highly specified contexts. For example, the verses allowing war for self-defence against the oppression of Arab polytheists should be understood in their context, and should not be universalised or conflated over their boundaries. Some verses which criticise the people of the book for wrong behaviour should be seen as directed towards the hostile acts and thoughts of some Jews and Christians not to Judaism or Christianity *per se*. In other words, Gülen reads these verses as descriptive but not prescriptive. He reminds his readers of an important exegetical principle that one should seek both *sübût-u kat’iye* (the certainty of authenticity) and *delâlet-i kat’iye* (the certainty of indication) in these verses. Although we are certain about the authenticity of the verses, we do not know

whether these verses indicate, indiscriminately, all Jews and Christians. Here, he locates these verses in their highly specified contexts, that is to say he affirms their contextual value and, at the same time, allows a certain flexibility where one can navigate and develop a constructive relationship with the religious Other (Gülen 2000: 111). He also indicates that the Qur'an's criticism does not target 'people' but 'characteristics' that can be found in any person and religious group. The distinction is important because in the first case the animosity is directed towards people themselves and in the second case towards abstract characteristics (lying, dishonesty, etc.). An individual who carries these negative character traits cannot be reduced to them and is embraced with even more compassion. This is exactly why the Qur'an, occasionally, states condemnations against the nascent Muslim community. Moreover, the Qur'an also uses very gentle words for the people of the book to "plant hope." (Gülen 2002b: 40)

In a recent interview, as a response to a question regarding the highly critical statements he made in his early sermons concerning Jews he said: "I sincerely admit that I might have misunderstood some verses and prophetic sayings. I realized and then stated that the critiques and condemnations that are found in the Koran or prophetic tradition are not targeted against people who belong to a religious group, but at characteristics that can be found in any person...He (the Prophet) was the one who stood for a funeral procession of a Jewish resident of Medina, showing respect for a deceased fellow human being. It is a fact that I criticized certain actions of Israel in the past. But in my mosque sermons, I also categorically condemn terrorism and suicide bombings that target innocent civilians." (The Atlantic 2013)

Peace, as alluded to above, is a substantive, essential norm.. *As-sulh hayrun*, peace is good, as the Qur'an states. Gülen sees inclusivist verses as essential and fundamental departing points towards peace, inclusivism and coexistence. These verses, and some practices of the prophet of Islam, are teaching us how to deal with the hostile Other and how to domesticate violence which in some circumstances seems to be unavoidable. This has something to do with the Qur'an's "earthly realism." The Qur'an does not shy away from dealing with the reality of war. Other options would be merely pointing towards the moral ideal without appreciating the complexities of life (Gülen 1979). It locates itself on the interface of realism and idealism, and endorses a strategy which at once encounters the ugly realities of human individuals and societies, teaches how to walk through these problems with the least possible harm, and strongly encourages moral ideals. Multi-layered modes of discourse are due to the multi-layered complexities of the world.

Gülen also frequently refers to some successful historical examples of coexistence to instil an ethics of peace with the Other. He establishes his message of peace and coexistence as an Islamic norm practiced throughout the ages since the inception

of Islam in a way that is measured favourably not only by medieval norms but also some modern practices. For Gülen the message of peace and coexistence is not a “new invention” forced by modern social and political contexts. It has always been in the perennial core of Islam as a trans-historical, context-independent ideal, and sometimes successfully realised (Gülen 1993). Among the examples frequently visited by Gülen are the first peaceful encounters between the nascent Muslim community and Christians and Jews, the first immigration to Abyssinia, the visit of Nejran Christians, and the Madina Constitution - a pluralistic text offering a multi-legal system (he reads it as an attempt to coexist peacefully). Some examples indicate the pluralist and relatively tolerant atmosphere in Muslim ruled lands, such as Baghdad in 8th-9th centuries, Andalucía in 9th-11th centuries (*la convivencia*), and especially Ottoman in the 13th-19th centuries.

4. The “Divine Breath” in the Other

Gülen is an optimist when it comes to valuing human nature. He holds that our “goodness endures despite passing evil” (Gülen 2013: 10) he advocates the “acceptance of human nature with its complexities.” (Gülen 2013: 19) Evil is accidental and goodness is essential in human nature.

Gülen's unflinching optimism has everything to do with the Qur'anic teaching that we are “created in the best form (*ahsan at-takwim*)” (Qur'an 95:4), and that we carry the “divine breath” within our souls in a mysterious way (Qur'an 32:9). The Qur'an also uses rather gruesome terms to describe human nature, such as ignorant, hasty, vicious, heartless, etc. However, in Gülen's reading this pessimist depiction is rather decentralised or construed in the light of more essential verses which envisage profound potential in human nature.

For Gülen, once we recognise our own profound inwardness we will recognise the same inner potential in the Other. Or in other words, seeing the divine breath in the Other makes him an object of respect and love. This message is in accordance with one of the primary concerns of the spiritual tradition: to recognize the Divine in the world and in the Other. This obviously provides a grounding to establish the essential dignity of each individual. (Gülen 2013: 5, 13, 31)

Along the same lines, Gülen emphasises the Qur'anic idea of the *continuity* between (Abrahamic) religious traditions. The idea of continuation between religious traditions allows Gülen to see the Other not as an isolated, self-enclosed entity, but as a fellow practicing a perennial message (Gülen 2013:176) The idea of the unity of the source of religions gives him a very important tool to cultivate fellowship between distinct religious traditions, and establish peaceful coexistence as the norm. It also instils a sense of “familiarity” with the Other. “We are brothers under

the authority of the One.” (Gülen 2013:101,162)

For Gülen, however, continuity does not necessitate homogeneity of religious traditions. He admits authenticity of the origin of other religious traditions that might contain divine light and truth despite posterior distortion of their message (Gülen 2002c: 33). Consequently, he sees the existence of some profound and even irreconcilable differences between religions in practice as well as in theory, while at the same time provides motivation for tolerance, coexistence and cooperation (Gülen 2002b: 19). Thus his strategy allows him to appreciate the profound differences yet commonality between religious traditions, to not impose an artificial homogeneity on religions, and allows for installing love and responsibility for the Other in the self. In refraining from imposing an artificial homogeneity on different religions, he allows for the possibility of rational deliberation on religious differences, hence a creation of hierarchy between religious traditions.

5. Metaphysics of the Other: *Ma’rifah* and *Muhabba*

Gülen is not a Sufi in the traditional sense of the word. Neither is the movement a Sufi order. But one can easily see the great influence of the masters of Islamic spirituality in his terminology and world view (The Atlantic 2013). A quick look at *Kalbin Zumrut Tepeleri* (Emerald Hills of the Heart) would reveal the great aspiration towards deep spirituality in practicing religion. Here I turn to a particular aspect of Sufi metaphysics, the theory of Divine names, which Gülen so masterfully uses in locating the Other in a thoroughly sacralised world. During this process the Other becomes sacralised too in the eyes of the beholder who sees everything in relation to the Divine.

Gülen describes metaphysics as an attempt “to comprehend existence as a unity of its observable and unobservable aspects” (Gülen 2013: 45). It goes beyond physical observations without contradicting them. The theory of the divine names that comprehend the world as a multiplicity of loci for constant and ever-changing manifestations (*tajallî*) of the divine names provides an overarching metaphysical structure which adequately “unites” the seen and the unseen.

Yet, from another perspective this metaphysics allows Gülen to relate every object and event to God as loci of the divine theophanies. “Every creature is a shining mirror” (Gülen 2013: 55) reflecting the divine qualities. The Qur’an states that “to God belong all the beautiful names” (Qur’an, 7: 180, 59: 24). These names include the Just, the Real, the Majestic, the All-Powerful, the Forgiver, the Giver of Death, the Reckoner, the Beautiful, the Gentle, Love. Alongside the general convictions of Sufi metaphysics, Gülen holds that both history and the cosmos are manifestations of the divine names. On all levels of existence various combinations of the divine

names are reflected.

What differentiates humanity is its comprehensivity. Herein the human individual emerges as the most profound nexus and the most comprehensive manifestation of the divine names (Gülen 2002d: 143-149, 153-158, 186-189, 213-217, 221-223; Gülen 2005). This is why humans are "vicegerents" of God on earth (Gülen 2002b: 44).

The theory of the divine names provides fertile ground for the construction of a universal fellowship and the Other as a sacred being. The Other is sacred because he has the traces of the manifestations of the divine names, thus he is a potential vicegerent. Clearly, attaching beings to God and to each other in such a sacred ontological framework leads to one of the basic tenets of religious worldviews things are more than they appear. Apart from their place in the cosmic order, beings also signify something greater than themselves. Therefore, beings as comprehensive mirrors of the divine manifestation are valued through their relationships with the Divine as well as with other beings. Both the physical/horizontal and the metaphysical/vertical significance of beings are celebrated.

Gülen frequently turns to the following famous sacred prophetic tradition to explain the mystery of creation: "I was a hidden treasure. I loved to be known and created the creation." This is despite the fact that traditional scholars such as ibn Taymiyya stated that no chain of transmission is known for this *hadith*, whether weak or strong. For Gülen the same meaning can be inferred from a verse, which says: "I created Jins and humans only that they may *worship* me (Qur'an 51:56), meaning that "they may *know* (*ma'rifah*) me" as famous commentator ibn Abbas explains (Gülen 2001).

The key words here are 'love' and 'know'. In accordance with Sufi metaphysics of creation, Gülen holds that the world emerges out of love (*mahabbah*) and the ultimate goal of creation is to attain knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*) (Gülen 2002d: 2005-17; Gülen 2002b: 41-3). God loves – in a way appropriate to His perfection – to manifest his perfection and beauty in the mirror of creation, as I alluded to above. Along the same lines Gülen describes metaphysics as the "ability of love to perceive reality as a whole" (Gülen 2013: 45). Here he seems to suggest that perception of reality as a unity of the observable and unobservable dimension is intrinsically linked to love. God knows his beauty and perfection but He also loves to know Himself, starting from other than himself. In short, God loves to be "seen and known."

For Gülen, love is the central axis around which everything else revolves. He describes love as "the essence of the creation." His prose reaches to poetic heights

when he speaks of love. Creation is, for Gülen, “a festival of love”; Love is “the elixir of life.” The driving force of the cosmos is love. Every motion in this world is an attempt to get closer to God, whether things are conscious of it or not. We love things and move towards them; in actuality we love God in the beautiful quality of things (Gülen 2013: 3, 4, 59, 64, 85).

After establishing love as the most fundamental reality of the world, Gülen turns to draw ethical conclusions that would organise one’s relationship with the Other. One loves God and “loves everyone and everything for God’s sake.” This deep sense of love manifests itself in one’s willingness to serve others. This is what Gülen calls “altruistic love.”

As such, defining the Other by using the metaphysical indications of the theory of the divine names provides Gülen with a grounding for a highly sophisticated ethics of respect, love, and coexistence. The following passage makes perfect sense within the framework of such metaphysics: “Love is the foundation of the world. God created is as such. Everything in the world is a magnificent art. To demean a piece of art is the same as demeaning the Artist. Everything deserves to be exalted, respected and loved due to their relationship to their Creator, God... We base our relation with the created order on the principle of loving them because of their Creator” (Gülen 2003: 146-7).

6. Ethics of the Other: Humility and Service

Another important aspect of Gülen’s construction of the Other has to do with the construction of the self, for we see the Other through ourselves. How does Gülen’s worldview lead to humility and regulates his relationship with the Other?

For Gülen “*lâ ilâha illâllâh*,” the most fundamental and central statement for a Muslim, once understood and internalized correctly, leads necessarily to humility (Gülen 2002d: 112-9). This statement announces the absolute dependence of the self on God. The self who is absolutely dependent on a higher being cannot *not* be humble. Everything which can be categorized as good comes from God and everything which can be categorized as evil results from our own actions. To use an analogy, light filling the day cannot be attributed to us, although we benefit from it and enjoy it. But if we choose to close our eyes, we will be the primary cause of the darkness in which we will find ourselves. Opening the eyes however is not the cause of light, it can only be the cause our benefiting from light. Darkness can be attributed to human volitional act, but light cannot. In this theological reasoning you can see that good is primarily attributed to God, and evil to humans. If we do not play a role in acquiring good then there is no reason to have false pride. But this is also to say that human beings should recognise the good in their lives and

should be thankful. Thankfulness and humility are the correct answer, not vanity (Gülen 2013: 177-84).

Gülen bolsters his understanding of absolute humility before God by reading such verses as “servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk on the earth humbly” (Qur’an 25: 63) He frequently turns to the Prophet’s life for evidence of the beauty of humility (Gülen 2002e). Once humility is established it would be absurd to judge the Other. The accountability is for God only.

Moreover, when we humble ourselves for God, we necessarily elevate the Other. Here is the crucial contribution of the concept of humility in terms of constructing the Other. By lowering one’s ego before God and thus the Other one perceives the Other as an object of respect. Hence, he writes that a humble man “recognizes all of God’s servants to be nobler than him and gives them his utmost respect” (Gülen 2002b: 32-3).

All of the preceding motives culminate in one of the most basic principles of Gülen’s ethical teaching: living for the Other. He holds that “true virtue is to live for the sake of others” This altruistic way of life is what truly establishes an authentic relationship between humanity and God. “In service our lives are directed towards God and through Him they touch everyone and everything.” Serving God is to maintain between man and nature and to be “in unison with the creation.” Serving God is tantamount to serving people. A true believer “loves everyone and everything for God’s sake...he suffers so that other may not suffer.” This way of life leads to contentment that comes from “sharing the joy of the other and freeing them from suffering” (Gülen 2002b: 20, 21, 95-6, 102).

Conclusion

There is no absolute Other in Gülen’s thought. He starts with the assumption of the Other, but subsequently transforms it, by drawing on the above mentioned practical, metaphysical, spiritual, and ethical principles, into a fellow, a co-healer, a sacred being towards which love, respect, humility, and service is the proper stance. The existence of diversity, thus the Other, is inescapable from the perspective of the divine purposes and, moreover, is a blessing. The most essential thing to recognize is the profound inwardness and inner potential of humanity in one’s own being and in the Other, in accordance with such Qur’anic teachings as the “divine breath” within us and “vicegerency” of man/woman. Gülen’s metaphysical perspective sees the One behind the appearance of multiplicity. Seeing the world as such offers novel possibilities for the construction of an ethics of coexistence and collaboration from an Islamic perspective. His call for *unity-in-diversity* and *diversity-in-unity* is a natural extension of these teachings.

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The Church of Sweden as a (Contested) Actor in a Multi-religious Society: A Case Study of the Imam Debate in Public and Church Media

Johan Liljestrand

Sweden can be characterised as a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. One of the most prominent actors in interreligious relations is the Church of Sweden. However, such involvement is also open to criticism, both within the church and in public debate. Different expectations concerning cooperation with the Swedish Muslim community became visible in the public media and in the national church media when a congregation in Stockholm engaged an imam for a multi-religious youth project. This paper examines the arguments relating to the mission of the church as a church for Swedish people in a pluralistic society, and discusses some of the consequences of these arguments for interreligious relations and dialogue. The material is based on articles published in Swedish public media and Swedish church media between March and September, 2011. The debate, analysed through five sub-themes, focuses on the borders of what should be included and excluded by a national church in a multi-religious society and the national church's responsibility for caring for religious minorities. The paper concludes with a discussion about issues of power regarding the church as an initiator of dialogue, and how different actors are represented in the media.

Keywords: National Church, the Church of Sweden, the Media Debate, Arguments, Muslims, Young

Introduction

Like most other European countries Sweden can be characterised as a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. This is a relatively new phenomenon, however, and does not reflect the country's religious history as a whole. The transition from a somewhat homogenous Christian culture to a (partly secularised) multi-religious society, mainly through immigration, into a heterogeneous one is, as might be expected, not without social tensions.¹ A prominent actor that promotes tolerance and the inclusion of religious minorities is the Church of Sweden, which once

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1 Although Swedes are generally positive towards immigrants, about 5% have extremely negative attitudes. In particular, the nationalist party 'The Sweden Democrats' seem to have a firm position in the Swedish Parliament. Attitudes to religion are more complicated, however; as many as 20% of all respondents show a strong resistance to wearing any kind of veil (Mella et al. 2011).

represented a homogenous Lutheran society. This new role of the national church is replicated in other countries too (Pratt & Göb 2013; von der Lippe 2012; Amos 2010). For example, in a publication concerning church ceremonies in a multi-religious context, bishops in the Church of Sweden wrote: 'Being a national church means living in dialogue with people, regardless of whether they are members of the church or not. The mission is to serve those who live in the parish.' (2012, 18)

In its official documents, the national church of Sweden describes itself as an evangelical Lutheran church for people in Sweden. Defining itself as a Swedish Lutheran community also implies a potential tension within the Church of Sweden. Here, the assignment is to work in the interest of its members, 66% of the population, *and* to support and cooperate with religious minorities in the neighbourhood. The interreligious involvement of the church is also subject to criticism and debate, both within the church and from the greater public. When the issue of cooperation with the Swedish Muslim community became visible in the national church, and subsequently in the public (secular) media, different expectations were expressed, and especially so when Sofia Church in Stockholm decided to engage an imam for a multi-religious youth project. The idea was that the imam would support the Muslim youth involved in the project and give an example of interreligious cooperation with the parish priest, the other leader of the project. As the dialogue project was aimed at interreligious cooperation and community building at the grassroots level, it can theoretically be labelled as diapraxis (Rasmussen 1988), or as working together side-by-side (Sacks 2007). Involving the imam was motivated with reference to the practical work that was organised as a church sponsored project. Interreligious discussions between religious community leaders, arranged on special demarcated occasions, thus reflected the daily work arranged in the neighbourhood by the church of Sweden.

The 'imam debate' was triggered when Sofia Church announced on their website the news that an imam was being employed for the first time in the Church of Sweden's history. This imam debate can be seen as a critical incident that made the internal and external tensions around the role of the church in an interreligious society visible. The debate also highlights the presence of 'internal' religious issues in the public space as a topic of national public concern. As the majority of Swedes are members of the Church of Sweden, public media incidents like this one illustrate how the Church of Sweden becomes part of the public debate, and that it is not possible to maintain a sharp division between the religious and the secular public sphere (Casanova 1994; Axner 2013).

This paper's purpose is to examine the arguments relating to the mission of the church as a church for Swedish people in a pluralistic society, and to discuss some of the consequences of these arguments for interreligious relations and dialogue.

After a brief introduction of Western European churches, Islam and the role of the media, I then describe the data and methods used in this study. The results are presented under five separate headings and are followed by a discussion section.

Christian-Muslim Relations in Churches and the Media Churches often assume roles as both partner and host in interreligious encounters. The Church of Sweden is not unique in its engagement with interreligious dialogue with Muslim communities (e.g., Leirvik 2003; Pratt 2013; Pratt & Göb 2013; Sudworth 2009; 2013). Pratt & Göb describe the situation in Germany in terms of the churches 'keeping up a stronger position in dialogue' due to their infrastructural resources and their assumed role in being a mediator between Islamic communities and the secular society (Pratt & Göb 2013, 53). The self-understanding of both the Anglican Church and the Church of Sweden is their assignment to both be present and to engage with all who live in the neighbourhood (Amos 2010, 187; Ippgrave 2014; Anglican Community Network 2008, 10; Porvoo Communion 2003, 3). The Swedish church's role in taking responsibility for organised encounters was documented by Halvarsson (2012) in field studies that were undertaken in the Stockholm area.

Egnell (2008), a scholar of theology and the head of the Stockholm Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, affirms the view that the Church of Sweden has a responsibility for all of the people residing in the country and addresses the issue of paternalism. According to Egnell, taking responsibility for religious minorities is not without its complexities. A prerequisite for avoiding paternalism is that religious minorities take the initiative for cooperation themselves. In a field study, Roald (2002) shows that dialogue initiatives from the majority church risk hegemonising the encounters, e.g., by highlighting certain issues at the cost of others.

The notion of responsibility that is connected to neighbourhood is a complex issue that can also have an impact on public and national church media. The involvement of the Church of England in inter-Muslim and Christian relations has been addressed by e.g., Amos (2010). Archbishop Rowan Williams' attempt to recognise Sharia as a legitimate legal practice in multi-religious England led to strong media reactions. Such reactions, described in terms of 'sensational responses' (Amos 2010, 184), can be understood in terms of the Anglican Church being seen as part of the national consciousness of the British people. Connections between a national church and the national consciousness are also prevalent in other Western European countries (Pratt & Göb 2013; Leirvik 2003), and the media play a role in enacting such issues. The visibility of religion in the public sphere seems to be connected to critical incidents, where, according to some prominent groups, national churches do not live up to expectations concerning the role of the church in a pluralistic society.

The media representation of Christian-Muslim relations not only means talking about these relations, but should thus also be seen as part of the actual relations (Iskander 2012). However, the space for media participation does not always seem to be equally distributed. Generally, the debate about religion in the Swedish media is dominated by the national church.² One dimension of such national concern is the potential for the Church of Sweden to become the subject of public debate (Axner 2013, p. 122). The relationships between the national church and different views of nationality and national responsibility and the Church of Sweden's links with the most prominent media, provide a background to the imam debate.

Data and Methods

The material used in the study is based on articles published in Swedish public media and in the Swedish Church newspaper between March and September, 2011. The articles were found using 'Retriver', a database that is designed to search the Swedish media. The criteria for selection are explicit or implicit references to the youth project that was initiated by Sofia Church in Stockholm. Blogs and commentary spots on the Internet are not included, however. All the articles are written by members of the clergy of the Church of Sweden, except for the editorials and one article in the Swedish Church newspaper.

The debate was initiated by Annika Borg, a priest with a Ph.D. in systematic theology who is a member of the 'Christian Opinion' think-tank on Newsmill, eight days before the first indications appeared in the public media. The debate in the public media is represented by six contributions, three of which emanate from the 'Christian Opinion' think-tank. All the contributions, including the three editorials, were published in the provincial press in the area known as the Swedish Bible Belt. The material used in this paper is presented below and is categorised as follows:

2 Axner shows that when religious issues are debated in the Swedish public media, operationalised by the three largest national newspapers, representatives of the Church of Sweden dominate the number of contributions (42%), while Muslim contributors contribute significantly less (16%; Axner 2013, p. 82). However, one might add that this figure is not necessarily low in relation to the number of Muslims in Sweden.

Debate articles in the public media	Editorials	The Swedish Church newspaper: The identity of the church
13-03-2011, Svenska Dagbladet	09-03-2011, Västervikstidningen	23-08-2011
16-03-2011, Aftonbladet	15-03-2011, Smålandsposten	31-08-2011
18-03-2011, Göteborgsposten	16-03-2011, Oskarshamnstidningen	07-09-2011a
18-03-2011, Svenska Dagbladet		07-09-2011b
18-03-2011, Svenska Dagbladet		21-09-2011
		28-09-2011

The media articles were printed and key sentences were identified, noted and commented on using analytic memos. Inter-textual links, such as debate-threads/references, were noted in order to locate the interjections in the context of other interjections. As the arguments presented support a certain position (Kroon 2001), the focus is on the analysis of these arguments. A total of five main themes were discerned in the analysis.

The Imam Debate

In the debate, the tensions within the Church of Sweden as a 'host' for dialogue with religious minorities, and with Muslims in particular, become increasingly visible. The debate is presented according to the following themes: leaders vs. ordinary people, the significance of modern values, the responsibilities of other religions, ambiguities in the identity of the church, and the depiction of young people in the church. All the sections conclude with a short analytical comment.

Leaders vs. Ordinary People

One of the major themes raised by critics concerns the legitimacy of church leaders and their relations with ordinary church members. In their opening article, published in Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), Borg and Andersson state that the decision to hire an imam to work with the interreligious youth project is not just a local matter for the Sofia Church in Stockholm, but one for all of the members of the Church of Sweden. 'The decision has been strongly criticised by the members of the church. However, this contestation has been regarded as an expression of Islamophobia.' (SvD 18-03-2011)

Ola Mårtensson, in *Västervikstidningen*, claims that its size and special status makes the church's decision relevant for 'the rest of us'; the subscriptions paid by its members should not be used to finance Muslim missionary activity. In addition to the SvD debate, Borg initiated a second debate five months later in the Swedish Church newspaper. This contribution was published as a direct response to a critical article (17-08-2011) by Helena Eklund, a priest who points to the Church of Sweden being too heavily focused on the positive sides of the Muslim presence in Sweden. Although Borg and Hugo, the latter another member of the think tank, do not explicitly subscribe to this argument, they view Eklund's contribution as an 'important opinion piece'. Hugo and Borg write that there is a tension between church members and those in power in the church concerning Christian identity and support for western values. 'When the Church of Sweden is perceived as putting another religion at the forefront, many wonder what the church stands for. It is a relevant question.' (KT 23-08-2011)

However, the ways in which contributions from ordinary people are depicted differ among the defenders of the decision. In his response to the first interjection in *Svenska Dagbladet*, Bo Larsson, the Diocesan Dean in Stockholm, comments on the Islamophobic contributions that followed Borg and Andersson's article.

Their article was published in SvD.se on 13/3 and when this was written over 1,100 comments were published, many of which are Islamophobic. (...) their sweeping manner of writing has instead opened up all the floodgates of intolerance and started a verbal web-war. (SvD 18-03-2011)

Here, Larson reads Borg and Andersson's article as being a critique of the church being 'populist', in the sense that the faith of the church is unimportant to the leadership that is responsible for the decision (SvD 18-03-2011). This is a critique that he rejects. In their final retort, Borg and Andersson state that Larsson dismisses the entire debate found in the web-comments and blogs. Members of the think-tank thus position themselves as the representatives of the ordinary church people, and they take issue with the opinions of its leaders. Likewise, the editorial also opposes the leadership policy of the church and sides with the interests of ordinary church members ('the rest of us').

In the first and the final responses, the web-commentaries are depicted in two contrasting ways: as a manifestation of the will of ordinary people and church members, and as an expression of more or less xenophobic reactions to Borg and Andersson's article. The critics' references to the voices of common church people (cf. Leirvik 2003) can be compared with those who defend the church's promotion of the integration of the Muslim minority, despite the intolerant voices resisting integration as being one of the assignments of the Church of Sweden. The Church

of Sweden, as a church 'of the people', thus seems to mean different things to the critics and the defenders: a church that embraces and supports different 'peoples' living in Sweden, rather than a church that relies on the liberal and Christian values that are seemingly confirmed by the grassroots. Notions of dialogue corresponding to diapraxis, or dialogue as being side-by-side, may thus potentially highlight controversies in the public space, because the church's engagement may require arguments that relate to the religious minorities in its neighbourhood, and whether or not the national church should embrace the perspectives of these minorities. Interestingly, the reactions in the social media are referred to by the critics as being the voice of the people, which could be seen as a strategy to bring the public media into touch with the everyday opinions of those ordinary people who are unable to participate in the public debate, thus legitimising a position that represents the 'ordinary' people as being against the élite of the church.

The Significance of Modern Values

The critics also highlight the strong connection between modern liberal values and the Church of Sweden, as opposed to non-liberal values. Borg and Andersson state that liberal values in regard to women's rights and homosexuals must be safeguarded. 'Are Christianity and Islam the same thing? Does the Imam bless homosexuals? Does he [i.e., the Imam] affirm women priests?' (SvD 18-03-2011)

In an article published in *Göteborgsposten*, Andersson, who is represented as an equality coordinator, refers to an incident where women were excluded from Muslim prayers. In the article, Andersson positions herself as part of the 'we' who have questioned this decision, and comments on the expected allegations of Islamophobia. Bo Larsson, in his retort, claims that the project aims to promote social integration and to counteract racism.

An assembly in the Church of Sweden has employed an imam part-time for nine months in order to work together with a priest in the Church of Sweden and, on equal terms, to work on a project (...) [that] intends to resist xenophobia and racism and also to show how religion can be a tool for integration. (SvD 18-03-2011)

Through connecting with values like tolerance and integration, Larsson relies on modern liberal plural values that are based on equality, but also stresses the need to include people, regardless of their possible views on women's rights and gay rights. A similar vindication was formulated by the vicar and the chairman of the local church council, Ulfvenbrand & Forsell, who write that: 'The church should express a faith that does not violate others' beliefs, that respects the equal value of everyone and that God does not differentiate between people.' (*Aftonbladet* 16-03-2011)

The defenders thus do not refer to the rights of gay people and women in particular, but rely on another (liberal) discourse, that is, the inclusion of believers who do not share the values that were mentioned by Borg and Andersson. Furthermore, arguments claiming that the national church should not compromise its own western values and the basic values of equality seems to presuppose that modern values are juxtaposed against traditional, non-modern values that are represented by Islam. The hesitation of the domestic church in relation to Muslim readiness to accept western values was noted by Pratt & Göb (2013, p. 53). When common work (diapraxis) is arranged in a long-term project, concerns about the lack of a common base for (modern) values are triggered. On the other hand, the notion that the church is a church for the people, including its minorities, who reside within geographical Sweden seems to correspond with a pluralistic notion of liberalism that is connected to the freedom of religion. One may add that the defenders do not stop at that point, but also hold the view that the national church has a responsibility to promote social cohesion.

Responsibility for Other Religions

The defenders of the decision to engage the imam claim that the Church of Sweden, as a national church, has a responsibility to support religious minorities and to promote their integration into society. As Pratt & Göb (2013) note in the German context, churches are often expected to be a bridge between Muslim communities and the state. In *Aftonbladet*, Ulfvenbrand & Forsell write that, as the largest religious community in Sweden, the church has a responsibility to contribute to organised encounters between people of different faiths:

By being the largest community in the country, the Church of Sweden has a responsibility not only for its own activities but also to support the possibilities for other believing people to be heard, to exercise their religion and to gain access to such venues that promote understanding and respect for the Other. (*Aftonbladet* 16-03-2011)

The reason for the employment of the imam, which was presented as being project-based and temporary, was to support young Muslims in such encounters. Ulfvenbrand & Forsell also state that decisions like this are allowed for in the church regulations, even though the imam does not belong to the Lutheran faith. As employers, they have therefore made a legitimate decision. The role of the Church of Sweden in being responsible for religious minorities is strongly supported by Öhagen, a member of the Church of Sweden clergy, who refers to the concept of residence (Chapter 2§1). She quotes: 'The assembly has a responsibility for church activities concerning everyone residing in the parish.' Öhagen adds: 'Besides safeguarding the four main undertakings of church services, education, welfare and

mission, every assembly should ask itself how it can support those who live, reside and appear in it .' (Kyrkans tidning 07-09-2011)

According to Öhagen, this concept applies to people who live in the same geographical space (cf. the bishops' statement mentioned above), i.e., the territory connected to the local church. In this case, the Church of Sweden has both the possibility and the responsibility to arrange encounters between Muslim and Christian youth, because Fryshuset – an organisation that aims to empower different groups of youths and to offer them a meeting place, and where the project was taking place, in the Sofia Church area, the organisation employed the imam.

The critics Hugo and Borg ask, rhetorically, whether the debaters regard the Church of Sweden as an umbrella organisation for different religions: 'the kind big brother who has to take care of others' (Kyrkans tidning 07-09-2011). Two days after the publication of Ulfvenbrand & Forsell's article, Borg and Andersson responded to Larsson by commenting on the role of the church vis-à-vis the state. The argument, they write, that the Church of Sweden is a majority denomination seems to be based on the self-definition of a church that belongs to the state (a relationship that ended in 2000), although the function of providing the requirements for the practising of their religion belongs to the state, not to the Church of Sweden. Borg and Andersson also ask whether representatives of other religions are really in favour of being embraced by the Church of Sweden.

The argument that the national church has a responsibility for immigrant religious minorities seem to be based on the assumption that religious groups share the interests of the Church of Sweden and see themselves as being in need of the resources that are provided by the national church. The arguments highlight questions around whether the Church of Sweden should act from a responsibility that is based on territory, i.e., in part acting like the (national) state, or if the assignment of the church should be in accordance with traditional Lutheran doctrines. If the latter alternative is the case, decisions such as the employment of representatives of religions other than the evangelical Lutheran one would probably be unintelligible. When defenders of the project rely on principles like the concept of residence, the role of the national church becomes similar to that of the state, or the public social sector, both of which have geographical territory as their point of departure. As long as people's needs are not defined in terms of their belonging to religious communities other than the Swedish church, this is unlikely to be controversial. However, when both religiosity and non-Christian identities become part of the church's mission and daily work, the borders of what the church is able to do trigger controversy.

The Meaning of Christian Identity

The debate in *Kyrkans tidning* labelled: ‘The identity of the church’, echoes the concept of ‘identity’ that had previously been used by Borg and Andersson in their initial contribution to *Svenska Dagbladet*, five month earlier. In this initial contribution they claimed that:

Freedom of action and different views under the vault of the church are something that most people would affirm, but when the church does not even have enough *identity* to recognise religions with their belief systems, it is confusing for everyone. (SvD 13-03-2011) [italics by the author]

The critique of being unfaithful to its assignment is also visible in the editorials. Signature AT in *Oskarshamnstidningen* claims that the church is becoming more and more ‘politicised’ and that this tendency is connected to its current loss of members. *Smålandsposten* writes that the initiative breaks the law in regard to the management of its mission, and that church fees are used for the wrong purposes. Five month later, a debate addressing the identity of the Church of Sweden started in *Kyrkans tidning*. Hugo and Borg called for a dialogue about the identity of the church by referring to two interreligious church projects in Stockholm, one of which was the one that employed the imam.

The first reply comes from Bäckström, who connects identity to the good examples of Jesus. Bäckström writes that cooperative projects with other religions can be compared with how Jesus acted towards others in the gospels; the initiative to hire the imam for the youth project could therefore count as an expression of a Christian identity (*Kyrkans tidning* 31-08-2011). A student of theology, Lina Tovar, distinguishes between Christian dogmas as a point of departure, and a notion of identity that develops in relation to others (*Kyrkans tidning* 14-09-2011). The two people who are responsible for the youth project, the priest and the imam, argue along the same lines. Identity should not, according to Rydinger and Tawalabe, be seen as something that is fixed, but as being something that is dependent on co-play, and that there is support for this in both the Gospels and the Qur’an. ‘Religious identity is not something that arises from a fixed and completed form (...) Identity is something that is constituted and reconstituted in an ongoing process.’ (*Kyrkans tidning* 21-09-2011)

The concept of ‘identity’ is thus used from different perspectives. The critics take their point of departure from dogma (‘belief systems’), whereas the defenders refer to Christians’ relations with non-Christians as an ongoing process. The idea that identity develops through encounters with different others, and that identity is relational and open (cf. Mead 1913) and can be juxtaposed against a fixed identity, is supported by examples from the Gospels and, according to the imam employed

on the project, from the Qur'an.

The argument that the national church lacks theological identity for its own members seems further to presuppose that (more or less) traditional Christian belief corresponds to the beliefs of the members of the church. Representatives who promote interreligious initiative claim that values like social integration should be promoted by the church, and they seem to rely on the assumption that the mission of the church is not to preach, but to do good things. Connected to this is the reference to Jesus as a model, i.e., Christian dogma is subordinated to the social dimension of the gospels. The aim to do good things and not to preach the Gospel also seems to be well suited to the principle of being present and engaging with everyone who resides in the neighbourhood. As already hinted, the notion of a church with responsibility for neighbourhoods that are located in Swedish territory seems to correspond to a notion of dialogue in terms of diapraxis. If the motive is to provide resources for social work, not teaching, the identity of the church will not be found in a personal faith. On the other hand, the church is expected to be present and to be recognised as a vital part of Swedish society.

The Depiction of Young People in the Church

The initiative to engage the imam was connected to the implementation of a youth project that hosted a number of Christian and Muslim youths. The needs of the youths are recurrently referred to in the debate. The issues presented above are thus projected onto the needs of the young people who participated in the project. Both the critics and the defenders underline that the leaders of the project serve as models, albeit with different consequences. What impact will a 'male' imam, representing patriarchal non-modern values, have on a project incorporated in the Church of Sweden? 'The question about who the male imam in the assembly of Sofia will represent is particularly important because it concerns work among youths. From which value base do we have a conversation with youth?' (Borg and Andersson SvD 18-03-2011)

According to Öhagen, the youth project allows young people to see a priest and an imam working side by side. By using this image of cooperation, she depicts the leaders as being good models for young people. The responsibility of the national church to promote integration in Sweden becomes visible when Ulfvenbrand & Forsell state that young people feel lost and need a space for encounters, conversations and reflection (Aftonbladet 16-03-2011). Larsson says that the motivation for the decision was that the imam would be: '(...) one of two equal parts in a concrete work that wants to address the fact that many youth feel lost, not least in their religious identity.' (SvD 18-03-2011)

The above approaches to the youth in the project can be captured by the notion of the youth as a 'space for projection', which accords to how the Church of Sweden should act in interreligious matters. The young participants in the project are positioned as being subordinate to the policies of the Church of Sweden. Interreligious work with youth seems to be based on the initiatives of the responsible 'adults' in the church and is strongly connected to issues concerning the role of the Church as a national religious institution. However, another perspective is represented by the leaders of the project. Rydinger and Tawalabe write about the lack of natural venues and say that the youth are trained to listen to each other in the youth project: 'In our work at Fryshuset the point of departure is that every young person will have an opportunity to cultivate and formulate their identity in interfaith work with others.' (Kyrkans tidning 21-09-2011)

The depiction of the young people as being dependent on the goals of the project seems to be based on the assumption of the young people as being 'not-yets', i.e., still in need of the guidance of adults (Grannäs 2011). When the youth are seen through the lens of church policy, agency is mainly attributed to the Church of Sweden as a national institution. The perspective highlighting the initiatives of the youth is presented by the leaders themselves, one of whom is the 'object' of the debate. The issue of the role of the Church of Sweden in relation to Islam and religious minorities is thus connected to the way that dialogue projects are depicted in terms of who will count as the main actor(s) embodying this project. When the church's role as a mediator for integration or social cohesion is highlighted, the members of the dialogue project are seen from a top-down perspective. On the one hand, the project is intended as a small-scale (cf. Sacks 2007, p. 181) grassroots project that is based on voluntary membership; on the other, the project was announced on the church's website with a view to making it public. When the project became public and thus mediatised, the perspectives of the youth seemed to vanish, while those of the church, in its role as a national institution, were highlighted.

Discussion

Three themes stand out in the analysis of this debate: dialogue as continuing practical work or diapraxis, the responsibility of the church for religious minorities, and the mediatisation of the interreligious project into a public matter. In this part of the paper I will discuss these themes further. Firstly, interreligious dialogue is not understood as being an activity that is temporal and that only includes the leaders of the religious communities. Instead, interreligious activities are understood in terms of different religious groups living together under equal conditions. For the initiators, equal conditions imply the equal representation of religious leaders. However, in such an arrangement the majority Church of Sweden has access to more resources than the Muslim community does.

As long as dialogue is mainly understood as being made up of temporal theological discussions between religious leaders, controversial issues like this may not be relevant. The notion, also shared by other national churches (e.g., Ipgrave 2014), that the churches have 'national' responsibilities, as majority churches, towards local neighbourhoods, thus becomes an argument for the project's defenders. However, the borders of what should be included *in* the Church of Sweden are also being contested. This tension within the Church of Sweden is connected to its compound role of being both a partner *and* a host for interreligious encounters. As Axner (2013) shows, issues concerning the Church of Sweden are common themes when religion becomes a topic for public debate in Sweden.

The imam debate can be seen as being a critical media incident that highlights the role of the national church as a mediator for religious minorities in general, and for Muslims in particular. This mediating role includes dimensions such as nationality, identity and the public utility of the church. The critics claim that Christian and modern values can be seen as being a claim for national homogeneity, seemingly supported by the voices of 'ordinary people', who express distrust of the Church of Sweden as their 'Swedish' church. Svennungsson (2013) even suggests that many Swedish Lutherans now 'feel more akin to secular humanists and atheists than to religious people of other traditions' (p. 751).

The different notions of identity mirror the different approaches to the ways that 'national' is understood in the Church of Sweden: as something that is already established, or as something to be further developed through encounter with religious minorities within the territory of the church. It seems as though both the critics of the decision and its defenders rely on modern, liberal values in order to define of what this identity consists. From a theological perspective, we might ask what counts as a liberal, modern theology. Is it plurality and openness towards groups with a non-western heritage? Or, does it mean declaring firm expectations from other ethnic groups with a non-western heritage concerning the rights of women, LGBT persons, etc? The examples given by the critics with regard to non-modern values are not attributed to the imam, as a leader of the project. However, the aim to modernise the Muslim community can also be found among the defenders of the project. The employment of a (certain) imam in the national Church of Sweden could be seen as being an act of normalisation performed by the religious majority, and which can be interpreted as the Church of Sweden aiming to liberalise the Muslim community by acting as a bridge between religious minorities and the majority society. One side of this is that the (proper?) guidance of Muslim youth becomes a matter, and a responsibility, for the Church of Sweden. When diapraxis becomes part of organised and church sponsored work, with the church as the employer, dialogue activities are integrated into the agenda of the church and its policies.

Interreligious projects that are organised and funded by the church will thus always involve power relations, even if the projects are labelled as *interreligious* projects and aim at a symmetrical, equal relationship. It is also about how interreligious projects are depicted in relation to the subjects who participate in them. When the project became public and was announced on the Sofia Church's website, a price was paid. If young people are described as being lost, or as victims of manipulation, they may lose their ability to act and to make a difference in the project, despite it being funded by the church as an institution that has the necessary resources and good intentions. The voices of the youth or of Muslims seem to be more or less absent from the debate, with the exception of the voice of the imam, who was the co-writer of one of the contributions. If the media facilitated social bonding between the majority and minorities, the voices of religious minorities would be an integral part of this public conversation.

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- Svenska Dagbladet 13/03/2011 En kyrka i fritt fall [A church in free fall] Borg, A. & Andersson, J.
- Svenska Dagbladet 18/03/2011 Naivt att tro att en anställd imam skapar gränslöshet [Naive to think that an employed imam would eliminate borders] Larsson, B.
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The Polish Round Table 1989: Negotiating the Revolution

Andrzej M. Szewczak

The catastrophe and terror in the recent history of the Old Continent have precipitated unprecedented socio-political change witnessed, and experienced, by three generations of central-eastern Europeans. The collective political conscience of the continent was forged in the reconciliation of former belligerents, the dismantling of barriers assumed by newly broken alliances, and the construction of supranational structures of democracy. This required the work and sacrifice of a generation, living out shifting state ideologies; people who had to forego former prejudices and engage in a new, fluid dialogue, which had been formerly discouraged and repressed. Here, I reflect upon how the inauguration of a new, political dialogue at the executive level helped to establish today's democratic, pluralist, and markedly stable, Polish state.

For many Europeans, the fall of the Berlin Wall is the most recognisable symbol of democratic change in the last century. The image of thousands of Germans demolishing the literal manifestation of the political iron curtain became immediately associated with the dissolution of the Communist Bloc. Heavily tinted by the confused existence of post-war Germany, these indisputably powerful scenes helped the identity of the newly re-unified country to crystallise. East of the Oder, where the collapse of the old world order began, the Polish public had already started to build a narrative of its own democratic emancipation – based on the Round Table Agreement, April 1989.

The Communist Bloc has been crumbling for most of the 80's and the destruction of the Wall in November 1989 was a visible culmination of that deterioration. The decisive blows to the system were dealt by its own people, on the wave of social and economic unrest in the second half of the decade. The events of 1989 in Berlin were a direct consequence of the events in Poland. The Round Table Agreement was a result of a carefully orchestrated series of meetings between the Communist government of the People's Republic of Poland and the democratic opposition. These began with an air of national and historical import, in front of the state

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television cameras, on 6th February 1989.

The representatives of the Polish government sat with the leaders of the then illegal opposition movement 'Solidarity', addressing the issues of growing social discontent in the country. The preceding year of 1988 saw a significant number of strikes and demonstrations, with thousands of Poles taking to the streets in protest against galloping inflation, food rationing and the suppression of the civic freedoms. Initially, the government considered calling for a state of national emergency and a clampdown on all political discourse. However, the extent and severity of the strikes forced those at the helm to approach the leaders of the opposition in search for a more measured solution. This attempt at establishing communication was unprecedented.

A similar political crisis nine years earlier led to the introduction of the martial law, in full secret support and guidance from the Soviet Union. Between December 1981 and July 1983 the members of Solidarity were jailed, and the streets were taken over by thousands of soldiers in heavily armed vehicles. The sealing of the country's borders, strict curfew, interception of telephone lines, postal censorship and brutal repression of dissent that ensued, plunged the country into a deep recession, aggravated by the general malaise of the disillusioned Polish society and harsh economic sanctions from the West. The martial law was viewed as a catastrophic failure even by the upper echelons of the Communist government and nobody in the country wanted to see this repeated. As a consequence, dialogue between the government and the opposition was sought.

On 31st August 1988, Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa met with the Minister of the Interior of the People's Republic of Poland, general Czesław Kiszczak. The General Secretary of the Polish Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Bronisław Dąbrowski, served as mediator. He was proposed by Solidarity and accepted by the Communists – a notable concession, indicative of either the decreasing power of their negotiating position *or* a genuine desire for non-partisan, meaningful dialogue. The meeting, held in absolute secrecy, led to Kiszczak's potential promise of the legalisation of Solidarity in exchange for Wałęsa's pledge to put an end to demonstrations led by the members of his organisation. They decided that the exact terms of the agreement would be discussed at a later session of talks – the Round Table talks – at the Namiestnikowski Palace in Warsaw, where the Polish Council of Ministers convened. Both sides agreed that political dialogue was necessary, though it took four more months of heated discourse, as well as a change in party leadership, before the talks could finally commence.

For the purpose of the televised opening and the closing of the sessions, the government ordered a construction of a special round table. This table was to

be installed in the main chamber of the palace to accommodate the delegates of the opposition and governmental factions. It was of simple, practical design, complimenting the frugal aesthetic of the time. Measuring 25 feet in diameter, it could seat 56 people and was given a respectable, deep-brown finish – merely a thin layer of oak veneer glued onto thick chipboard. The table was manufactured in 14 segments that join to form an empty circle inside, rather than a full disc – not a detail exceeding the bare minimum in the strictly rationed economy. Such was the haste with which the table was assembled that the craftsmen who made it did not even varnish its underside.

Creating an environment conducive to dialogue required careful stage design and both sides were acutely aware of this. The building of consensus is always preceded by the coming-down and reaching-out of all involved sides. As well as vast political transformation, Poland was in desperate need of new props, replacing those hastily disposed of; symbols of the dawning new order. The choice of a round table as the centrepiece for this televised spectacle sent an unambiguous message. This item of custom-made furniture became synonymous with the arrival of democracy, by means of dialogue, in Poland. Nowadays the table is displayed in Warsaw behind glass, for tourists to view and perhaps reflect on.

Yet, the symbolic parity of the Round Table was more of an illusion. In reality the members of the opposition remained targets for the secret service, and they were closely monitored throughout the duration of the talks. Their phones were tapped; clearly, one side had more access to the dialogue than the other. There were even attempts of sabotage carried out by agents of the ruling party, determined not to lose a firm and total grip on the situation. The leaders of the People's Republic of Poland did not want to upturn the Communist order in the country and wanted to rather incorporate Solidarity into the existing structures of power in Poland. Did they wish to listen to the other voice, or merely assimilate it? The answer is clear. Over the course of the talks the first democratic election was decided to be held in July 1989, with a quota system in place to guarantee seats for candidates from, or supported by, the ruling party. The government was eventually forced to acknowledge Solidarity's legitimacy – a concession not so willingly given, as had been implied in the earlier talks.

The elections of 1989, although formally won by the Communists because of the stipulation of the electoral system, exposed the truth of the total lack of public support for the regime. The state's control of the situation in the county was in fast decline. Additionally, the influence of the USSR on the politics of Poland was becoming gradually less pronounced, due to the Soviets' preoccupation with their own, internal problems. With dwindling support from Moscow, the Communists became quickly and suddenly aware of the precariousness of their own situation.

The elections, rather than unify the two fronts, brought about a parliamentary stalemate that lasted until September, when it was finally decided that Solidarity alone would be forming a minority government, with the reluctant support of their opponents.

Throughout that year, the Eastern Bloc was swept by a wave of similar events, bringing peaceful transitions of power to non-Communists in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Bulgaria. Success of Poland's Round Table served as the model for talks held in these countries and meant that political revolutions claimed no victims. By taking up the Polish model of dialogue, all managed to avoid the bloodbath that was the revolution in Romania, where domestic conflict, borne in the political climate impervious to all discourse, claimed over a thousand lives. Among the dead were the country's dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, and his wife Elena. The two were apprehended when trying to flee the country, and hastily put before a drumhead military tribunal on the charges of genocide and crimes against the Romanian nation. These were the two last people to have been executed in Romania. They died on Christmas day 1989, two hours after their trial began. In every other country of the Eastern Bloc, no one died as a consequence of the political turmoil in that year.

When the Poles elected Lech Wałęsa as President, a year after the Round Table talks, the new political fate of the country seemed firmly sealed. As time progressed, the Round Table became a by-word for the process of Poland's transition to democracy. Inasmuch as the status of that symbol remains undisputed, the historical assessment of the events has been a topic of heated debate ever since. The event shaped the political scene in modern Poland, as many of the people who were closely involved in the overthrowing of the regime have been in and out of power in the 26 years that passed. Political motivations of the talks' organisers have been questioned by some, the extent to which the both sides had to compromise has been used freely to undermine credentials, and responsibility over the effects of the talks has been thrown to and fro – as abruptly as the partisan carousel has turned between consecutive elections. The legitimacy of the dialogue of the Round Table talks, and the integrity of its content, is questionable. However, what remains uncontested is the pivotal role that the talks played in enabling any debate to be possible in the first place.

BOOK REVIEW

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Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters,

Edited by Paul Hedges,

London: Bloomsbury Academic; 2015

Paperback, 242 pages, £64.99 / £45.49, ISBN: 9781472588555

This book is a comprehensive contribution to the literature on Christian-Muslim relations and interfaith dialogue. It gives a variety of perspectives on the past and present of dialogues between adherents of Abrahamic faiths, ranging from Jewish views on dialogue (Reuven Firestone), interreligious dialogue and gender (Anne Hege Grung), peace-building through dialogue (Jean-Daniel Kabati) to 'Christian Responses to Islamophobia' (Ray Gaston), to name a few. The volume starts with a Preface by Leonard Swindler, a Foreword by Alan Race, and an Introduction by the volume's editor Paul Hedges. This is followed by individual articles by the contributors who provide the reader with different perspectives on the nature of 'Muslim-Christian encounters', as the title of the book indicates. Given the diversity of the contributing authors (across the spectrum of all three Abrahamic faiths and with academic, grassroots and ecumenical backgrounds), the book manages to provide the reader with historical context, contemporary discussions and interdisciplinary analyses following the general theme of interfaith relations, tensions and dialogue.

David Thomas' article provides us with an often detailed historical background of Christian-Muslim 'dialogues' or 'dialogue[s] before Dialogue' in the strictest sense, from the 7th century onwards, and demonstrates to the reader that historical encounters and exchanges between Christians and Muslims were much more vibrant and multifaceted than vast generalisations. Following Thomas, Paul Hedges provides a diverse contemporary context, but rather than merely evoking the 9/11 tragedy and taking things from there, he touches base by starting his evaluations from the collapse of the Ottoman State, and demonstrates like Thomas the diversity of the exchanges between Christians and Muslims. He acknowledges that boundaries between the 'Muslim world' and Christianity were often fluid, since Christians historically have been living in Muslim majority areas just as Muslims have been living in Europe for centuries. Reuven Firestone touches on the position of Judaism in relation to Islam and Christianity, and argues for ways in which adherents of each religion can engage in healthy 'trialogue' with the adherents of

the other Abrahamic paths. Firestone further holds that exclusivism and 'divine election' are integral to monotheistic faiths, and that it is still very possible to engage in dialogue by acknowledging the special position and universality of one's beliefs by avoiding reductive approaches regarding the beliefs of one's dialogue partner and appreciating the intrinsic value of other religious paths, referring to the views of two traditional scholars, Cusanus and Hame'iri, from the Christian and Jewish traditions.

Khaleel Mohammed explores the state of interfaith dialogue post-9/11 and emphasises intra-faith diversity, and discusses at length the handicaps of Muslim academics trained in traditional Islamic scholarship in engaging in inter-faith dialogue. Anne Hege Grung evaluates the gender factor in Christian-Muslim dialogues, discussing the issues of representation and lack of sufficient female representation in many religious traditions along the faith spectrum. Yusuff Jelili Amuda discusses a more specific subject, namely the use of religious principles of tolerance in dealing with conflict situations between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Jean-Daniel Kabati analyses peace-building efforts in the Democratic Republic of Congo through interfaith dialogue, while Douglas Pratt explores the future of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

Ray Gaston reflects on grassroots Christian responses to Islamophobia in Europe, and Clinton Bennett provides the reader with a postmodern analysis of Muslim-Christian dialogue after 9/11 in the US. Shirin Shafaie discusses the sensitive topic of nuclear proliferation and disarmament from Christian and Islamic perspectives. Finally, Clare Amos provides an ecumenical perspective on Christian-Muslim relations by discussing the Vatican and World Council of Church initiatives on interreligious dialogue and cooperation. By and large, the book's main strength is the diversity of the contributors and the variety of topics explored regarding the past, present and future of Christian-Muslim engagement. However, although the articles brought together in the volume provide multiple perspectives on Christian-Muslim dialogue, it is surprising that perennial philosophy is hardly mentioned at all, despite the fact that proponents and founders of perennial philosophy (such as Frithjof Schuon and Rene Guenon) have been highly vocal regarding interfaith dialogue with Islam and pluralism. Particularly Seyyed Hossein Nasr's contemporary perspectives on dialogue between adherents of Christianity and Islam without jeopardising one's beliefs and rejecting pluralism would have been complementary to Reuven Firestone's arguments regarding the possibility of respecting and valuing other faiths from a perspective of religious exclusivism. Furthermore, despite the fact that David Thomas gives a very balanced and detailed account of historical exchanges between Christian and Muslim communities, the Preface comes across as a generalised and reductionist view on the role of Islam and Muslims in the

strained relations with the Christian world. Finally, the present volume could have made good use of footnotes for each article for ease of access for the casual reader, instead of placing the notes at the end of the book, but this should not hinder most readers from checking the Notes section for reference if the necessity arises. Although not exhaustive (as one of the authors indicates, it is not possible to cover all the possible discussions around the main theme), the subjects discussed give the reader a comprehensive idea about the main contemporary and historical points of relevance and tension regarding the three Abrahamic faiths (such as gender, exclusivism, pluralism, tolerance, and conflict). A comprehensive index at the end of the volume also allows the reader to find any concept of interest effortlessly therefore increasing the overall benefit the readers can obtain from the book. Overall, *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters* is an essential read for those who show interest in the history of relations between Christians and Muslims, the contemporary issues surrounding interfaith dialogue and tension, and finally the future of the *trialogue* between adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths.

BOOK REVIEW

Emma Jane Harris
The Dialogue Society

What Would Socrates Do? Self-Examination, Civic Engagement, and the Politics of Philosophy

Joel Alden Schlosser

New York: Cambridge University Press; 2014

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Asking the question ‘What Would Socrates Do?’, Joel Alden Schlosser boldly claims, can lead us to better ways of living together. Socratic thought is relevant when developing modern ideas such as democratic citizenship, civic engagement and political education, but not - he continues – in the ways we would expect.

This almost 200-page text was published in late 2014 and is the first book by Joel Alden Schlosser, Professor of Political Science at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania. In his wider research, Schlosser works to make ancient political texts relevant to contemporary debates within his field and without. From the off, the text proves a commitment to a rigorously contextualised reading of Socratic philosophy that takes into account the thought *in practice*. Where other political readings of Socrates may be guilty of ‘domesticating’ the subject, making him interesting to everyone and useful to no one, ‘What Would Socrates Do?’ takes a more pragmatic look at Socrates’ relationship to his times in order to better illuminate how we should, and can, read him now. A central aim of the book is to study how Socrates approaches – and undertakes, and transforms – various democratic practices of the Athenian public spaces that embed his philosophy.

Socrates is no stranger to the scrutiny of contemporary dialogists; in fact, he seems to be a point of great contention. Plato’s prosaic formalisation of the Socratic method in his Dialogues, a method borne in contradistinction to classical Greek sophistry, is – depending on the critic – either a genuine dialectic or simple means of persuasion. For Sosnoski, Socrates peddles mere teacher/pupil pedagogy; for Bakhtin, he meaningfully tests others, himself, and ideas through conversation. Socratic method plays a shaping role in Bakhtin’s dialogism, assuming the method holds individuals accountable for their ideas, and asks something of each participant. But is such ‘dialogue’ merely utilitarian; does it seek an end for the end’s sake, or does it contain honest and determined respect for the mystery of the other (and their mysterious ideas)?

Situating Socrates' usefulness in terms of contemporary dialogical method clearly requires a more holistic approach to his thought than is given by theorists such as Derrida, Bakhtin, Sosnoski or Buber, who fail to pay due attention to the relationality between Socrates and the late fifth-century Athenian political landscape. This is precisely what Alden Schlosser's small but ambitious text provides the confused dialogist, navigating contemporary dialogue theory's indebtedness, or otherwise, to Socrates. Does Socratic method seek common ground through the means of mutually engaging conversation; did Plato present us with our first, historical example of democratic dialogue? Seeking evidence of genuine dialogical encounter, as opposed to glorified debating tactics, and supported by evidence of contextual application, is a central component of Alden Schlosser's excavations.

The book's fourth section, 'Fearless Speech in Democracy', is particularly relevant to the emergent field of dialogue studies, specifically the section's focus on *parrhesia* (free speech). Schlosser points out that Athenian politics *demand*ed the participation of its ordinary citizens. The elite by no means bore a neat hegemony, and they suffered harsh penalties if they failed to represent their electorate. However, the concept of citizen did not equivocate women, slaves and foreigners with their male counterparts. Despite this, Socrates rhetorically engaged with these 'sub-categories' of citizen (as Plato, Aristophanes and Xenophon can attest). He transgressed the boundaries of his cultural, baseline understanding of equality, and made accountable – through the trading of, and not just transmitting of, ideas – those who bore little to no social accountability. The very subject of his conversations with Meno the slave – *arete* (excellence, as a moral virtue) – shows their mutual affirmation of a common Athenian ideal, radically interrogating a fundamental virtue of democratic, Athenian life. The very same virtue, in fact, which moved the ruling elite to consider its citizen's interests.

Socrates never led the slaves into uprising, or encouraged the women to revolt. Indeed, his whole relationship with the Athenian state – and its citizens and non-citizens alike – was 'strange'. On the one hand he flouted conventionality, and on the other he used conventional Athenian rhetoric, and conventional Athenian values, to show or pedal his support for anti-conventionalist modes of engagement. For the very fact of this 'strangeness' (and not 'inconsistency') Schlosser holds that Socrates' challenging of extant political consensus in Athens is how we should read and act out Socratic modes of engagement now. What can we say about the political consensus on civic engagement in our own societies today, and how should we challenge it?

More broadly, the text challenges other interpretations of the ancient thinker that risk becoming standard in their relative fields (by Judith Butler, Bruno Latour and Hannah Arendt, to name but a few) and continually returns to the

multidimensionality of Socrates that feeds into and sustains his timeless dialogical method. Whilst satisfyingly criticising anachronistic readings of Socrates, Schlosser perhaps fails to exhaustively argue *why* the discontinuities in Socrates' thought, and thought in practice, can allow us to read him in a particular way. Surely such discontinuity can only convince us of why we *should not* read him in any particular way?

This text is certainly useful to historiographers seeking to plot the ancient and modern architects of dialogical encounter. While it may not fully reanimate the rhetorical tradition for use in contemporary, socio-political contexts (as Zappen's 2004 'The Rebirth of Dialogue' arguably achieves, when reading Socrates through Bakhtin) it at least gestures towards the possibility of our doing so.

The Journal of Dialogue Studies is a multidisciplinary, peer reviewed academic journal published twice a year. Its aim is to study the theory and practice of dialogue, understood provisionally as: meaningful interaction and exchange between people (often of different social, cultural, political, religious or professional groups) who come together through various kinds of conversations or activities with a view to increased understanding. The Editors welcome vigorous discussion of this provisional description, of dialogue's effectiveness as a means of increasing understanding, and of other fundamental questions.

The Journal brings together a body of original scholarship on the theory and practice of dialogue that can be critically appraised and discussed. It publishes conceptual, research, and/or case-based works on both theory and practice, and papers that discuss wider social, cultural or political issues as these relate to the evaluation of dialogue. In this way, the Journal aims to contribute towards establishing 'dialogue studies' as a distinct academic field (or perhaps even emerging discipline).

The particular focus of this fifth issue is 'dialogue and democracy'. Questions explored including following:

- What is the relationship between dialogue and democracy?
- How is dialogue espoused by different practitioners of democracy, from leaders to the general public?
- The positive and negative impact dialogue can have on democracy.
- What can democracy learn from dialogue?
- Are politics and/or power structures within the context of a democratic system compatible with dialogue values and processes?
- What role if any can dialogue play in supporting the processes that produce and develop government policies?
- Are political ambitions and dialogic aspirations mutually exclusive?

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