

Shoot the Muslim. Racism-Religion Relations in the New World Configuration.

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Introduction

Why talking about racism?

The Racist Paranoia Today: a Dangerous Enemy.

Formalities

When we talk about racism we intend to think/criticize/transform a dominant logic of identities construction which tends to the construction and consequent “negation” of differences. When we say racism, we intend to think/criticize/transform a logic that enables the possibility of extermination and exclusion (or hierarchical inclusion). Indeed, the logic being discussed is one of exclusion and exclusiveness which allows to confine certain subjects to a disposal group (i.e. to turn those who are presented as obstacles for the conservation/development/reproduction of the system into beings with no “rights”, disposable beings). We will refer quickly to a difference posited by several authors who have dealt with this issue and who have identified at least two types of racisms called, following Slavoj Zizek² populist racism and elitist racism. While the former is the racism reproduced (in the sense of produced again) by the dominated ones, the latter is that exercised by the majority (in the sense of hegemonic dominance) and which we will be trying to discuss here.

Racism as logic is clearly no novelty. However, we do believe that it necessarily changes over time. And it is precisely the current racist discourse what we are going to try to think, the specific characteristics that differentiate it from the previous ones, the type of specific language which articulates it. Our starting point will be the following statement (a sort of certainty that summons us to noise): once the Cold War had ended –and, therefore, the communist disappeared as the subject/object to eliminate, in the process of establishment of what was called “New world order”, there has emerged a new racist discourse articulated (although not exclusively) around the religious.

Indeed, Islamic religion has come to occupy a privileged place in the dominant discourse; it has come out and not in just any form, but in the form of the enemy. The Islam has emerged, and while it is true that it has done so together with Islamic movements that in the Middle East seek to become alternative means of resistance against the nationalist

² Zizek, Slavoj: *El sublime objeto de la ideología*. Siglo XXI editores, Buenos Aires, 2003.

movements, it has also been placed in the position of the main enemy in the dominant classification hierarchy.

It is not our intention here to talk about The Crusades or religious wars, we will leave these terms for those who wish to suspend time and abolish History. But we are going to discuss a logic that is perpetuated (though transforming itself) and we will try to look into these transformations. If, during this process, we should come across religion, we will not discard it at all, but neither will we give in to the myth of the eternal return that turns the modern and supposedly straight timeline of History into a circle that closes in itself, and through which the worst nightmares keep coming back. We think the return as discourse and we will discuss religion re-presented within the framework of our concern, but we are not going to talk about a return of the religious. We will try to understand religion from the logic of racism and at the present historical moment.

In order to achieve this purpose, we have resorted to critical thinking, to historical accounts and to a body of speeches delivered mainly by George W. Bush, but also by some members of his administration and other characters who have contributed to the creation of this discourse (understood as process and therefore as movement). For the same purpose, this paper has been divided into two clearly distinct parts each of which attempts to answer two questions which, in turn, act as a guide to the following: what does the construction on an Other imply and who occupies this place at the present historical moment?

What is the Other?

Racism

Racism can be understood as a process of construction of otherness that operates establishing segments or fragmentations (identitary differentiations) in an imaginary homogeneity in order to ensure the survival (i.e. reproduction) of an Us considered not as identity but as universality.

It is worth noting that stating that differences are constructed does not imply (necessarily) a denial of their existence as non-constructions, i.e. it does not imply that 'we are all the same'; if we did imply such a thing, we would be constructing an allegedly homogenous unity ready to differentiate itself from another group just as homogeneous as our own. Instead, we intend to go in the opposite direction: our point of departure will not be the One equal to itself, but rather the understanding of ourselves as a multiplicity from which identitary units are constructed.

What we attempt to talk about here is a mechanism for demarcating more or less assimilable boundaries. A mechanism that begins –and which *can* begin –with a logic that posits a mythic unit of origin, that is: a naturalized must be (the Universal Root) from which different levels of normalization will be established and these, when realized, will progressively eliminate all that cannot be incorporated under any circumstance. Thus, this is a disjunctive and normalizing logic of exclusion and exclusiveness that allows to confine certain subjects, identified as members of homogenized sets, to a disposal group. A logic of identity of a binary type (necessary bifurcation for the realization of power³: I/Other) which creates different spaces of classification (fragmentation function) and disappearance that enable the conservation of an Us constructed by the hegemonic discourse (survival

³ Deluze, Gilles: *Foucault*. Paidós, BuenosAires, 2003.

function)⁴. The founding Unit thus posited is constituted not as particular identity (which would be equivalent to acknowledging its historical nature making it, therefore, transitory, disposable) but rather as a transhistorical universality that will be threatened *from the outside* by different alterities that may or may not be integrated. (In this sense, the said Unit would not assume any responsibility for the production of difference, instead, the differences are inhabitants of an Outside that is absolutely unknown and dangerous to her).

Identitary Differentiations Construction: Identity and Identification Processes

We can think of two types of identities or, rather, of two mechanisms for the construction of identities (we too are going to make a binary distinction⁵): on the one hand, that which we have decided to call Identity (capitalized) and on the other, that which we have decided to call identification processes or identities. The first type of identity will refer to an Identity that *is presented* as fossilized and dogmatic, hard; an Identity based on the exacerbation of a unique characteristic which will thus become the basis of a totalizing image by means of a monadic feature that will determine absolutely the carrier group homogenizing it. It is a fetishized Identity. As regards the second type, suffice it to say for the moment that it will make reference to identities that are understood as constructions and, therefore, as alterable; identities that enable not only movement –because, necessarily, they all enable it (since there is time, there is conflict, there is History) –but they also *make it explicit*. Ultimately, *since there is History and there are struggles that move it forward, identities are nothing more than strategic constructions of a dynamic nature which are in constant transformation; the different fossilizations (Identity) are rather identification processes in movement, anchored in sedimentary layers, which constitute the ‘hard referents’ of certain identifications*. It is a matter of discourse management and therefore, of manipulation of the different ways in which reality is presented; it is not about trying to find something that is not there but, rather, of organizing what is there in a different way so as to inject a different sense into it. If we have decided to make this kind of analytical practice on the concept of identity is because we do not wish to reject its construction *itself*, that is, we do not wish to advocate for the end of identities, but we do believe that identities must be constructed and reconstructed (and we believe that ultimately they are, although certain discourses force us to stagnation) always taking into account the historical moment and becoming.

We do not intend, however, to posit a sort of equivalence in which dominated identities are constituted solely as process identities and majority identities (hegemonic, dominant)⁶ are constituted solely as Identity. We do not want to devoid our previous

⁴ Foucault, Michel: *Genealogía del racismo*. Caronte ensayos, La Plata, 1996.

⁵ For the time being: simplification or economy of words...

⁶ We talk about majority in the sense Deleuze talks about majority, that is, not in a numerical sense, but making reference to the dominant, the hegemonic: ‘The opposition between minority and majority is not simply quantitative. Majority implies a constant, (...) serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate.(...) Majority assumes a state of power and domination, not the other way round. (...) The majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming. (...) There is no becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. (...)’ Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix: *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*. Pretextos Valencia, 2004. Thus, we are talking about majoritarian discourse as an hegemonic discourse, with better chances of appearing and, therefore, of being. This concept has been chosen because we did not want to employ here the Western concept that implies an idea of homogeneity that we do not adhere to.

statements of the possibility of hardening, becoming rigid, impervious... in this sense, Muslim Identity that only allows that epithet, thus being able to eliminate its particular Other, belongs as much to this (Western) world as the Identity –silenced as such –whose carrier subject is the President of the United States, George W. Bush, and his fellows from the ‘international community’. It is about criticizing the Identity forging discourse which necessarily entails the hierarchical integration of the othernesses (assimilable differentiations) by including them via tolerance in the egoic community (clearly as second-rate citizens) and to the elimination of the Others –via elimination -.

“What is immersed in the light is the resonance of that which the night submerges. That which the night submerges prolongs in the invisible what is immersed in the light.”⁷

Particularisms and Universality

Although the Identities based on the Muslim as unique feature and those whose carrier is the President of the United States may be constructed as such (i.e. as closed groups, homogeneous and without contradiction or differences inside), we cannot say, however, that they are identical. There is a difference between the two given by the power relations in which they interact which determines that one of them is confined to the domain of the particular while the other is presented not as an identity but as *the* universality. In this sense, the latter Identity will constitute the Totality and will decide which identities belong to it and which identities do not. Those which do not belong will then be constituted as the threatening Outside of a harmonic and coherent totality.

In general, the Identity of the majority remains covert as identity. It is naturalized and kept undisclosed since an identity implies a historic particularity and the majority, in order to function as such, must be presented as universal and eternal: the identity of the majority does not appear as an identity (not even in its capitalized version) but rather it is constituted as a must be, a normality: it is presented as the universal. All the light (projected from the I/We who have the floor) falls on the identitary particularism of the Other who comes to threaten the universality. In the case of the Muslim as the new Other, in the discourses of the non Muslim majority a game may be observed in which the majoritarian identity appears at certain moments as Identity and, at certain others, as universality. These different moments are related to the degree of aggressiveness carried in the discourse and on the addressee. *If it is a discourse addressed to the Other to exterminate* (although he is not addressed directly, the Other is *outside* the possibility of being questioned) *Identity appears at full strength: the West is referred to as a homogeneity opposed to and separate from the East* (refuge of Islamic fundamentalism). *Instead, if the discourse aims at creating consensus and it is addressed at Us, words are spoken on behalf of Good, Freedom, the Civilized World, the ‘international community’, as a series of universal and necessary values of which the speaker is the carrier.* Thus, the majority is presented sometimes as Identity (and, therefore, as particularity, as a part) and others as universality and, therefore, as the Whole that is attacked from the outside (the fearful Exterior).

⁷ Jean-Luc Godard: *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (4a) (1998)

The Outside

Thus, in order to eliminate it, the Other is expelled from the Totality, it appears as a strange entity that attacks our peaceful lives, marking and transforming them. It is absolutely necessary to exclude any possibility of identification with this character, so that there is no risk of the I itself disappearing at some other time. So long as the I remains within a We, it may be at ease. Besides, this identification with the totality rejects inner conflicts, prevents all self criticism and spits them both out. Just like Hitler and his regime are not thought of as belonging to the logic of the whole itself, but are exiled to the domain of Irrationality (of which Us, rational beings, do not form part)⁸, so the Other is expelled to the domain of Barbarism, Evil, darkness (according to Bush's discourse, Islamic activists are hidden in "black holes"). *The Other is not allowed to enter our world not only so that its elimination may be possible, but also to preserve a given social structure which cannot be challenged*. The Other is thus representative of an Outside that comes to threaten an already-constituted-immanence. The Other is from another world, does not belong to 'ours' and could never do so, that is why it has to be eliminated. Thus, the causes of all evils are attached to some kind of entity who comes from the outside.

If, as Levinas puts it, modern reason seeks the causes in the immanent, disregarding the transcendental as irrational, when it comes to the construction of the enemy and the explanation of the enemy's actions transcendentalism is resorted to: my enemy has nothing to do with me (absolute alterity relation) and I have nothing to do with him; this way, there are no immanent causes and, therefore, there are no causes, then irrationality is resorted to: the Other is irrational and belongs to irrationality, to the inexplicable, to the incomprehensible⁹.

The Other (the Exterior) and the others: Exclusion and Tolerance.

Racism should not be understood, however, only as a synonym of exclusion and possibility of extermination. Racism operates excluding as much as including. Indeed, what defines racism is the demarcation of othernesses (both the assimilable and the negative or inassimilable ones). This demarcation is realized by different degrees of tolerance ranging from a 'differential' inclusion to a complete exclusion. The Other –or the negative otherness –presented as a homogeneity and an immobile identity, eternalized and adjectivized once and forever, is not discarded unless when trying to eliminate it or make it disappear, when it cannot be included in any form into the majoritarian identity. The Other is not excluded only because it is different, it can also be included (otherness) via a transformation that will also affect the I, but it is a transformation of such a degree that the latter can withstand it and still maintain its sameness (the circle of the same encloses that

⁸ Refer to Daniel Feierstein's analysis in Feierstein, Daniel: *Seis estudios sobre genocidio. Análisis de las relaciones sociales: otredad, exclusión y exterminio*. Ed. Eudeba, 2000.

⁹ Knowledge is a relation of the Same with the Other, in which the Other is reduced to the Same and divested of its strangeness in which thinking relates itself to the other but the other is no longer other as such; the other is already appropriated, already mine. Henceforth, knowledge is without secrets or open to investigation, that is to say, it is a world. It is immanence. Levinas, Emmanuel: *Trascendencia e inteligibilidad*. Ed. Encuentro, Madrid, 2006

of the other¹⁰). When we refer to the Other we are making reference to an inassimilable difference and, therefore, liable to elimination. The Other is a dogma which allows no flexibilization. Instead, when we talk about the othernesses, the others (or the other) we are making reference to more `moderate´ or, rather, more integrable modes of differentiation that, therefore, allow certain inclusion into the group (though always as an other, that is as a second-rate human being or third-rate or ...-rate). Multiculturalism as a means of `tolerating´ the differences enters the picture here, that is, multiculturalism as a means of exercising a power that has the floor to permit or forbid the entrance to that which is, therefore, *its* world¹¹.

There exists, then, a degree of tolerable difference (othernesses) that only implies small transformations (necessary, on the other hand) in the bosom of the majoritarian identity. Transformations that –in a process seeking to host all identities in a unique hegemonic identity –include/integrate minoritarian identities and can thus label as `eliminable´ those identities that, since they are considered dangerous by the majority to the conservation of its status, are confined to the Outside. It is in this way that the universality fiction is created, where differences *seem* to be canceled. Thus, the other is not necessarily excluded but, rather, it can be included on the condition that it continues to be different.

Who is the Other

“They are fundamentalists because they are Islamic”

(Another introduction)

We have tried to describe above what we understand by racism: a category that implies a given logic that we cannot call transhistorical but which is neither a novelty. The delimitation of an Other is the basis for an extermination that is presented as necessary in order to keep or transform certain power relations. Now, what moved us to talk about racism was the urge to think a discourse that brought a new enemy to light: the Islam... As we will try to posit hereinafter, it is interesting to think not only the lightning itself, but also the way in which it was presented. Indeed, the Islam was not only placed in the light of the historical discourse, but also it was placed there *once again* through a discourse that carried old paranoias with it: Crusades and Islamic invasions overflowed the words.

We have tried above to think the Other in its general, almost object-like, nature. We will try now to think the subjects who fulfill that role at the present historical moment: the question about what gives way, then, to the question about who. And this latter question is of no less importance than the former: we might say that while the first is of a strategic nature, the one we will try to answer now is of a tactical nature instead. Since, as we have stated, while there have been Others throughout history, these have not always been embodied by the same subjects or, rather, these have not always been identified for the same characteristics that define the hierarchical order of subjects.

The different types of racism may be identified by the different types of characteristics presented as deviations, that is, by the specific language that articulates othernesses construction at a given historical moment. Taking this statement as our starting point, we propose to think the new “Global war against terror” as constructed around a new racism that aims at the creation of othernesses based on religious features.

¹⁰ Levinas, Emmanuel: Op. Cit.

¹¹ Refer to Grüner, Eduardo: *La Cosa política o el acecho de lo Real*. Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2005

Religious Racism: Shoot the Muslim!

‘The masters of the West have never mourned in an adequate way, and the conditions that at other times were called “objective” tended to get worse (...), and it was not to expect that too much time went by before the logic of war (that has always been, with more or less masquerade, the logic of Capitalism) found a new Enemy, gigantic and powerful for any imaginary –I mean, in a much more transcendental sense than the “atheist Communism”, since now it is a renewed War of Gods, like the ones depicted in the Bible or the Koran –: the Age of the Crusades...’¹²

Much has been said about September 11th, 2001, which –in my opinion –is not at all wrong: noise makes it all crumble down. But it is also about building, and that is more difficult. Because discourse constructs and one always has to be careful, one has to try to say that which leads the way towards the sense we intend to convey, without deviating, in that attempt, towards the opposite direction...

Much has been said about September 11, and there is a more or less shared noise in which the attack is heard as an event that moved many things and restructured many others; and the intention here is to think those things so as to understand where we are going and where we want to go...

From the ruins has emerged a Voice that, though it has not silenced the other voices (silencing voices, not possible), it has been louder and therefore better heard: it has prevailed. A voice characterized by a constant allusion to a religion that, although it had been the target of many looks and many words thus far, has now become an outstanding protagonist: the Islam came to play a central role in the scene. This allusion was (and it is still today) accompanied by a loud rejection towards that religion, a rejection that constructs that religion as entirely negative. And the subjects devoted to that religion were included in a homogeneous and suspicious whole that made it possible to persecute and dehumanize them worldwide. Muslims have had in innumerable epithets; ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ took the lead and their religion became the essence of violence, aggressiveness, arbitrariness, intolerance, militarism... Thus, the Islam was became the antipode of Judaic and Christian religions that, in turn, appeared as the essence of peace and love. The President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, faithful to binary classifications, took it upon himself to embody the Christian I/We overflowing his speeches with messages of love and tolerance towards the Muslim religion:

‘... this is not a war between Christianity or Judaism and the Islam. In fact, the teachings of Islam make it clear that peace is important, that compassion is part of life. This is a war between good and evil.’¹³

‘President Bush and the United States of America are willing to direct our noble energies in an effort to promote development and education and the opportunities all around the world, including the Muslim world.’¹⁴

¹² Grünter, Eduardo: Op. Cit.

¹³ Speech delivered by George W. Bush on 10/04/2001 in a meeting with Mexican president Vicente Fox.

¹⁴ Speech delivered by Condoleezza Rice at the Conservative Political Action Conference on 02/01/2002, at www.whitehouse.gov (underline is ours).

... Which prompts the question of why these words of tolerance, discourse constructing words, appear, why they are necessary, why taking the time to enumerate the qualities of a religion; which in turn prompts the question of why a religion should be placed in the eye of the storm¹⁵. We do not intend here to give credit to a theory of cultural relativism that *pretends* that the differences are cancelled and, to that effect, professes a tolerance which, as such –and as we posited above –is unacceptable, we intend instead to draw attention to a process of difference construction that, though it had been under development since the so called ‘Islamic movements’¹⁶, since the attacks on the World Trade Center, it has now taken a qualitative turn. (Indeed, racism does not begin with the enumeration of a series of characteristics –not even negative ones –that Muslims may have, but with an inversion in the discourse affirming that they have those characteristics *because* they are Muslims¹⁷. That *because* entails a fossilization of a single feature that would be found in the very bosom of the Muslim religion itself and that would have nothing to do with the historical, social and political situation of Middle Eastern peoples).

As from September 11th, 2001 onwards, it was allowed to say, coming from different power spheres, some things that had nothing to do with tolerance and everything to do with the will to exterminate, with the necessity of disappearance. Coming from the very circle of President Bush, things like the following were heard:

‘... the more you examine the religion, the more militaristic it seems. After all, its founder, Mohammed, was a warrior, not a peace advocate like Jesus’¹⁸;

‘... although it is very uncomfortable to say (...) that one of the greatest religions of the world has a deep tendency towards aggressiveness, daring to do so is however one of the things that defines leadership’¹⁹;

‘... the Islam is at war against us’²⁰

The president himself launched his attack against terror as if it were a Crusade. The examples really abound, and such abundance is frightening.

This double allusion to the Muslim religion, at times calling for its integration (or tolerance), at others, for its elimination, contains the two contemporary moments of racism: inclusion and exclusion. The ‘Muslim friends’ referred to in these discourses are States as well as peoples summoned to be included within a totality that accepts them only as second or third or X-rate members, on the condition that they respect certain requests relative to

¹⁵ ‘...the mere fact of having to make these statements in favor of Islam, having to prove whether Koran justifies terrorism or not, whether suicide is part of Islamic culture or not, whether Jihad means this or that, forcing every Muslim to defend themselves daily against the generalized suspicion that it represents an potential fanaticism inherent to their culture and their religion is the very proof that Islam and Muslims are not being judged according to the same standards as Judaism and Christianity are.’ Martín Muñoz, Gema: *Iraq. Un fracaso de Occidente (1920-2003)* Tusquets editores, Barcelona, 2003.

¹⁶ The *resurgence* of Islamic movements may be dated back to the Islamic revolution in 1979 in Iran, but they have to be understood as an alternative means of resistance against the unsuccessful Arab nationalism whose prime example is the Egyptian Gamal Abdel Nasser.

¹⁷ Refer to Žizek, Slavoj: *El sublime objeto de la ideología*. Siglo XXI editores, Buenos Aires, 2003.

¹⁸ Kenneth Adelman, member of the Pentagon’s Defence Policy Board in *The Washington Post*, 12/01/2002, in: Martín Muñoz, Gema: Op. Cit.

¹⁹ Eliot Cohen, member of the Pentagon’s Defence Policy Board Advisory Committee, in *Ib.*

²⁰ Paul Weyrich, influential Pentagon activist, in *Ib.*

some type of inclusion. The rest of them are placed beyond the boundaries of the acceptable: subject-objects without admission.

Voices that highlight the religious...

The explanation of the religious highlighted in the new racist discourse may be found in certain situational variables that might be seen as accidental, that is, without any relevant function.

First of all, we could find an explanation to this new religious racism is the Christian fundamentalist nature of the former president of the United States. It is well known that George W. Bush, besides attributing the fact that his father has overcome his alcohol addiction to the will of God (thus, He is responsible for saving his life), has established different religious 'routines' in the internal functioning of his administration. Thus, among other things, most of the speeches delivered by the president of the United States end with a phrase that makes reference to God blessing the country or with the words 'God is on our side'²¹. But coming from the president of a hegemonic world power as the United States of America, such statements can rarely be seen as fulfilling no relevant function at all (or what have we become used to?).

That is, if following the Foucauldian theory of discourse, we can posit that discourses are unique combinations among the so many other possible combinations of language, resulting from certain power relations, we may wonder how it is possible that not just any person but the president of an hegemonic world power can say such things as these. If religion is conceived only as monotheist religion in which God, the absolute unit –the origin of all things –cannot accept any alterity (the monotheist God is, in this sense and necessarily, a racist god); if there is a struggle in which both parts brandish *their* God as a weapon, then one of them is necessarily doomed to disappear and only one of them can present God (now, definitely, the one) as his ally:

'Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty have always been at war and we know that God is not *neutral in this battle*.'²²

No other God can exist; there is no possibility of tolerance: God capitalized is unique. When war breaks out between unique and absolute Gods, one of them is doomed to disappear. The fact that the president of the United States is a fervent Christian may seem irrelevant, the fact that he *can* turn this characteristic into an instrument to exercise power (i.e. the fact that his words create discourse) goes beyond the anecdotic and it is then when we must ask ourselves about the possibility conditions for this to be so.

On the other hand, the anti-Muslim discourse does not belong exclusively to the president Bush and his crew, it has gone beyond the discursive boundaries of North America. On September 12th, 2006, in a lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his belief that the Muslim religion was essentially violent when he cited a dialogue held between a Byzantine Emperor (in the year 1391) and – textually quoted–an 'educated Persian':

*Quoting the Emperor's words: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."*²³

²¹ Refer to countless speeches in www.whitehouse.gov

²² Speech delivered by George W. Bush, at www.whitehouse.gov

Several days later, on September 30th, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published twelve clearly offensive and humiliating caricatures depicting the prophet Mohammed, among other things, carrying a bomb in his turban. Thus, the terrorist was not defined by his actions, but by his religion.

A second type of explanation of the emergence of this racism is found in he who seeks origins, *creations* of discourses, without seeing in these a resulting rearrangement of power relations. In this sense, it can be stated that the origin of this racist anti-Muslim discourse is related to the fact that the perpetrators of the attacks of September 11 were members of a terrorist network (Al-Qaeda) who acted in the name of Islam. This is only half true. The videos, massively broadcast, in which Osama Bin Laden is depicted summoning to a *yihad* (wrongly translated as 'holy war')²⁴ are incomplete. The wrongly considered 'leader' of Al-Qaeda did not speak of religious matters only. Indeed, this issue occupies only a minor place within his discourse. He spoke instead, and most of the time, of power relations, of a history of domination and oppression which, of course, did not conform to the majority's discourse²⁵. The fact that the carrier of this discourse was a character as hateful as the Arab magnate is of no less importance. In fact, it is that discourse and it is that reality that which entangles the great majority of Muslims in those webs. Osama Bin Laden's discourse has then been broken down into pieces, and though it would have been possible to highlight other aspects of that discourse, only those strongly related to the religious aspects were highlighted:

'Our people wonders: who attacked our country? All the evidence that we have gathered points to a group of terrorist organizations informally affiliated and known as Al-Qaeda (...) their aim is to change the world and to impose their radical beliefs on peoples everywhere.'

'The terrorists' directives command them to kill all Christians and Jews...'²⁶

Of course, once this breaking down of the discourse was performed, the appealing to tolerance no longer mattered...

The depoliticization of the conflict

The danger of the explanations that we have just thought lies in the fact that, in their unilateralism, both contribute to that which is also sought with the breaking down of discourse mentioned above: the depoliticization of the conflict. The construction of an Us and an Other is, above all, a relation and, specifically, a political relation (in the sense that it is constituted as a power relation). This implies that identity differentiations exist solely as a product of the relations, i.e. they are produced in the encounter of both. If the conflict is depoliticized, the Us and the Other are separated and therefore there is no possibility of relation, thus making it disappear. They come to integrate two spheres absolutely separate from each other. Then, *the religionization*

²³ El Papa provoca irritación al islam por sus críticas a la Guerra Santa, Clarín newspaper, Buenos Aires, September 15th, 2006.

²⁴ Brieger, Pedro: *¿Guerra santa o lucha política? Entrevistas y debate sobre el islam*. Ed. Biblos, Buenos Aires, 1996.

²⁵ Refer to Martín Muñoz, Gema: Op. Cit.

²⁶ Speech delivered by George W. Bush on 09/20/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

of the conflict implies the separation of the Us from the possible causes (political, derived from a relation) of the terrorist actions which, for this reason, cannot be comprehended and are placed in the domain of irrationality. Thus, it is more feasible to place the Other in a territory alien to us, dissociate it from everything that has to do with an Us, dissociating it at the same time from a given reality.

A given reading that was made of the Iraqi resistance after the invasion of the United States can be understood along the same lines. The attacks perpetrated every day in Iraq are presented as an internal and religious civil war which has nothing to do with the presence of a world power invading and occupying the territory. Sunnis and Shiites are not thought of as resistance, but as a conflict within the domain of the Others, which is the result of the Sunnis having lost power. While the differences between these two religious tendencies are evident, to deduce from that fact that these attacks are the product of a conflict that belongs exclusively to them and that, therefore, has nothing to do with the presence of U.S. armed forces in Iraqi territory also contributes to separate the majoritarian Us from Iraqi problems.

The depoliticization of the conflict and its contemporary religionization can be thus related to a double game of separation: separation of the Us from the Others and separation of the Us from certain parts of the Totality which are thus placed in an offensive Outside. The conflict is then reterritorialized and new boundaries are set demarcating new domains of Our own and new alien worlds.

The Outside or the Construction of a New Totality

... this is a terrible moment for our country and it must have affected many students, some way or other, when they ask why has this happened to America? Why would anybody do this to our country? (...) These attacks come from people that are so evil that it is difficult for me to explain why. It is difficult for us to understand why anybody would think the way these people think and despise life the way they do and hurt innocent people. It is simply difficult, for us, adults, to explain.²⁷

The difficulties to provide *rational* explanations constitute the kickoff to push Out that which is to be exterminated. All through George W. Bush's speeches no one allusion is found to the power relation between the country he rules and the social, economic, political and cultural reality of those he declared his new enemies.

How do I respond when I see that in some Islamic countries there is vitriolic hatred for American? (...) I am amazed. I am amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about that people would hate us. (...) I just can't believe it. Because I know how good we are and we've got to do a better job of making our case.²⁸

The question about the why overflies all his speeches without finding its place, leaving a silence behind that exempts the answer from any type of rationality:

... who and what and where and especially why September 11.²⁹

The Outside is inhabited by irrationality and savagery (abnormal features, opposed to the must be) and also by beings who are not welcome in the world of the majority. There is a double game of identities here: once as Identity, other as Universality.

²⁷ Speech delivered by George W. Bush on 10/25/2001 at www.whitehouse.gov

²⁸ George W. Bush in a press conference on 10/11/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

²⁹ Speech delivered by Condoleezza Rice at the Conservative Political Action Conference on 01/02/2002, at www.whitehouse.gov

Survival Function: Identity Threatened

The first instance related to a first type of separation: that of the Us from the Others. Identity is constructed here by presenting its particular features, defining itself as opposed to the Other, that is, we see the I emerge from that which is rejected and the threat that this represents to it.

“America and the European nations are more than just military allies, we are more than trading partners, we are the heirs to the same civilization. The commitments of the Magna Carta, the teachings of Athens, the creativity of Paris, the inflexible conscience of Luther, the gentle faith of Saint Francis: this is all part of the American soul. The New World has succeeded in keeping the values of the Old one.

Our histories have diverged, but still we pursue the same ideals. We believe in free trade, temperate by compassion. We believe in open societies that reflect unalterable truths. We believe in the value and the dignity of each life.

*These beliefs bring our nations together and turn our enemies against us. These beliefs are universally right and true. And they define our nations and our partnership in a unique sense.*³⁰

*“These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful and retreating from the world forsaking our friends. They stand against us because we stand in their way.”*³¹

Here, the logic of them *or us* prevails (exclusive disjunction), in which the Us is defined as Identity. They have declared war to us, We must reply... The new “Global War against Terror” was declared, then, in existential terms. Indeed, it was the survival of a set of values (the good ones) and truths (the true ones) what was at stake, a set of values and truths belonging to a Whole that was being attacked from a maladjusted and uncivilized Outside. This apolitical way of thinking that entails a logic of all or nothing played an essential role in the construction of an Us (that is, therefore, homogeneous) which had to be saved. Then, a new enemy was in sight: terrorism. But, *it was not about chasing out and harassing just any terrorist: Islamic terrorism was specifically aimed at, thus transforming any pocket of Arab-Muslim resistance into an enemy that has to be defeated at all costs:*

“The brutal terrorist attacks on London and Madrid obscure (...) a thinly spread fact: the great majority of this kind of attacks on countries of the European Union are carried out by extreme left or extreme right pro-independence national groups. It is thus stated in the Europol “EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2007”. (...) The report states, however, that “despite the small number of Islamic terrorist attacks, half the people arrested for terrorism are Islamic”³². Completely different Islamic movements were then presented as if they constituted a homogeneous space, suppressing all political relation to it:

*“A terrorist underworld, including such groups as Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed, operates in jungles and distant deserts and hides in the center of big cities.”*³³

³⁰ Speech delivered by George W. Bush beside German chancellor Schroeder on 05/23/2002, at www.whitehouse.gov

³¹ President Bush’s Address at the National Day of Prayer Ceremony on 09/14/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

³² Gelman, Juan: *Hechos de la vida*, *Página/12* newspaper, Buenos Aires, June 3rd, 2007.

³³ Speech delivered by George W. Bush at the United Nations 11/10/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

*Washington will reject recognizing an Islamic regime in Iraq, even if this was the desire of the majority of Iraqis and was reflected in the polls*³⁴

Thus, since the attacks of September 11 on the World Trade Center, the United States finally replaced its old Soviet enemy whose fall had given rise to a strategic uncertainty depicted in paranoid terms: the Muslim was, from then on, the new Other who had to be exterminated.

Everything is the United States

*This conflict is a struggle to save the civilized world (...) Because of their cruelty, terrorists have decided to live on the margins of mankind.*³⁵

In the second instance, a different type of separation operates: that of the Others from the Totality. He who dominates has the capacity to construct and reconstruct the Totality according to the struggles he faces. A Totality and a universality that will be constituted by the I and by those included by it, the rest –inassimilable –will come to occupy the diffuse space of the Outside. Thus, the Whole is delimited drawing a dividing line between that which belongs to my world and that which does not. The discourses following September 11 have played this double game of the constitution of Identity/universality according to the spaces from which discourse is created and to its interlocutors. When it was about creating consensus and join forces, universality prevailed. The identity of the majority was made invisible by positing that they were defending *the* world, *the* civilization and not *a* world or *a* civilization:

*This is not a war between our world and their world. This is a war to save the world.*³⁶

This way too, the conflict was universalized by making everyone (except for some identified and identifiable by their particular features) stand on supposedly equal footing. Differences were thus rejected and the cause of the attacks was an evil, strange, irrational, medieval Islamic group coming to attack us (all of us), where, how and why it was not known:

A month ago today, innocent citizens from more than 80 nations were attacked and killed, without warning or provocation, in an act that horrified not only every American but also every person of any faith and any nation that values human life.

*The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world.*³⁷

*... we have told people from all over the world: this could have happened to you.*³⁸

*In this war we do not merely defend America or Europe, we are defending civilization.*³⁹

³⁴ Donald Rumsfeld in *El País* newspaper, Madrid, April 22nd, 2003 quoted in Ramonet, Ignacio: *Irak, historia de un desastre*. Ed. Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 2005

³⁵ Bush's Address to the Nation from Shanghai on 10/20/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

³⁶ Speech delivered by president Bush when sending 'humanitarian aid' to Afghanistan on 10/04/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

³⁷ President George W. Bush's Press conference on 10/11/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

³⁸ Speech delivered by George W. Bush on 10/01/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

³⁹ Speech delivered by George W. Bush beside German chancellor Schroeder on 05/23/2002, at www.whitehouse.gov

*`This is not only the struggle of the United States. And it is not only the freedom of the United States what is at stake. This is a struggle of the world. And this is the struggle of all those who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.'*⁴⁰

Some Final Reflections...

*`It must be admitted that none of this is very clear. It is a completely typical drunken monologue, with its incomprehensible allusions and tiresome delivery. With its vain phrases that do not await response and its overbearing explanations. And its silences (...) The function of the cinema, whether dramatic or documentary, is to present a false and isolated coherence'*⁴¹

The starting point of the present paper was a question: What is the specific language that articulates racism at this historical moment? No sooner did we attempt to answer it, than religion appeared. And this –thinking that, in the so called 21st Century, there can exist, there can be a discourse whose enemy, whose nuisance, whose target are subjects classified for having a certain religion –aroused a great amount of contradictory emotions, and a lot of questions followed, many of which still remain unanswered; in the end, maybe the only thing that has been accomplished is to add up more questions to the already existing ones.

What we have attempted to do through the words we have strung together is to think the question of racism and its realization at this particular and precise historical moment. Now, what is the relation between this logic we have tried to define and Capitalism as a still oppressing system? The question is still floating in the air... So is this other one: Why, in the 21st Century, when the train of modernity and progress, of thriving civilization, the idea of an ever greater mankind (which, let us not be mistaken, has not disappeared from our thoughts for it has not disappeared from our discourses, because we still *believe* in it) and indefinite secularization have supposedly triumphed in `normal´ (that is, dominant) societies, why these very same societies construct their enemies on the basis of religious aspects? Some thinkers who have dealt with this question have given explanations concerning the lack of sense that reigns in this transitional phase called postmodernism. Along this line, religion would come to fill in, once again, for the lack of answers or certainties. But this is not enough an answer: Why religion and not some other thing, revolution for example? The answer will not come from any of the two parties in conflict, but from their encounter and from the participation of others, from the different shapes this struggle has taken and the shapes that it will still take in the future.

This paper is supported, basically, by a corpus of speeches delivered at a given moment: from the attacks on the World Trade Center to the year 2003. Lack of time has compelled us to limit ourselves to that temporal space. It is also worth noting that what has been read in this essay has been a *selection* of those speeches, since they were arranged in such a way as to illustrate a particular point: the relation between the dominant discourse and religion and, more specifically, the religious enemy. Thus, with the same corpus of speeches a different discursive arrangement might have also been constructed.

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⁴⁰ Speech delivered by George W. Bush on 09/20/2001, at www.whitehouse.gov

⁴¹ Débord, Guy: *Critique de la séparation* (1961)

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