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The Violent Potential of Unconditional Claims in Conflict: Reflections on the Discourse concerning the Destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan

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Abstract: On a general level, the article analyzes how the clash of unconditional claims between secular rationales and religious narratives is prone to engender violence. To provide this discussion with material evidence, the case of the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan and its media coverage is put under scrutiny. The author shows how the marker of "religious violence", otherness, and irrationality was (re)constructed in this context. In the last analysis, the article demonstrates that a parasitic relationship obtains between an occidentalist brand of reason and its presumed other (epitomized in the gestalt of "religious violence").

Keywords: religious violence; orders of violence; occidental reason; Buddhas of Bamiyan; Taliban

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1. Introduction

Since the Taliban seized power and was cut off from most of the international community including developmental aid programs, international organizations have warned emphatically about a disastrous humanitarian catastrophe of unprecedented dimensions to happen in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding this disconcerting prefigurement, the Western observers' perception of the factual suffering of the Afghani people is thwarted by proliferating news and images communicating the Taliban's backwardness, cruelty, and irrationality.[1] In the maelstrom of globalization unleashed in an unprecedented fashion since 9/11, we find ourselves confronted more and more with instances of spectacular violence that remind us of our own vulnerabilities. As a consequence of this, traditional resources of long-distance empathy seem to dry out on many fronts. Our contemporary imaginary geographies of suffering and vulnerability (Crépon 2019) rather appear to engender a deepening ethical indifference toward the suffering of our not so relevant others. In this economy of perception, the marker of "religious otherness" (Cavanaugh 2009; Gutkowski 2014) is of paramount importance. It plays an indeed cardinal role in Western justifications of presumably legitimate "counter-violence", exemplified in the so-called "war on terror", more and more restrictive and selective immigration policies, or the structural violence of (inter)national security discourses.

It is beyond doubt that the regime's brutal actions and especially its inhuman treatment of women and minorities is absolutely condemnable and must in no way be exculpated. However, there is also deep need to analyze the very representation of such assumed "otherness", "backwardness", and "irrationality" around which our Western perceptions and evaluations revolve.[2] This indeed is a major moral obligation in order to shed critical light on our own Western habits of responding to the "religious other", especially in the violent and fanatic gestalt in which we became accustomed to (mis)perceiving it. In light of this obligation, not only do we need to critique our "Western gaze" (Mohanty 1988), "habits of hostility" (Alcoff 2000), and a "self-righteous brand of reason" (Waldenfels 1991) that all keep us tied in a mental habit oscillating between alarmism and indifference, we also need to confront the (all too often normatively embellished) legitimizations of counter-violence that are derived from these habits.

Butler (2002, p. 10), on her part, is very clear about the difficulties that such an undertaking implies: "If we believe that to think radically about the formation of the current situation is to exculpate those who committed acts of violence, we shall freeze our thinking in the name of a questionable morality. But if we paralyze our thinking in this way, we shall fail morality in a different way. We shall fail to take collective responsibility for a thorough understanding of the history that brings us to this juncture. We shall thereby deprive ourselves of the very critical and historical resources we need to imagine and practice another future, one that will move beyond the current cycle of revenge".

In other words, the difficulties that this undertaking here will confront, too, concern the questions of "Who is the opponent?", "Who is being critiqued here?", and, furthermore, "From where do I speak?" The answer to this of course is that critique here is to be rigorously understood as a kind of self-critique that is first and foremost to be directed against a discourse in which this author has been raised and cultivated, too, and which has come under attack only more recently for its disavowed exclusions and (not always only soft) violence. Nothing is, I believe, more apt to expose this difficulty than the irreducible ambiguity with which we, in the occidental philosophical tradition, confront violence in general, and "religious violence" in particular, as something that at once horrifies and fascinates. Nowhere are reductionist accounts more frequent than in this field of research, which all too often comes down to a "hunt for causation" (Whitehead 2004, p. 55), setting out to find solutions for an objective problem at hand, an answer to a question. Yet exactly the peculiar experience and special intelligibility of religion, as Paul Ricœur has reminded us, does not revolve around its capacity to offer distinct answers to clear-cut questions. It rather revolves around a vast array of "absolute feelings, absolute in the sense of detached from the relation by which the subject would preserve the mastery over the object called religious." (Ricœur 2001, p. 127) However one responds to their call, if one is receptive to them at all, does not matter here; relevant is only that this relation of call and response is not preformed epistemologically by "a prior field of common understanding." As Ricœur argues, it rather engenders a "common field through obedience" and its varying ritual "invocations." This basic idea of religion's performative magic and the socializing potential derived therefrom in general and from religious violence in particular (see Kippenberg 2011) of course is but a thorn in "the eye of reason."[3] The issue that remains to be settled then consists in whether or not our brand of (discursive, etc.) reason is capable at all to deal with it on a par, especially if it is taken to pose a threat to its rule and cult.

Bearing all this in mind, in what follows I propose to discuss the relationship between occidental reason and religion by way of focusing on the special case of religious violence. In this context I wish to ask the—presumably extravagant—question of whether or not religion perhaps serves as an "originary supplement" of occidental reason and its quest for self-realization and preservation. Is it a useful "implant of fear" that negatively animates our Western "social imaginaries" (Taylor 2004) of individual freedom and political sovereignty? Is it some "raw material" that is needed to feed our modern quest for universal order (Bauman 1993)? And has not, to even risk this disconcerting hypothesis, secular—or disengaged—reason thus become dependent upon the (re)production of this "relevant other"? The question that shall bring these problems into clearer focus concerns the role of "unconditional claims" on the part of both religious as well as secular mindsets; claims which, if translated into non-negotiable truths, cannot but clash and so create an apparently escalating dynamics of violence into which all parties are easily drawn.

2. Reflections on Violence, Order, and Unconditional Claims

In the Western tradition, politics is frequently considered in terms of a "culture of conflict" that has to stand the test of consensus. Consensus, without a doubt, is not at all to be understood as a unanimous concept without flaws and difficulties. Widely known conceptions such as deliberation, procedural integration, or discursive translation have been developed as most powerful instruments to secure such a consensus without

sacrificing difference at the altar of some monolithic conception of unity or identity. Politics, accordingly understood as the "art of compromise", thus remains deeply fragile. This is also a major point that has recently been emphasized by "radical democracy" and agonistic accounts in social theory. Notwithstanding their sharpened focus on conflict and a "conflictual consensus" (Mouffe), one of the most pressing issues that still haunts our late modern social imaginaries seems to be the unquestioned presupposition that politics has to be kept free absolutely (or should we say: unconditionally?) from any *unconditional* claims. This concerns claims that are *by definition* taken to not permit any compromise. Forms of religious faith that revolve around such non-negotiable truths are taken to exemplify this tendency, i.e., to result in violence and hence to radically undermine "the political" as such.[4]

This presupposition, however, seems to be questionable. It bespeaks an *all too narrow understanding of conflict* and *agonism.* According to this understanding, any claim that cannot be understood as a contestation *within* a share (discursive, liberal, etc.) framework but concerns the *framework itself* (the constitution of the forum, where struggles may appear as such and are respectively accepted or ostracized; the form of the discourse, where validity claims are handled due to their argumentative power or are excluded; or the liberal "social imaginary", which separates "good" from "bad religious practice" (Goldstone 2011; Mamdani 2004) is taken to result in *irreconcilable discord.* This presupposition consequently feeds into the widespread conviction that such claims cannot but conjure up enmity and violence, quite automatically.

And indeed, if we take a look at *radicalisms* of any kind, especially in the form of religious *fanaticism*, does not this insight find the strongest evidence? Does not it become clear quite quickly that such claims, if advocated as unconditional ones about some irrevocable truth of a "chosen community", belief in the revealed truth of a religious dogma or a sacrosanct topology of the sacred, etc., harbor a more than serious potential for violence? And indeed, respective evidence seems to be broadly available and appears, at least at a first glance, irrefutable. While this evidence appears striking, the presupposition as such may yet be reproached. And indeed, it has again and again been contested sharply that the political can be reduced to a functional or procedural manner that is designed to either fully integrate all difference or sovereignly master it, not the least by way of using legitimate, i.e., normative violence. Following Levinas (1979), we see clearly that such a reduction results in a selfsame order and totalizing system that not only becomes inhospitable to the other but also impervious to change. To keep the political clean from every confrontation with any such claims would, in other words, result in a petrification or even emaciation of the "political" being turned into a mere calculus.

This argument concerning the endangered vivacity of the political needs to be considered more closely. It has, interestingly, not been raised with regard to *ultimate truths* of different provenance but rather with a view to *unconditional claims* and their transformative power, religion being a case in point. Such claims, when being raised, *interrupt* the leading discourse in order to make themselves heard, visible, accountable. Unconditionality thus receives a different meaning. It does not simply refer to some pregiven (or prefabricated) ontological truth that is postulated to be non-negotiable and to solicit unconditional respect. It rather surfaces in the *experience* that *we cannot not respond* to such claims of the other adequately, under no condition, unconditionally: from the claim to be *at least perceived* and *to count politically* (Rancière 1999), the claim *not to be humiliated* (Margalit 2010), to be respected in one's dignity (Shklar 1990), or *recognized in one's personal integrity* (Honneth 1995); there is much in this context in need of consideration.

The question whether or not violence is integral to such claims requires further reflection on what we understand as *violence*. Confronted with the existential need to overcome violent conditions of oppression, multiple exclusion, or systemic disrecognition, *violence* indeed often seems to offer an unavoidable *instrument* for the excluded and the truly destitute ones. To confront and possibly overcome the invisible violences of their disenfranchising contexts, which abandon them to the role of passive victims, the recovery of agency and

visibility is cardinal. Such recovery, however, often cannot but resort to a poietics of spectacular violence performed in culturally shaped ways (Whitehead 2013). The perception of such performative violence used by *our others* as senseless, atavistic, or irrational is luring. It easily leads us astray, however, in judging their violence as the only *true* violence at work in such situations.

To correct this misperception, a suspension of our normatively shaped assessment of their *inherently* illegitimate, irrational, etc., violence is required. Phenomenologically speaking, this calls for an "ethical epoché."[5] Its aim is to trace the manifold violences (symbolic, structural, epistemic, cultural, etc.) that always already predetermine what is perceived *as* violence and what is not; what counts *as* violence and what does not. In sensibilizing us for our largely pre-reflective habits of perception, interpretation, and judgment, such an epoché helps us to deconstruct monolithic conceptions of violence as "the other of reason." This is of utmost importance since such conceptions are operative in our justifications of the ways in which we deal with the violence of the other. Whether this is translated into terms of political power, a procedural byproduct of socialization, or even a merely collateral effect of some "responsibility to protect", this justification of our own violence in terms of counter-violence not only normatively embellishes it, but furthermore results in the social production of indifference toward the suffering of the other who becomes its legitimate target.

The concept of violence that I promote here is an inherently *relational* one. It starts from the insight into a constitutive interplay between violence and social order, the bodily and the symbolic faces of violence. It holds, in a nutshell, that any (social, political, etc.) *order of violence*, since it functions in a selective and exclusive fashion, also is a *violent order*.[6] This implies that violence as event and as structure are closely interrelated, in particular by the fact that the very project of order thrives upon the definition of the disorderly, paradigmatically of (what counts as) violence. Orders of violence may therefore not only be dependent upon "imaginations of disorder." Since they need supposedly "brute", "irrational", "inherently illegitimate", etc., violence as their relevant other, we might even suspect that they performatively (re)produce it, perhaps to the extent of finally becoming parasitic upon it.[7]

Bearing this interrelation of order and violence in mind, we realize that this discussion is not about a subtle phenomenological distinction. Rather, the question of what counts *as* violence or violent, more precisely as orderly "violence" (and therefore as legitimate, as an extreme but normative manifestation of power, etc.) or extraordinary violence (and therefore as "the illegitimate *per se*") is most relevant for our debate concerning unconditional claims and the violence attributed to them. This attribution, as I argue, is but a necessary correlate of order projecting the mark of some "true" or "original violence" onto its other, the disorderly, unruly, irrational. This becomes exemplarily clear when we look at how other violence is represented in the context of our self-righteous brand of Western, occidental reason and the ethicized politics it entails. Often indeed such an ethicized politics puts forward unconditional claims at preserving itself and its invocations of an acclaimed universal humanism. Under these auspices, the others' violence is easily misrepresented as mere "irrationality incarnate", an "atavistic episode" of a condition we deem to have overcome in principle, or the "barbarism" of a free play of unrestrained power, as in the case of so-called "failed states" and dysfunctional "cultures of violence."[8] Such an understanding of violence as the "wholly other", however, plays into the hands of a general "myth of meaningless violence."[9] This, finally, facilitates an ignorance of violence in one's own universal (political) claims while purporting their ethical indispensability and legitimizing the violent means of its global implementation.

3. Excursus: On the Post-Secular Condition and the Trope of the "Religious Other"

An exemplification of the preceding reflections can be found in the extraordinary (and tendentially irrational) status that is attributed to *religion* in "post-secular" discourses. The alluded problem comes to the fore most clearly in Jürgen Habermas' attempt to determine

religion's role in his recently recalibrated theory of discursive reason. This reworking concerns a move with which he sought to adapt his framework to a changing tectonics of secular reason and its presumed "religious other."[10] In a series of writings, Habermas (2008, 2015) corrected his earlier insistence on the *absoluteness* of (discursivized) reason, which called for the necessity to *purify* the sacred realm of the public sphere of irrational appeals, i.e., claims assigned to tradition and epitomized by religious statements. While this correction testifies to some openness for the semantic potentials of religious traditions of (phronetic) knowledge, religion is understood in a twofold way in this account of post-secular reason: on the one hand, it is presented as a *potential remedy* for a "derailed modernity" "spinning out of control", which lacks the moral capacities to reflexively confront its own discontents and "accelerating decline" (Habermas); on the other hand, it is represented as including an "opaque core" or element (Habermas 2008, pp. 142–43) that is deemed antagonistic to the requirements of the collective deliberations and "translational proviso" that only a rational qua *secular* discourse is presupposed to bring about. However finetuned, even in Habermas' most recent account *religion* ultimately thus basically retains the nimbus of the extraordinary, that is, of including an "opaque core", being at least potentially irrational, and consequently also tendentially violent.

With a view to the unconditional claims promoted by religious actors, the in itself violent implications of this assumption (and its unconditional promotion) become painfully clear. We can see this when Habermas speaks of the fact that we can "[only] *on the basis of a self-confident defense of universalistic claims* [...] learn from others' arguments about the blind spots in our understanding and application of one's own principles." (Habermas 2013, p. 293, transl. author) If we understand the (religious) "others' arguments" as a figure of the *extraordinary*, which is in fact only considered here as a way of strengthening one's own sovereign rule (Yegenoglu 2014), then it becomes immediately clear how the trope of the "religious other" is (mis)used: as an original supplement of occidental reason's attempt at self-constitution and preservation, which is dependent upon the representation of its relevant other/s. What this exhibits concerns a true charter of *discursive* reason, which detects in the extraordinariness of the other always merely its rational impenetrability and thus intrinsic disorder but never recognizes its projective construction as *extraordinary*.

In light of Habermas' argument, it is possible that we are (still) understanding each other wrongly and applying our ethical principles incorrectly. The fact, however, that the orderly positioning of this "we" and the ethical principles we use could by definition be full of prerequisites and that their unconditionality ("on the basis of a self-confident defense of universalistic claims") might indeed be surreptitiously claimed, remains largely unquestioned within this (Western) conception of reason, which sees in religion its very—but *à la limite* irrelevant—other. [11]

In this context, the further question arises if the claims of others—meaning their claims to be perceived, respected, recognized, etc., *as* other—are not even sacrificed as such to a claim for the salvation of what we define to be the "true other." How a specific discourse about "the other" is indeed (mis)used in such a way to serve the unconditional enforcement of (Western, secular) political claims becomes intelligible in relation to the instrumentalization of the role and oppression of *women* in Islamic societies, especially in the Afghan one. In this "special" case, Western political discourses have exploited women's state of victimization as a justification for the violence directed against these societies without, in the last analysis, confronting the patriarchal structures within.[12] This, however, is a sacrifice that but grants absolution to the self-righteousness of an indifferent reason by way of closing itself off in an *autoimmunizing* fashion, in "the law of a terrifying and suicidal autoimmunity" (Derrida 2005, p. 18; 2002, p. 80). It does so in bringing the "equation of freedom and sovereignty" (Arendt 1958, p. 234), which was exposed to be the original sin of traditional political theory by Arendt, to its very logical end: it does so since it seals the imaginary institution of a self-perpetuating logic of unevenly distributed vulnerability, one that but reanimates the myth of an autonomous, masterful, and invulnerable subject, which

cannot but project its vulnerability onto its others, thus cultivating a culture of conflict and violence (Bergoffen 2016).

That unconditional claims conflict and potentially clash and that violence escalates in this context quite easily hence is not only accepted as a widespread fact but finds evidence in our most dear conceptions of discursive reason and procedural integration. An exemplary case of such an escalating clash of two forms of unconditional claims that resulted in massive violence is reflected in the discourse concerning the destruction of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan in March 2001 through the Taliban regime. While the story, superficially regarded, seems to paradigmatically exemplify the violence-prone potential of unconditionally propagated *religious* claims and their role in petrifying "cultures of violence" and traditions of hostility, we may also read this story differently and give it a certain twist. The aim here will be to arrive at a self-critique of secular reason and its involvement in the very (re)construction of (extraordinary) violence that this case bespeaks.

As I wish to demonstrate, this scenario is not only about the blank and irrational fanaticism of a "religious other" who as "violence incarnate" simply refutes all dear achievements of political modernity—most notably discursive reason and collective deliberation. We may also read it to rather point at "the need to desacralize the respective political power" and to confront "the seduction of an ever-renewed sacralization" (Joas 2013, p. 285) of the political in general, one to which secular politics obviously is not resistant at all. The problem to be confronted hence concerns not only outdated theocracies, old-fashioned "political theologies" of power and domination, or "failed states" that cling to ancient rites of sacrifice long deemed overcome. It rather concerns a more common phenomenon that also recurs in the apparently most secular orders of the political and in, as Derrida holds, "our religious wars", in which violence so apparently belongs to "two ages."[13]

4. Explanations of Destruction

In March 2001, the destruction of two Buddha statues in the valley of Bamiyan[14] by the Taliban ("students of religion")[15] led to worldwide protests on a previously unknown large scale. For comparison, remember the religiously motivated destruction of the Babri Mosque by Hindu extremists in 1992 and the subsequent violent unrest (Elias 2007, p. 26; Noyes 2011); the defacement of the Taj Mahal on 14 October 2011 by right-wing Hindus spraying graffiti on its white marble walls. Both incidents were barely covered in (Western) media. Due to its inner-Islamic nature, the destruction of the monumental Ottoman Adschjad fortress in 2002 by the Saudi regime (during the construction of the commercial complex of the Abraj-al Bait Towers in Mecca) is to be differently placed, too (Meskell 2002, pp. 564–65), although the Turkish Minister for Culture and Tourism felt then prompted to speak of a "cultural massacre", "equivalent to the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan." (Noyes 2011).

However, after the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, public resonance was far greater when compared with the marginal one in the above-mentioned cases, in which resonance simply proved politically undesirable. The destruction was covered not only locally but also on a global level. Perhaps this was due to the fact that protests and discourses in the run-up to the destruction were full of negatively connotated expressions—especially by pretentiously neutral international institutions—such as "vandalism",[16] "crime against culture", "crime against the common heritage of humanity" (Matsura 2001), "cultural terrorism" (Francioni and Lenzerini 2003, p. 625), "religious and cultural nihilism" (Watrin 2001) and—of course—"barbarism."[17] The Western assessment of the Taliban being simply an ultra-conservative, "puritanical", and "medieval" Islamist regime seemed all too strikingly confirmed in view of this apparent iconoclastic furor and the "perverse modalities of its implementation." (Francioni and Lenzerini 2003, p. 620) This decree, published by Mullah Mohammed Omar (the leader of the Taliban regime, which—at this point in time—was at the first height of its power) on 26 February 2011, speaks *prima facie* also of such a conception. It was an attempt to legitimate the destruction of the statues (indeed of all

non-Islamistic *idols* all over the country) by way of an ultraorthodox reading of the Koran. The line of argumentation reads as follows:

> "On the basis of consultations between the religious leaders of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, religious judgements of the ulama [senior clergy] and rulings of the Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, all statues and non-Islamic shrines located in different parts of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan must be destroyed. These statues have been and remain shrines of unbelievers and these unbelievers continue to worship and respect them. God almighty is the only real shrine and all fake idols must be destroyed."[18]

Neither warnings of moderate Islamic countries or high-ranking scholars succeeded when examining this interpretation as being not only a strategic mistake of the regime, but also a grave misinterpretation of the Koran[19], nor did appeals of the "West" (especially by the UN, UNESCO, and other NGOs). Also, calls made by Buddhist states (i.e., Thailand or Sri Lanka) as well as calls from India and Iran that had already appealed for the statues to be saved before the publicly announced destruction, remained unfruitful.

Rather, it seems, appeals from international art and culture institutions (such as the New York Metropolitan Museum) proposing to buy this so-called "world cultural heritage" (a status, to which the statues were not elevated due to the international ostracizing of the regime) or offering to pay for its maintenance did, in fact, exacerbate or accelerate the situation.[20] Especially, this fact seems to be extremely significant for understanding the situation. In its light, it becomes clear that this case is neither to be judged as a senseless act of "vandalism" indicating the regime's blank irrationality or "moral depravity" (Francioni and Lenzerini (2003, p. 621), nor as a purely religiously motivated iconoclasm reflecting the regime's backwardness and support of an anti-modern agenda. Without a doubt, religious or theological arguments were repeatedly put forward, at least on the surface: for example, the "religious zeal" of the Taliban was highlighted, and their "messianic determination to impose their primitive idea of Islamic practice" (Morgan 2012, 18sq.) as well. Undoubtedly, the radicalization of the Taliban fits well into the given historical context of a "revolutionary millennialism", whose "messianic irrationality" can also be found in the Kohistans and their attacks on the Buddhas as early as 1929 (Schnoering 2010, p. 138).

Furthermore, the interpretation according to which religion plays the (most) decisive role in the case at hand is supported by the regime's official explanations[21] and according to activities that present the destruction as a ritual *act of sacrifice*. This also becomes clear by Mullah Omar's argumentations. When Yusuf Abdallah al-Qaradâwi, a renowned (though currently controversial) legal scholar, reproached Mullah Omar by saying "[that] by considering themselves more knowledgeable and more pious than the companions of the Prophet and the ‚well-guided Caliphs' [the first four caliphs according to the Sunnis] who all respected historic relics, the Taliban were demonstrating impious pride", Omar responded with reference to a religious argument: "How could we justify [at the time of the last judgement] having left these impurities on Afghan soil?" (quoted in Centlivres 2003, p. 75).

And indeed, if one follows this argument, the presence of the statues symbolized a grave impurity on the soil of the Islamic emirate, which not only had to be removed in person, but be atoned for symbolically:

> "A twofold sacrifice was necessary: first the purifying sacrifice of the statues (decided by the 26 February decree) and then, the expiatory sacrifice of one hundred cows throughout the country, including twelve in the former presidential palace (ordered on 15 March). In compliance with religious dictates, the meat was to be given to the poor [. . .]"
>
> (Centlivres 2008, p. 3)

The role that the Taliban regime ascribed to the atoning sacrifice is of crucial importance here because the fact that the statues had been tolerated for so long should make it clear that

the—according to a utopian image of Islam from the 7th century—contemporary Islamic society is, in fact, degenerate and religiously deficient (Elias 2012, pp. 5–6).

According to J. Elias, another indication of the central role of religion would be the clear correlation of events and their media processing with the *Islamic Hijri calendar* (cf. Elias 2007, pp. 16–17), which Western commentators have completely ignored although it is absolutely obvious. Ultimately, according to Elias, this correlation suggests that this incident is but a "re-enactment of prophetic tradition, the Abrahamic precedent being invoked not just in the iconoclastic act but also in the symbolism of sacrifice, since the deaths of children as a direct consequence of international sanctions evoked Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his child for his monotheistic God." (Elias 2007, p. 26) If one looks at these observations, then religious *motives* seem to have played an important role in the course of events—possibly not being articulated until then. Moving from the level of motives to the level of *justification*, J. Elias concludes that: "The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001 was religiously motivated to some degree, and religiously justified to every extent." (Elias 2012, p. 2)

Taking all things in regard, it yet appears questionable whether it truly is indeed justifiable "to every extent" by ways of religion. There is undoubtedly a prehistory of Islamic iconoclasm at work in the motivational background, as evidenced by the fact that the *faces* of the statues were destroyed a long time ago. But this view becomes questionable in many respects, especially if one takes into account the detailed history of the case. In fact, the destruction of the statues might not even have come as a surprise, out of the blue, but it is decisive to see that certain rumblings were pointing into this direction. The "shock" that Westerners experienced in light of the spectacular destruction was due to the decrees issued in 1999 by the regime using the "diction of Western cultural heritage of humanity", probably then endorsed for the sake of drawing nearer to the international community[22]:

> "A. 'Concerning Protection of Cultural Heritage':
>
> All historical cultural heritages are regarded as an integral part of the heritage of Afghanistan and therefore belong to Afghanistan, but naturally also to the international community. [. . .]"
>
> "B. 'Concerning preservation of historic relics':
>
> [. . .] The famous Buddha-statues at Bamiyan were made before the event of Islam in Afghanistan, and are amongst the largest of their kind in Afghanistan and in the world. In Afghanistan there are no Buddhists to worship the statues. Since Islam came to Afghanistan until the present period the statues have not been damaged. The government regards the statues with serious respect and considers the position of their protection today to be the same as always. (. . .) The Taliban government states that the statues shall not be destroyed but protected."
>
> (Omar quoted by Falser 2010, pp. 83–84)

Given the actual volte-face of the regime, the standing background of this decree suggests a comprehensive political *instrumentalization* of religious motives. After all, a broader spectrum of practices of Islamic iconoclasm would have allowed for more than simply the brute destruction. Correspondingly, commentators focused on the *contextuality* of the events, especially its political and cultural framework rather than on its religious subtext. The latter was often all too quickly and clearly interpreted as a mere medium for political aims. Three aspects of such contextual analyses can be highlighted in the following, containing essential positions and their potential interrelations.

The first is the international political situation, i.e., the scarcely existing international *recognition* of the regime (Semple 2005; Puech 2004), meaning:

> "Taliban iconoclasm can be understood as constituting a form of protest against exclusion from an international community in which the de facto hegemony of the elite nations is obscured by the rhetoric of universal values. As an index of an idea of community that frequently falls far short of the ideal (and nowhere more

so than in Afghanistan, where superpowers did battle by proxy), there could be few better targets to make the point. If the destruction of Afghan antiquities in March 2001 represented an attack on 'a separate Afghan identity' [. . .], this was a concept of identity rooted in the universal values of the nation-state. [. . .] Their destruction represented the definitive rejection of that ideal in favor of an equally hegemonic notion of pan-Islamic homogeneity constituted in opposition to it."[23]

The intended strengthening of an "international Muslim movement" did not fail to materialize either (Elias 2007, p. 26). Against this background, the general condemnation of this act, underlined by numerous commentators, merely reflects the reporting of Western media; the contributions to the discussion in the Arab region were much broader. Not only in local presses, for example, the destruction was viewed as a symbolic act that had succeeded in exposing the self-righteousness of the "international community".[24]

In this respect, the aforementioned "Western self-righteousness" leads immediately to a second political motive: the critical situation of the Afghan population. For in 2001, the UN had forecast a severe famine as a result from the drought, an eminent threat to large parts of the population, which was already severely affected by more than 20 years of war.[25] The introduction of strict international economic sanctions[26] (as a consequence of the Taliban's refusal to extradite Osama bin Laden, who was wanted by the USA) might have appeared to the regime as hypocritical infamy when compared with the offers made by Western institutions to buy the statues or to pay for their preservation. And further on, the ban on opium production imposed by Mullah Omar, making up an extremely significant part of the national product and whose implementation was extremely problematic for large parts of the rural population[27], did not lead to a corresponding improvement in international relations either. Sayed Rahmatullah Hashimi, Taliban envoy and confidante of Mullah Omar, explained the regime's decision as a result of the outrage, anger, and indignation from the West that was seemingly more concerned with the *stone* statues' fate than with the millions of *people* starving in Afghanistan.[28] The corresponding argumentation of the clergy's assembly thus reads: "If you are destroying our future with economic sanctions, you can't care about our heritage." (Crossette 2011).

The stylization, even iconization, of the Buddha statues in the context of the universalistic discourse about the "world cultural heritage", also occurred at a most inopportune time:

"Significant among these [sc. statements and proposals from the West; MS] was the offer of New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art, made through the United Nations, to pay for the removal of all moveable relics in Afghanistan. This offer came during the Hajj, at a time when the memory of Abraham could not be stronger, since both the Hajj and Eid al-adha commemorate events in Abraham's life, in particular his opposition to idols and his willingness to sacrifice his son for the sake of God. It is no wonder that such offers were widely reported in newspapers read by those sympathetic to the Taliban."

(Elias 2007, p. 20)

The interplay between this and the first-mentioned explanatory approach becomes just as clear at this point as the fact that, and how, religious motives are amalgamated by a politics of unconditional claims.

"The Taliban's failure to obtain recognition by the United Nations—which, by the way, made it impossible to nominate the Bamiyan Buddhas for the World Heritage List—weakened the position of the moderates among them, who had obtained the reopening of the Kabul Museum. It may also have turned the concern for the statues expressed by the international community, whose ostracism the Taliban resented, to the monuments' disadvantage. Returning or reducing the Buddhas to their original religious function (against all evidence to the contrary)—

> and exercising upon them the most radical right of the owner—amounted to a provocative affirmation of sovereignty, not only upon the territory and the people but upon the values."
>
> (Gamboni 2001, p. 11)

Before I return to the reading of destruction as a modern type of performative iconoclasm, which has already been indicated, a third attempt at contextual explanation should also be mentioned: it focuses strongly on the *symbolic dimension* of this event. This approach relates the destruction of the statues to their significant cultural role for the largely central Afghan Shiite minority, the Hazaras (see Monsutti 2004). The Hazaras, which had also been oppressed by the Pashtun majority in the past, fought with the Taliban over the Bamiyan valley at the said time, their supremacy fluctuating. Especially, the massacre of Yakaolang by the Taliban (January 2001) must be considered, as it took place immediately before the events of destruction.[29] It seems crucial that Bamiyan's local government became the "precarious capital" of quasi-independent Hazaristan and thus, to the Hazaras, its statues became—as Centlivres points out—"of emblematic significance". Hence, they served to attest to the Hazaras' autochthonism:

> "Les gigantesques statues, selon certains intellectuels, lui appartiennent bien. Ce n'est pas un hazard si des conquérants, venus d'ailleurs, et en particulier les Afghans, tous sunnites, s'étaient acharnés contre elles et surtout contre leur visage. Ces visages mêmes étaient la preuve de l'autochtonie des Hazaras. Leurs traites étaient, selon ces jeunes lettres, ceux mêmes—mongols—des habitants de toujours de Hazarjat. Ils étaient leur héritiers légitimes. [. . .] La destruction des statues représente une atteinte au gigantesque décor de ce qui avait été la capitale des Hazaras et l'anénantissement de monuments liés a l'identité hazara."
>
> (Centlivres 2001, p. 102)

Yet not only a symbolic attack on the "cultural identity" of the Hazaras is associated with the destruction of the statues. Another symbolic effect was located in the fact that those two dissimilar statues were viewed by the Hazaras as a *sexually differentiated couple* and their destruction would have been the Taliban's attack on the symbolic public presence of the feminine. According to this gender-theoretical reading, "the fury directed against one of the Buddhas was, metaphorically, aimed at the Afghan women; at least from a Western point of view, Afghan women had to feel targeted and repressed in their desire for liberation" (Centlivres 2008, p. 8).

One might wonder whether in the case of these two discourses, as Judith Butler aptly put it, we are not dealing here with a "foreclosure of alterity [. . .] in the name of 'feminism'" (Butler 2002, p. 41). The self-righteousness of this rejection seems to be evident in the former case, when one realizes that earlier on Taliban's massacres of the Hazaras initially found little echo in Western media, but suddenly there was great reference regarding their truly difficult fate.[30] Against this background, the hypothesis of an "ethnic revenge campaign" against the Hazaras is found to be unlikely. In return, reference was made to the dynamics of the "internal antagonisms" of the Taliban, in particular to the increasing influence of Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden on parts of the ruling elite and their understanding of Islam.[31] In this context, with regard to the role of ethnicity in Afghanistan, a general remark should be made: Since 1992, an "ethnicization" has unquestionably taken place. Indeed, according to Schetter, ethnicity even formed the "driving force of the war machine." However, the Afghan conflict may by no means be understood exclusively as ethnically motivated. Although the "Islamic rhetoric" often "veiled" the "ethnic dimension", it should also be noted that "the practice of Islam, which was perceived to be correct, became the only valid standard for the legitimate exercise of power" itself when "the political commitment to Islam in the population at large [lost] its credibility as a means of social integration." (Schetter 2003, pp. 566, 564).

If we are to review what we have already seen, we realize that neither one of the main explanations of the destruction—by way of the religious, cultural, or the political

motivations or aspects—are convincing solely by themselves. In fact, "attempts to label such violence as *either* primarily Islamist *or* political [risk] misunderstanding a complicated situation" (Noyes 2011, p. 1; cf. Meskell 2002, p. 562). Apart from the one-sided theological and contextual explanations, there are very few that point to the peculiarity of this case: that is, to the *interweaving* of the religious and the political. In this regard, the most important interpretations seem to be those that discuss "performative iconoclasm" and globalization as its background.[32] In these interpretations—as J.-M. Frodon rightly suggests—a crucial question yet remains: whether the act of destruction "under cover of archaic justifications, functioned along the lines of a very contemporary logic." (Frodon 2002, p. 21) In other words, the questions seems to be whether the religious moment is merely a welcome "cover up" or truly carries a profound meaning, reflecting a violence *intrinsic* to religion, or rather, to a specific tradition of religious knowledge and practice.

To answer this question, we must consider each interpretation's underlying understanding of *transcendence* that came to the fall: As the Taliban regime stated (in stark contrast to the 1999 decree previously cited), the decision to destroy the statues was related to the fact that these statues were being worshiped as *idols*. As officially recorded, however, not only did no Buddhists live in Afghanistan but the statues were also not frequented as pilgrimage sites. Furthermore, the regime had also announced that if there were Buddhists, their (also religious) minority rights would have been accepted, however doubtful this assertion may appear.[33] Thus, the question needs to be raised against which "transcendence claim" the action was directed; or rather, against which collectively raised claims of some form of "making transcendence together"[34].

According to a line of interpretation presented by Frodon, Gamboni, and Falser, the Taliban's action was the world's first media-effective form of something then termed *performative iconoclasm*. Following their findings, it was directed less against an *idol* in the traditional sense but rather against the Western concept of *world cultural heritage*, which was weaponized by the West. In this light, Gamboni continues the passage quoted above:

> "Returning or reducing the Buddhas to their original religious function (against all evidence to the contrary)—and exercising upon them the most radical right of the owner—amounted to a provocative affirmation of sovereignty, not only upon the territory and the people but upon the values. If this interpretation is correct, the Taliban refused to take part in the world cult evoked by Malraux, instead subjecting it to the primacy of their understanding of Islam. This meant *defining the Buddhas as idols but attacking them as works of art and icons of cultural heritage*."
>
> (Gamboni 2001, p. 11, emphasis mine)

Indeed, the apparent economic and political absurdity of this act of destruction, as well as the fact that there is no theological legitimation for it to be found in the Koran, supports the interpretation of an intertwining of political motives and religious justifications. This interpretation, however, does not seem to be complete either: as Centlivres states, that is because Western discourse about universalistic world cultural heritage ultimately leads to the introduction of a kind of "new transcendence." As I would argue following this path of argumentation, this discourse claims that the *idol* (an object of religious worship) is replaced by the *icon* (the artwork embodying a non-religious relation to the invisible). Thus, ultimately, as Centlivres argues, "one religion is replaced by another religion":

> "In their effort to portray the cultural heritage's preservation as a human, terrestrial universal and secular value, the protestors against the destruction of the Buddha's of Bamiyan turned it into a new transcendence [. . .] and therefore usurp[ed], for the Taliban, what belongs to God. The indignation provoked by the destruction of a work that the West ‚sacralises', as a cultural heritage of the humanity, is precisely what led the Taliban to believe that, for the West, another type of idolatry—the cult of Works of Art—has replaced the false Gods of Bamiyan."
>
> (Centlivres 2008, p. 10)

This interpretation seems to be conclusive (enough). What remains is the universalistic concept of world cultural heritage that refers us (back) to what I would like to call the underlying *autoidolatry of "the West"* and the *cult of a disengaged reason* around which it revolves. This emerges, for instance, through the afore-mentioned "self-confident defense of universalistic claims" (Habermas) and becomes tangible therein, "[that] it excluded from the realm of the 'civilized' humanity those who had dared to attack its 'imaginary museum'" (Ibid., p. 10).[35]

5. Unfolding Some Implications

Clearly, the conflict of unconditional claims in the case at hand takes place in a truly abysmal field. It holds "religion" at its secret center—be it only in its limited, but strategically apostrophized meaning by which the secular "West" understands itself to have finally overcome religion through the processes of privatization and secularization. Correspondingly, the intrusion of religious convictions, dogmas, or systems of knowledge into the political serves as a most relevant "marker" (Cavanaugh 2009, p. 15) for the cultural and political backwardness of the "religious other" (cf. Fabian 1983); most notably of "Islam." However, as we have come to know since Edward Said at least, the generalizations that are characteristic for this discourse all too quickly obscure its history, which is currently reappearing in various contexts under the auspices of a so-called "post-secular society", one replete with discontents that multiply in our "modernity spinning out of control" (Habermas):

> "These enormous generalizations have behind them a whole history, enabling and disabling at the same time ... We must immediately note that it is always the West, and not Christianity, that seems pitted against Islam. Why? Because the assumption is that whereas ‚the West' is greater than and has surpassed the stage of Christianity, its principal religion, the world of Islam—its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding—is still mired in religion, primitivity and backwardness."
>
> (Said 1981, p. 36)[36]

In view of this state of affairs, one begins to understand that "the West" can only confront "Islam" in a "politics of the veil", (Scott 2007) hence on the basis of a *constitutive misperception*. In one and the same gesture, Islam's otherness is exposed *and* transfigured. Practically regarded, secular "policies of religion-making" (cf. Dressler and Mandair 2011; Mamdani 2004) define what may appear, on the one hand, in the (global) public square and partake in procedural deliberative practice and, on the other hand, what needs to be relegated to the private realm or even to be excluded from the political forum in general. To adopt Appadurai's deep insight into the ambiguity of recognition under the constraints of a globalization going awry, one may say that the "religious other" is pinned down to a vicious alternative: the impossible choice here lies between an "inclusion on Draconian terms (meaning self-alienation) or exclusion from world-history" (Appadurai 2006, p. 35). Fixing the other this way in a contemptuous double bind that cannot but motivate violent "struggles for recognition" ("visibility", dignity", etc.) while self-righteously condemning (only) such visible violence, yet is not all. As to my hypothesis, this *misperception* goes hand in glove with a profound *self-distortion* on the part of our beloved Western self-understanding. This can be seen with regard to how the "politics of the veil" is justified in our related social imaginaries. As we have seen even in the case of Habermas' most sophisticated account, this is done in terms of a "self-confident defense of universalistic claims" (Habermas) to be promoted by "discursivized reason." On the one hand, this kind of justification is promoted, as we have already quoted, by a "foreclosure of alterity (...) in the name of 'feminism'" (Butler 2002, p. 41); it is done, in other words, in terms of the orderly selection of some "true other" who is presented to require protection and hence must be saved—thus reiterating the patriarchal structure that revolves exactly around the construction of such vulnerable subjects.[37] On the other hand, this very way of thinking

about "the other" within a secularist framework structurally conceals the *obstinacy* and violent—potentially fanatical—character of an "ideological secularism"[38]; i.e., one that tacitly manages this order by reproducing the *extra*ordinary under the sign of a potentially threatening *dis*order. In other words, such management is short-circuiting the claim of the extraordinary with imaginations of threatening disorder (that call for justified counter-violence). That this "threat of disorder" is traditionally at the very heart of modern social technologies becomes not only clear with Hobbes' inaugural imagination of a natural "war of every man against every man"[39], but also with Foucault (1965), who placed the trope at the very heart of the discursive constitution and incorporation of societal divisions; today, it is also operative in late modern transformations of war, in which the trope is not simply a testament to Manichean ideologies but is often conjured up by internationally deliberated policing operations that legitimate "violent practices through invocations of humanity." (Jabri 2006, p. 57) Bearing in mind the context of our study here, the fact that such invocations are then often instrumentalized in order to "legitimate imperial violence", should by now not come as a surprise at all (cf. Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 30).

If, however, occidental thought is so deeply enmeshed in a mental habit of the other's misperception and related moral self-distortion, what kind of *reason* is still able "to keep awake (. . .) an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven" (Habermas 2015, p. 19) in our "derailed modernity"? First and foremost, imagining the potential of such a *non-indifferent* brand of reason requires to refrain from a "cult of reason" that promotes unconditional claims based upon "ideas of progress indifferent to mortality" (Patočka 1996, p. 130). Since indeed, it is exactly the totalizing claim of such ideas and their assimilatory force which allows for the implementation of its own intrinsically justified "counter-violence".[40]

In order to counteract serious misperceptions of "the other", and its morally distorting implications, which, I find, have established themselves in the habitus of the Western culture of reason, the concept of culture and its heteronormative implications appear in need to be further questioned. This even pertains to a *discursivized* form of reason, which still sails in the same winds of some heteronormative narrative semantics, as the example of post-secularism and the trope of "religious otherness" has shown. To embark on such a critique of the concept of "culture" and its lasting heteronormative implications is a task that I cannot even come close to mastering here. However, by looking at the already mentioned concept of "world *cultural* heritage" and its pivotal role in the controversy over the Buddhas of Bamiyan, I would like to conclude with a related reflection that shall at least serve as a guide for further discussion in this direction.

That the concept of "world cultural heritage" indeed exemplifies the problematic at hand becomes palpable if we take into consideration the following: the embodiment of the unconditional claims promoted by our Western brand of reason is operative in the concept of "world cultural heritage" (dating back to the Enlightenment tradition). Given this, it runs the risk to turn into a *cult of reason* if its implementation is not taking into consideration the necessity of "provincializing Europe" (Chakrabarty 2008), i.e., of deconstructing long-traded assumptions about secularism, sovereignty, and power. This deconstructive "long gesture"[41] would have concrete implications for the self-understanding of international organizations and institutions, as Falser demonstrates:

> "As a guardian of the so-called world-heritage the UNESCO is called upon to reflect its role in global power relationships. And further on, if a humanitarian concept of cultural heritage is in need of reflection, people of the region must consequently also be protected as its *stakeholders*, which was and is hardly the case in the case of the Bamiyan valley: the former inhabitants of the neighboring caves of Bamiyan were resettled against their will, not least as a consequence of the subsequent UNESCO World Heritage nomination."
>
> (Falser 2010, p. 91, transl. author)

If the destruction of the statues was previously seen as a "cultural self-mutilation" (Centlivres 2001, p. 139), the question then arises, how the officially/internationally ordered practices documented by Falser affect the social viability of local life and thus destroy the *local* cultural heritage, which is but foundational for the concept as such.[42]

In the given context, one may of course speculate about whether or not the destruction of the Buddhas' physical gestalt did not in fact perfectly exemplify the ideas of *imagelessness* and related "impermanence", (*anicca, anityia*) which were of paramount relevance for early Buddhist art.[43] It remains doubtful, however, how one was to distill a regulative principle for international action and politics out of this, especially in a context that seems to be predetermined by the cycle of violence and counter-violence and "natural" laws of retaliation. Notwithstanding this difficulty, the creation of such a principle would at least help to question and deconstruct hegemonic regimes of sovereign interpretation that have been designed to define what may and what may not find entry into the Olymp of "world cultural heritage." Even if doubtful in its institution and far-reaching implications, however, refraining from transcendence-based ideals of sovereignty would at least help us to avoid excessive arguments that lead to further escalation. To provide an example from the case dealt with, the destruction of cultural assets may indeed negatively affect entire generations as archaeologist C. Renfrew clearly implied in his statement looking at the events in 2001. When noting, however, "[that] the time is ripe for an international convention to make the destruction of cultural artefacts a crime against humanity" (quoted in Bone 2001), not only was an exaggerated claim promoted by him, but it seems to be even more than "dangerous to place commensurate value on people and things and to couch these acts in a language reserved for genocide, since they do not inhabit the same order of existence" (Meskell 2002, p. 564). And, as matter of fact, recourse to the meta-legal category of a "crime against humanity" all too often has been used as a means to justify further (even incommensurate) violence, most notably in terms of a "last war" to end all wars, etc. This also refers to a major pattern at work in justifications of *religious* violence, i.e., recourse to the category of the "holy" which, in its uncompromising status (Margalit), is designed to *end* the chain of arguments by introducing a figure of the unconditional. The idea that the appeal to this figure, however, deploys social actors with a "license to start all over" opens the door to the mimetic circle of human action which but parades as purported sanctity.

At this point, I would argue, we are again faced with the urgent need to differentiate between (attacking) forms of *violence* and (the exclusive character of) *violent* orders and to explore the interrelations that exist between them. This distinction proves especially crucial in the leading context in which we are dealing with an escalating conflict of "unconditional claims" (or ones presented as such) harboring antagonistic potential. The suggested distinction is designed to open up the possibility for a transformation of such claims. TThis is the case, since it can help us to understand the violent character of orders that function in the background of the actual violence, which results from these orders' work, especially when being absolutized. And indeed, nowhere is the self-righteousness of our Western culture of reason more tangible than in the misperception of one's own "violence" and in the consequences it entails: be it in terms of the orderly "counter-violence" that the "self-confident defense of universalistic claims" (Habermas) justifies *in the name* of order; or in terms of the necessarily "violent character" of reasonable orders that always already predefine what counts *as* violence and what does *not*. Furthermore, orders, whose violent character remains largely invisible to those sheltered by them, create indifference toward the suffering of "others" who are either excluded as such (and thus often motivated to gain access, recognition, or visibility by violence) or included on inherently violent, i.e., dispossessing terms.

All things said here point at severe problems that our Western, occidentalist brand of reason has with its disavowed (parasitic) dependency on what it projects as its "wholly other", "the other" of reason as such, i.e., "irrationality", "mute violence", and most notably dark, opaque forms of "religious violence", which brings all these tropes of otherness together in a most erratic way. Especially if reason's aspirations to establish some universal

super-order or super-discourse take place under the sign of the exclusion of others by way of ostracizing them from the "realm of the 'civilized' humanity", we should become very wary. What becomes palpable in cases like the one we have studied here in some detail, in fact points at an *autoidolatry* of reason, which is based on the rejection of "the other" in itself, i.e., some originary violence we project onto our "others." In Waldenfels' (1991, p. 109) words, "the justification of violence is compensated for by the self-righteousness of reason, which cedes to its own violence the more this process is disguised by rationalization."

Where "the other" is excluded due to the "violence incarnate" she is said to embody, we need to ask what kind of violent orders function in the background of the definition of violence that is at work in this situation—and how it is produced by such orders whose potential for violence is disavowed and projected outwards. Whether it is the *uncompromising* character of "the sacred", the *unavoidable* "religion of the economy", or the *relational* grip of (the myth) of "progress", or, as in our case, the *civilizing* "cult of the culture of reason", violence disguises itself not only through its rationalization but also through the proclaimed unavoidability of those among its cultural forms which are *unconditionally* promoted to finally be able to contain or ban it. In the end, this process of reason's redemptive distancing from its innermost "other" is rendered *sacrosanct* through the performative production of others as "violence incarnate", as what order requires as its *material* to justify its very project.[44] Our well-known stories, philosophical all too often, of "barbarians", "cannibals", and nowadays "terrorists" testify to this. But we may still accompany them by counter-narratives of the *barbarization*, *cannibalization*, and the *terrorizing* of those others that are the means that in fact make the spectacle of our others' violence tick and justify our own.

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Notes

1. Respective media coverage is presented and discussed especially in Section 4; the material relates to the event under scrutiny, for reasons of space more recent cases, which can easily be found, are not presented here.
2. Such evaluations, which provide the critical background focus of this paper, or its "opponent", are not only part of everday perception and morality. They are also still operative in major branches of mainstream research. A critical discussion of such accounts that all, in some way or another, see a close relation between violence and religion at work (Juergensmeyer, Hick, Kimball, or Marty, to name just a few renowned protagonists) can be found in Cavanaugh's deconstruction of this so-called "myth of religious violence" (Cavanaugh 2009).
3. It is worth quoting here Huxley, who holds: "To the eye of reason, I repeat it, it certainly seems strange. But then the majority of human actions are not meant to be looked at with the eyes of reason." (Huxley 1948, p. 47).
4. In Avishai Margalit's words, this logic is explained as follows: "In the religious picture, there are things over which we must never compromise. The religious picture is in the grip of the idea of the holy. The holy is that which is non-negotiable. Crudely put, one cannot compromise over the holy without compromising the holy. Conversely, in the economic picture of politics, compromise is at the heart of politics, and the ability to compromise is highly praised." (Margalit 2010, p. 24).
5. Phenomenological analyses of violence and its many faces have pointed to the necessity of such an "ethical epoché" (Husserl). They underscore the intertwining of violence and order, thus pointing at the "limits of the legitimation of violence" and how they feed into the problem of violence (Waldenfels 1991).
6. On this distinction between violence in the substantive and the adjectival form, translated here as *violence* and (being) *violent*, see again Waldenfels (1991, pp. 106–7).
7. Examples for this performative production of the other's presumably irrational and excessive violence are provided and discussed by Whitehead (2013), see also Staudigl (2019).

[8] How violence is represented and (re)produced in this way in the neoliberal discourse, and its practices of locating violence, is demonstrated convincingly by Springer (2011).

[9] See on the criticism of this myth, to which even mainstream recent research on violence is still susceptible, Blok (2000); on the constitutive *interweaving* of violence and social order, which marks the oppostive position, see Whitehead (2007); and the same argument with regard to the Afghan society finds evidence in Centlivres (1997).

[10] That this tectonics has changed substantially and that the secular and the sacred are not exclusiver opposities, has much earlier on been discussed by anthropologists of religion, see, e.g., Asad (2003).

[11] In this regard, Habermas speaks about the "opacity" of religion and a respective "translation proviso" (Habermas 2008, pp. 133–39, 142–43) that shall feed into "salvaging translation", thus enriching discursive reason in a procedural fashion.

[12] The argument is put forward mightily by Butler (2002), but see especially Abu-Lughod (2002), who is referenced there.

[13] See also the considerations on this "new archaic violence" in Derrida (2002, p. 88): "In our 'wars of religion' violence has two ages. The one, already discussed above, appears 'contemporary', in sync or in step with the hypersophistication of military tele-technology-of"digital" and cyberspaced culture. The other is a 'new archaic violence'; if one can put it that way. It counters the first and everything it represents. Revenge. Resorting, in fact, to the same resources of mediatic power, it reverts (according to the return, the resource, the repristination and the law of internal and autoimmune reactivity we are trying to formalize here) as closely as possible to the body proper and to the premachinal living being. In any case, to its desire and to its phantasm".

[14] For the history of the culturally and socially important valley located at a crossroads of the Silk Road and the history of the two approximately 1400–1600 years old Buddha statues, their interweaving with the local (pre-) Islamic culture, see the comprehensive descriptions in Centlivres (2001); Morgan (2012); as well as the extensive local history background in Warikoo (2002).

[15] On the "Taliban construct" and its history, see Schetter (2003); Schetter and Klußmann (2011); on the comprehensive context of Wahabi Islam as a whole, see Delong-Bas (2004).

[16] See, for example, the editorial of the *Times of India* from 4 March 2001, which was entitled "Act of vandalism", or the "ICOMOS World Report on Monuments and Sites in Danger 2001/02" (ICOMOS 2002); here, the guideline "Actions of ICOMOS for Heritage at Risk in Afghanistan", in which the topos is tried several times without reflection: http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2002/afghanistan2002.htm (accessed on 26 September 2022), Saikal and Thakur (2001).

[17] See, for example, the "Appeal" von ICOMOS und ICOM published in 2000 (ICOMOS 2000), "Save the cultural Heritage of Afghanistan": http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/world_report/2000/appeal.htm (accessed on 22 December 2013). Since the ICOMOS webpage undergoes permanent modifications and it sometimes is difficult to retireve older appeals, I also refer to a comprehensive publication, including further appeals and reports, published in *Monuments and Sites* (Petzet 2009).

[18] Edict issued by the Islamic State of Afghanistan, 12th of Rabiul-Awwal 1421 (26 February 2001), quoted by Flood (2002, p. 655). See also Omar (1999).

[19] The rejection ran right through the ranks of the whole Islamic world. Even countries such as, for example, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates clearly distanced themselves and tried to persuade the Taliban regime to give in (cf. "World appeals to Taliban to stop destroying statues", CNN 3 March 2001. http://web.archive.org/web/20071224155700/http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/03/03/afghan.buddhas.03/index.html, accessed on 8 July 2014), for example, by sending a delegation from the "Organization of Islamic Conference", which included the already mentioned, widely respected, Yusuf Abdallah al-Qaradâwi and the well-known Islamic intellectual Fahmi Huwaydi. A comprehensive compilation of the religious and legal justifications of Islamic scholars can be found in the *Proceedings of the Doha Conference of 'Ulamâ on Islam and Cultural Heritage*, Doha Qatar, 30–31 December 2011, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001408/140834m.pdf (accessed on 8 July 2014), cf. especially the contribution by Al-Ansari (2001, pp. 30–31). On the broad scope of the rejection, see also Lal (2001, pp. 23–27, especially 26).

[20] The confrontational escalation between an all-economic and a religious way of life, which the aforementioned Margalit has identified as an ideal type, is clearly evident here (see again Margalit 2010).

[21] For example, the Taliban Minister for Information and Culture, Mawlawi Quadratullah Jamal, who stated that the decree covering the destruction was "totally an internal religious edict" and "had been under consideration for six years." Quoted by Ahir (2001, pp. 51, 53).

[22] It should also be added in this context that the widespread looting and the extreme "sell-out" of pre-Islamic Afghan art was put to an end when the Taliban came to power: "An estimated 70% of the collections disappeared between 1993 and 1996 when various factions of the Mujaheddin fought for control of Kabul. No losses were reported after the Taliban took over. In fact, numbers of moderate Taliban officials were supportive." (Dupree 2002, p. 986) It should be added further that Mullah Omar himself had the destruction of the statues, which a local Taliban leader had attempted, stopped in 1999.

[23] Cf. Flood (2002), who documents the entire spectrum of Islamic iconoclasm in the past and present, as well as more comprehensively Elias (2012, 653sqq.)

[24] Cf. Elias (2012, pp. 19–21), with a wealth of evidence from the local, especially the Pakistani, press.

[25] At that time Afghanistan, with around 1.5 million war victims and 5 million refugees, had lost around a third of its population; in 2001 it was also, together with Somalia, the country most severely affected by hunger and had the lowest life expectancy in the world (cf. the “Asia Overview” in Human Rights Watch 2001a).

[26] See UN Security Council Resolution 1333 (2000), dated 19 December 2000.

[27] Cf. Francioni and Lenzerini (2003, p. 624): “Actually, Afghanistan is estimated to produce 75 per cent of the world’s raw opium, with a harvest estimated at 2800 tons in 1998 [...]. For the first time, on 27 July 2000 the Taliban supreme leader Mohammed Omar issued a decree imposing a complete ban on opium poppy cultivation in the controlled territory of Afghanistan (see UN Doc. A/55/393—S/2000/875, at 45).” On the substantial role of opium cultivation and art smuggling for the Afghan "open war economy” see also Rubin (2000).

[28] See Crossette (2011); Falser (2010); and note the following statement by an Afghan interviewed by archaeologists regarding the “careless handling” of cultural goods: “What can we do? We are hungry. We have no food in our homes. We have to dig up these things and sell them . . . We don’t worry about our history. We just think of our hunger ”(quoted from Meskell (2002, p. 563)).

[29] On this see the evidence provided by Human Rights Watch in a report titled “Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan” (Human Rights Watch 2001b).

[30] Compare with this criticism Falser (2010, p. 87); but see also Rashid (2001).

[31] Compare with the criticism of the hypothesis mentioned by Schnoering (2010); on the influence of al-Qaeda and its “kidnapping” of the regime cf. Morgan (2012, 20sqq.).

[32] Falser (2010, p. 86); on the role of the Internet and new forms of communication in relation to the political overdetermination of material culture and especially archaeological artefacts see Colwell-Chanthaphonh (2003, pp. 75–98).

[33] See the assurance of the envoy Sayed Rahmatullah Hashimi: “[T]he Taliban would not destroy statues actually being worshiped and would not touch the Hindu temples still left in Afghanistan”, quoted in Crossette (2011).

[34] This formulation can perhaps be ventured following Schütz’s considerations in “Making Music Together”, a piece which emphasized the bodily lived moments of pre-reflexive communalization (Schütz 1972, pp. 159–78); B. Giesen’s analysis of what he calls “Tales of Transcendence”, on the other hand, emphasizes the discursive-performative effects that “narratives of transcendence” have for the constitution of the political due to their emblematic appresentation competence in relation to the extraordinary (cf. Giesen 2005).

[35] This points at the necessity to develop a general critique of the Western institution of the *museum*, which needs to be deconstructed as a metaphor for the anthropological discourse as such (see Fabian 1983; Wilson 2001). As for this context, self-critical reflections on the by no means just “observing reason” (S. Moravia) but “past mastering” of archeology can be found in Meskell (2002).

[36] On this discussion and its relevance for our context, see also Mutman (1992) and Goody (2004). On the “post-secular” constellation and its proliferating discontents, especially when viewed in the context of the maelstrom of globalization, see Staudigl (2020).

[37] More closely regarded, we realize that the discussed kind of rejection works by way of defining *difference* only as a specific part of an overarching (rational) order. Following Levinas, we understand that in this way of thinking, the other allows for not responding to her singular call and alterity, since it is always already judged as the genus of a species, that is, as a mere part of some all-inclusive totality. On the notion of violent totality see, of course, Levinas (1979); on the aforementioned distinction, see Levinas’ exemplary formulation: “Ce n’est pas du tout la différence qui fait l’alterité; c’est l’alterité qui fait la différence.” (Levinas 1988, p. 92).

[38] Cf. Glendinning (2009); on the potency of “ideological secularism” compare also with Habermas (2008, p. 241, my emphasis), who states: “But the weak responsibility for the collective fate of one’s neighbors and of distant peoples is not lifted from our shoulders simply because our fallible powers are mostly inadequate or because it sometimes misleads *obstinate* or *fanatical* individuals who fail to recognize their own fallibility”.

[39] Hobbes (1651, p. 79). Most relevant of course is the fact that Hobbes explicitly states that “it may peradventure be thought there was never such a time nor condition of war as this”, (Ibid., p. 78), thus pointing at the imaginary character of this counterfactual condition. The apparently eminent “threat of disorder”, in other words, is in fact implanted into the political imaginary, making it tick.

[40] See once again Springer (2011, pp. 155–59) who demonstrates this most convincingly with regard to the “political theology of neoliberalism” and the ways it produces and construes its (ir)relevant “others.” As Springer holds, it does so by relegating the figure of otherness to those spaces around the globe that are in their resistance taken to be prone to violence and thus embody a real threat to the neoliberal project. Neoliberalism, thus viewed, is but paradigmatic for modernity’s being parasitic upon the imagination of “the other”, “violence incarnate”, which it permanently has to (re)produce as its very other in order to keep its business going.

[41] See Derrida (1992, pp. 28–29): “To make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other, indeed—and this is perhaps something else altogether—toward the other *of* the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore, (b) to be faithfully responsible *for* this memory, and thus to respond rigorously to this double injunction: will this have to consist in

repeating or in breaking with, in continuing or in opposing? Or indeed in attempting to *invent another gesture*, an epic *gesture* in truth, that presupposes memory precisely in order to assign identity from alterity, from the other heading and the other of the heading, from a completely other shore?".

42 On the ambivalence of archaeological practice in general and on the problem of conservation or museum securing of cultural goods at the expense of, i.e., indigenous groups in particular see Meskell (2002, p. 565); Silverman (2011); and also Silverman and Fairchild Silverman and Ruggles (2007). Ironically, it was recently demonstrated by French researchers that there are paintings from the 5th–9th centuries in rock caves that became only accessible after the destruction, some of which used oil techniques—a technique the birth of which was previously dated to the painting of the 14th and 15th centuries in Italy and Flanders (see Véron 2001). This discovery complements the previously often emphasized role of the influence of classical Greek art, which is manifest into the Gandhara style.

43 A hint into this direction might be found in the simple observation that reactions to the destruction on the part of Buddhist countries did not join in the average international outcry of indignation but rather expressed sadness. The well-known *koan* of Linji Yixuaon, a 9th-century Zen master (d. 866), may also give rise to thought in this context, but remains uncommented here: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him".

44 This figure of thought goes back to Zygmunt Baum's discussion of the *modern* "dialectics of order": "We can say that the existence is modern in as far as it forks into order and chaos. (. . .) If it is aimed at all (. . .), order is not aimed at as a substitute for an alternative order. The struggle for order is not a fight of one definition against another, of one way of articulating reality against a competitive proposal. It is a fight of determination against ambiguity, [. . .] of transparency against obscurity (. . .). Order as a concept, as a vision, as a purpose could not be conceived but for the insight into the total ambivalence, the randomness of chaos. Order is continuously engaged in the war of survival. The other of order is not another order: chaos is its only alternative. The other of order is the miasma of the indeterminate and unpredictable. The other is the uncertainty, that source and archetype of all fear. The tropes of 'the other of order' are: undefinability, incoherence, (. . .) illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity, confusion, undecidability, ambivalence./Chaos, 'the other of order', is pure negativity. It is a denial of all that the order strives to be. It is against that negativity that the positivity of order constitutes itself. *But the negativity of chaos is a product of order's self-constitution: its side-effect, its waste, and yet the condition sine qua non of its (reflective) possibility*. Without the negativity of chaos, there is no positivity of order; without chaos, no order." (Bauman 1993, pp. 6–7, my emphasis).

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