

PhD Thesis Summary

Illusions are an inevitable aspect of every human being's life. Regardless of the positive or negative role ascribed to them within the life of human beings, illusions exert an overwhelming power over the individual. The fact that illusions are widespread in every aspect of human existence should lead us to recognize and identify the manner in which they are functional. According to some theories from the scholarly literature¹, a close analysis of illusions may help reduce the tendency to be misled by appearances, may increase our critical skills and stimulate our demarches regarding the prevention and management of future illusions.

Among the multitude of illusions which influence the existence of human individuals, we mention cultural illusions which are determined by placing human beings in a particular cultural matrix. Throughout this thesis, we

¹ Patrick Michael Gunkel, *Ideonomy: the science of ideas*, MIT Press, 2000; Saul Smilansky, *Free Will and Illusion*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2000; John McClure, *Explanations, accounts, and illusions: a critical analysis*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

have defined the cultural illusion as an appearance which works „as if” it were true, being conditioned by the location in a particular cultural perspective.

The paradigm of „clash of civilizations”, proposed by Samuel P. Huntington², according to which civilizations are the main actors of the international political scene, and the most significant conflict of the global political arena in the twenty-first century is the one between Western civilization and Islamic civilization, was the general framework of Western cultural illusions analysis performed in this thesis. Also, for a more extensive and accurate understanding of Western cultural illusions, we brought together in an interdisciplinary approach, concepts and ideas from the field of cultural philosophy, cultural anthropology, intercultural psychology, history and psychoanalysis.

In chapter one, for a better understanding of the paradigm „clash of civilizations”, we presented an analysis of the relationship between culture and

² Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*, traducere de Radu Carp, Editura Antet, Prahova, 1998.

civilization. The distinction culture - civilization represents an old and current concern at the same time for culture philosophy as well as for cultural anthropology, cross-cultural psychology and history. Both concepts are dynamic and acquire different meanings depending on the perspective from which they are analyzed. The fact that the ways of defining culture and civilization are mutual is a hindrance to establishing clear distinctions between the two concepts. Among the multitude of the definitions assigned to the term „culture” in the scholarly literature, we can notice that most of these consider the culture as a set of values, beliefs and norms shared by members of a particular group, passed from one generation to another, which determine the way they relate to themselves, other human individuals and environment. In other words, most researchers in the field associate the culture with the spiritual dimension of human beings, while civilization is considered to correspond to the economic phenomena and technical, scientific and political processes.

Within the paradigm „clash of civilizations”, civilization, understood as a broad cultural unity, provide

their members a collective identity and is deeply marked by an ideological charge. Samuel P. Huntington identifies religion as the main cause of the conflict between Western and Islamic civilization.

Islam is one of the major world religions. Nowadays, it is the second religion spread around the globe, including more than one billion followers worldwide. However, the degree of knowledge and understanding by the Western individuals of the Islam religion is extremely low. Terrorist attacks such as those in 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, 2004 bombings in Madrid and London in 2007, produced a strong sense of anxiety among ordinary people and an intensification of the concern of researchers towards the civilization conflict between the West and Islam. Most Western analyzes regarding this conflict emphasize the crippling effect which produces the Islamic radicalism on the lives of human individuals by triggering the violent Jihad.

Under the conditions of an existing civilization conflict between the West and Islam, each side uses an assembly of methods, whether peaceful or violent, to

respond to the threat coming from the other side and to assert at the same time superiority over the opponent. Each side victimize itself and blames the other, and cultural illusions of both sides contribute to the emergence, maintenance and spread of the conflicting state.

In chapter two we examined within the paradigm „clash of civilizations”, three cultural illusions of the West, namely egocentric illusion, West - Islam dichotomy illusion and illusion of harmony.

Egocentric illusion was approached through the Western ethnocentrism analysis as a cultural illusion. Ethnocentrism³ is described in the scholarly literature as a universal phenomenon which appears in the context of interaction between the groups that possess different value systems, traditions and beliefs and the presence of some conflicting perspectives between the respective systems, leading to a denial of the values, traditions and beliefs embodied by the other group. Therefore each individual tends to attribute positive attitudes to the own group

³ William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*, Ginn, Boston, 1906.

and negative attitudes towards the other groups. The main features of the ethnocentrism refers to the fact that it ensures the survival of the group, contributes to the dominance and the affirmation of the superiority of one group over the other, gives a sense of self-respect for the members of the group, positions one group at the centre and marginalizes all the other groups and takes place in different stages.⁴ According to the results obtained by some researchers, ethnocentrism is of three kinds, namely: positive ethnocentrism, negative ethnocentrism and highly negative ethnocentrism. In its positive version, ethnocentrism involves a valorisation of its own culture, without considering it an assessment standard for all the other cultures, as in the case of the negative ethnocentrism and does not involve the action of imposing the values of its own culture upon the other cultures, as it invokes the negative extreme ethnocentrism.⁵

⁴ Leonie L. Sutherland, „Ethnocentrism in a pluralistic society: a concept analysis”, in *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, Vol. 13, No. 4, October 2002, pp. 274 – 281.

⁵ Serena Nanda and Richard. L. Warms, *Cultural anthropology*, 6th ed., Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, 1998.

Within a picture of the global politics realities in the twenty-first century, an image marked by the existence of some conflicting tensions between the two main actors – the Western civilization and the Islamic civilization, the ethnocentrism, through its highly negative form, can lead to the dehumanization of the other and to extreme violence cases.

The conflict between the West and the Islam can be seen as a confrontation between two ideologies opposite to each other: the Orientalism⁶ (neo-Orientalism, in its current form) and Occidentalism⁷. Both ideologies describe the way in which a particular cultural identity tries to assert and to impose their own values on the others, manufacturing the „Other” through some distorted stylized images. In short, generally within the Orientalist dogma, the West is perceived as being rational, superior, progressive and triumphant, while its opposite, the East (Islam) is described as inferior, underdeveloped and inherently violent. On the other

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Random House, New York, 1978.

⁷ Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *L'Occidentalisme. Une brève histoire de la guerre contre l'Occident*, Climats, Paris, 2006.

hand, in a broader sense, the Western dogma assigns to the West a destructive materialist spirit and an excessive moral depravity. Within this dualistic vision of the world, each side perceives the other as a threat to their own identity. This antagonistic and dehumanizing vision of the world presents a real threat to human beings in general, in that it legitimizes violent means of action and suppresses any presence of the dialogue and cooperation.

Nowadays, more than ever, the West feels the need to adopt a position in the meaning of the affirmation of its superiority. Given that there are no absolute standards for asserting the superiority of one culture to the other, the West must recognize that, although important, its contributions to the universal civilization are only one side in relation to other. The rejection of the other cultures prevents us from being human beings in all our fullness.

Given that each human individual is more or less ethnocentric, recognition of being ethnocentric is the first step towards reducing and even removing certain manifestations of ethnocentrism. Also, by using the

concept of „critical ethnocentrism”⁸ in all areas of human knowledge, researchers can contribute to its success. In addition, reduction, diversion and elimination of ethnocentric behaviours of individuals are subject to the manner in which they are able to exploit the adaptive unconscious⁹ and resources offered by cultural creatives¹⁰. This task of human individuals remains a project depending on future changes in the culture. Certainly, in the future, economic, political and cultural changes in conditions of heightened globalization will produce new forms of ethnocentrism, but we must trust in the ability of human beings to achieve cultural progress by promoting dialogue and cooperation between cultures. The key in order to reduce Western ethnocentrism lays in the hands of the West, by accepting pluralism, recognition of cultural diversity and respect for the „Other”.

The following cultural illusion of the West, analyzed in chapter two, was the illusion of the

⁸ Ernesto de Martino, *La fine del mondo*, Einaudi, Torino, 1977.

⁹ Timothy Wilson, *Strangers to ourselves: discovering the adaptive unconscious*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2002.

¹⁰ Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: how 50 million people are changing the world*, Harmony Books, New York, 2000.

„harmony” which is based on the paradigm of the „end of history” proposed by Francis Fukuyama¹¹ considering the emergence of a harmonious world where all societies have as form of government Western liberal democracy.

Capitalist liberal democracy, broadly regarded as the effective combination of individual liberty and popular sovereignty, and as a modern form of political organization of Western societies is promoted by most Western analysts as an export product of Western civilization which includes the same conditions everywhere in the world. Therefore, the existence of a set of laws governing the relations of power between rulers and the ruled, presence of institutions which would implement these regulations and a political culture define the conditions necessary to all democratic forms of government.¹²

In recent years, we have seen an increase of the Western analysts’ interest in the relationship of Islam

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, *Sfârșitul istoriei și ultimul om*, traducere de Mihaela Eftimiu, Editura Paideia, București, 1992.

¹² Michael Mandelbaum, *Democracy’s Good Name: the rise and risks of the world’s most popular form of government*, Public Affairs, New York, 2007; Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000.

with democracy. The theme of compatibility or incompatibility between Islam and democracy is closely linked to the meanings of „political Islam” concept. Political Islam¹³ is experiencing a variety of different approaches among western analysts, most often causing confusion and misunderstanding. Often, political Islam is reduced to a violent political activism, denying thus the variety of political movements in the Muslim world, from the radical, violent and traditional forms to moderate, peaceful and modernist forms. Broadly, Islam can be seen as a political ideology dealing with aspects of Islam religion with the purpose of harmonizing Muslim societies.

In what concerns the main causes of the Muslim societies democratization failure discussed among the Western academia, they consist, on the one hand, on oil, lack of legitimacy of the Muslim state and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹⁴, and, on the other hand, on the autonomy and incompleteness of Islamic law (*sharia*)¹⁵.

¹³ Graham Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Moreover, for certain Western analysts, the lack of separation between the secular and religious space is the main cause of failure of Muslim societies democratization.¹⁶

The thesis of Islam's incompatibility with democracy is supported both by most Western analysts who identify as the main cause of this incompatibility the total lack of democratic tradition in Muslim countries, as well as a significant number of Muslim theologians and jurists, according to whom democracy is regarded as a Western product, completely different from Islamic norms and values, something of a non colonizing „Trojan horse” which, from the moment it enters the Muslim countries, will do nothing but destroy their tradition and satisfy the selfish interests of the West.

Muslims approach of democracy fall into a wide spectrum of political Islam. However, frequently, they are introduced by most Western analysts in a binary structure. Thus, a first Muslims' approach of democracy consists in the rejection of all that is Western and the

¹⁶ Michael Mandelbaum, *op. cit.*

belief that „Islam is the solution”. In other words, the strict application of Islamic law, in their view, would lead to the modernization of Muslim societies. The second approach refers to the implementation of reform projects in order to adapt Islamic law to modern standards of democratic principles.

We agree to the idea that, at present, the forms of governance from the Muslim world states, oriented to the strict or not strict application of Islamic law highly contradicts the fundamental principles of democracy represented by freedom, justice, equality, human rights, free choices, political representation, freedom of expression in public space, secularism, limitation and separation of powers. Nothing will change in the democratization of Muslim countries, as long as, whatever form of government will arise as a result of any process of reform, it will seek the same purpose: the application of *sharia*.

The incompatibility between democracy and Islam is inevitable in the absence of complete secularization of Muslim societies. However, we should not neglect the role of modernist or liberal movements

within political Islam which can contribute over time to implementing democratic principles and mechanisms in Muslim countries governance.¹⁷

In our opinion, the failure of the processes of democratization of the Middle East countries carried out both outside and inside, as well as functional difficulties of a global democracy concerning the complexity of the legitimacy system it sustains and the capacity to meet the interests of a complex mass, represent major obstacles to a global democracy as described by Francis Fukuyama.

In the twenty-first century, some scholars emphasize the fact that secular Western liberal democracy is not the only way towards modernity and political development. In this context, the West must recognize the existence of multiple models of modernization.

In the last part of chapter two, we analyzed the illusion of the dichotomy West - Islam, using concepts on

¹⁷ Mihaela Matei, *Islamul politic și democrația, între reformă, interpretare și jihad*, Editura RAO, București, 2011; Shireen Hunter (editor), *Reformist voices of Islam: mediating Islam and modernity*, M. E. Sharpe, New York, 2009; John L. Esposito, *The future of Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.

the dialectic „civilization – barbarism” from the literature. We addressed the relationship between civilization and barbarism as a structure within the human thought, deeply influenced by the unconscious instincts of fear and dread as a result of interaction with the „Other”. The image of the „Other” in the history of Western civilization has been defined, in general, by the „barbarian” of the ancient Greeks and by the „savage” of the great geographical discoveries and European colonization. In the twenty-first century, the barbarian’s image from the Western’s point of view is the Muslim terrorist.

According to „civilization-barbarism” dialectics in terms of civilization conflict between the West and Islam, the Westerners are „civilized” according to their own vision and „barbarians” from the Muslims’ point of view; on the other hand, Muslims are considered „barbarians” by the Westerners, while they find themselves „civilized”.

Following the ideas presented in the last part of chapter two, we concluded that mutual identification of West and Muslim with civilization and barbarism denotes

a framework of the human mind whose content varies from one epoch to another, under the influence of collective imaginaries. We also argued that the West must recognize that the twenty-first century world is a multicultural one, that its dualistic division between West and Islam only denotes a construction, a Western myth that makes cultural diversity of human beings relative. However, we stated that in order to build a better world, all civilizations have to reconsider their attitudes and behaviours towards the „Other” and engage themselves actively. The first step towards a better world is to identify the causes of conflicts between human individuals belonging to different cultural entities. Most often, these causes are related to the unconscious side of the human psyche and require considerable effort on the part of individuals to identify and remove them, but this task is not impossible.

In chapter three, we discussed the civilization conflict between West and Islam in the light of the psychological nature of conflicts between groups of individuals from different cultures. Under this approach,

we used Sigmund Freud's concept on unconscious¹⁸, Carl Gustav Jung's theories on collective unconscious¹⁹, as well as Joseph L. Henderson's concept on cultural unconscious²⁰. The aim of this chapter is to show that the cultural unconscious, by its energies and mechanisms, can produce cultural illusions and, at the same time, can promote their maintenance and expansion.

Human beings are always in danger of being subject to unconscious forces of destruction represented by the shadow archetype and death instinct. Both forces embody absolute evil and, in certain circumstances, may subjugate the collective psyche of a group. In what concerns the causes of occurrence and exacerbation of conflicts between groups of individuals from different cultures, political, economic and sociological theories enlighten us only partially. In the context of the current globalized world, there is a need to analyze the

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Opere. Scrieri despre societate și religie*, vol. 4, traducere de Roxana Melnicu, George Purdea și Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu, Editura Trei, București, 2000.

¹⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, Routledge, London, 1955.

²⁰ Joseph L. Henderson, „The Cultural Unconscious”, in *Quadrant: The Journal of the C. G. Jung Foundation*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1998.

unconscious, because it can provide us with knowledge that rises beyond economic, social and political causes and conditions. In this sense, psychoanalytic knowledge has much to offer and should not be underestimated.

According to some psychoanalytical theories, the human psyche is composed of four psychic instance: collective unconscious which means that part of a person's unconscious which is common to all human beings; personal unconscious denoting that part of the unconscious of a person which is specific to all individuals belonging to a specific culture; consciousness, that dimension of a person's psyche which includes rational mental activity.

From the perspective of Jungian psychoanalysis, the collective unconscious is composed of archetypes which are defined as *patterns of behaviour*, spirits and instincts. Archetypes themselves are experienced as archetypal images. Psychoanalysts who interpret Jung's theories nowadays indicate the importance of differentiating the archetype itself from its content, such as images and experiences and stress the idea that archetypal content is culturally conditioned. In this

regard, the literature calls the archetypal experience of a certain time and space „cultural archetype”.

In analyzing the conflict between West and Islam, through the defence mechanisms of the human psyche, we determined that culture can be seen as a defence mechanism, meaning that its creations such as myths, legends, tales, customs and rituals, etc. can provide a degree of protection to the individuals belonging to the two cultural entities, when facing a state of anxiety caused by the conflict between the two parties.

The concept of „cultural complex” was also a useful tool in the analysis of the psychological nature of conflicts between groups. This complex, in the vision of Thomas Singer ²¹, refers largely to precisely what distinguishes us as human individuals, that is the autonomous processes of the individual and collective psyche. Moreover, cultural complexes of a group are powered by archetypal energies originating in the cultural

²¹ Thomas Singer, „The Cultural Complex and Archetypal Defenses of the Collective Spirit: Baby Zeus, Elian Gonzales, Constantine’s Sword, and Other Holy Wars”, în *San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 2002.

unconscious of that group and, in certain circumstances, can take over the collective psyche and the individual psyche of the group members.

In what concerns the conflict between West and Islam, in chapter three, we determined that the mechanism of the conflict between the two civilizations can be reflected by the following process: Western individual and the aggression projected onto the Muslim produces aggression, and then justifies this aggression as defence. The same is true for Muslims, only in reverse. In this context, cultural illusions appear as the result of the efficient functioning at the level of the cultural unconscious of the negative unconscious forces and defence mechanisms of collective spirit.

In chapter four, we analyzed to what extent we can speak of a universal civilization that would identify with Western civilization. Also, by analysing the relationship of Muslim societies with modernity, we analyzed by default the illusion of progress.

In the twenty-first century, the problem of modernity is one of utmost importance both for the West and the Muslim world. In general, within Western

academia, two visions can be identified on the importance of Western modernity in the world. The first concerns the adoption of Western modernity by all societies in the world, while the second affirms the existence of alternative modernities of non-Western societies.

The idea of a universal civilization is closely linked to the idea of progress of humanity. In this regard, some of the directions of the Enlightenment project, such as the trust in the nature of human perfectibility, uprooting of traditions, use of reason in addressing all human problems have led to the Western conceptualization of the nowadays modernity. Thus, Western modernity, in its political form, is represented by liberal democracy while in its economic forms is represented by the capitalist market economy.

Modernity causes various challenges to Muslim societies, first by its nature, which involves the alienation from tradition, a tradition to which Muslims had a strong attachment. Some analysts believe that the Muslims thinking style characterized by an exaggerated fundamental tendency to abstraction is to blame for the

lack of modernization of Muslim societies, while others blame the Muslims' lack of imagination. Also, some of the experts in the field believe that the lack of modernity in Muslim societies is due to the application of Islamic law, while other believe that the Muslims' inability to operationalize the precepts of their religion bears responsibility for the lack of modernity in Muslim world.²²

In an increasingly interconnected world, events occurring in one part of the globe have increasingly complex implications upon communities and businesses in other parts of the globe. This process is called „globalization” in the scholarly literature and can contribute decisively to the modernization of Muslim societies. Following the intensification of globalization processes, the world becomes more interconnected, which can lead to dialogue and understanding, as well as to tensions and conflicts between individuals from different cultures.

²² Alexander Abdennur, *The Arab Mind*, Kogna Publishing, Ottawa, 2008; Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, Hatherleigh Press, 2007; Ziauddin Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization*, Mansell Publishing Limited, London and New York, 1987.

As Samuel P. Huntington stated, manifestations of Western modernization can become a phenomenon of cultural domination. To counter Western imperialism, Huntington gives us three solutions consisting in the application of three rules: *the rule of abstinence*, *the rule of joint mediation* and *the rule of commonalities*. The first of them interdicts West and, of course, any core-state of a civilization, military intervention on states belonging to other civilizations, while the second rule encourages core-states of the civilizations involved in the conflict to seek resolution of differences through dialogue and negotiation with each other. The third rule takes into account the valuation of a common background of people from all civilizations.

West must overcome the old scheme of the Enlightenment according to which there is only one form of progress, as it appears today: political modernity embodied by liberal democracy, economic modernity embodied by the capitalist market economy. The idea of progress is not uniform. Every society has its own view on this subject. Instead of a universal western modernity we should pay more attention to the fact that societies

have the ability to integrate into a specific form ideas, norms and institutions of other societies. Muslim societies are no exception to this rule. In the wider framework of the world, we must realize that there are multiple modernities. Also, these multiple modernities must enjoy recognition from the other ones in order to be able to talk of a real progress of humanity in a general sense.

The fact that the interaction between Western and Muslims has increased due to globalization processes can be an advantage to both parties, if supported by an attitude of openness to dialogue and cooperation, but also may contribute to the exacerbation of differences if it is based on fear, ignorance and preconception.

Identification of Western civilization with universal civilization may have adverse effects on other civilizations. Therefore, the idea of a universal civilization acquires significance for mankind only when it seeks to gather together a common background of values, beliefs, norms, practices and institutions of all civilizations of the world and provide a framework for the manifestation of each civilization's specificity.

Any steps meant to achieve a better future for human beings must begin with an assessment of existing resources available to mankind. In this sense, the model of the European Union, through the use of „smart” power in international relations, economic capacity and potential, stability of democracies in European countries by peace-promoting policies, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue by policies promoting culture as a catalyst for creativity and especially by efforts to promote culture as a vital element in the Union’s international relations²³, can serve as framework of a universal civilization. We shall see whether this universal civilization will be a reality or another cultural illusion.

²³ European Commission - Culture, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-policy-development/european-agenda_en.htm, accessed: 15.03.2012.