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Editor's Note

Fanaticism: A Universal Vulnerability

Fanaticism is a universal vulnerability. Every person is susceptible to becoming fanatic when the environment enhances this risk. From an existential viewpoint, individuals in our society may become fanatic about a variety of aspects. Almost everyone holds some form of beliefs. Religious ideas, ethical values, and political ideologies pose different ontologies that, from a psychiatric viewpoint, allow for ontological security and existential safety. This reduces our existential anxiety and ultimately our neurotic one. In times of personal, group, or societal crises, fanaticism may arise. Fanaticism starts when a person's beliefs become the absolute paradigm of behavior to follow for themselves and everyone else. Every other antagonistic belief system would therefore be incompatible and subject to rejection or elimination.

At different times in history, society became polarized into two opposed belief systems. In times of financial struggle or lack of control by a government that would guarantee individual freedom, a society may become polarized and radicalized between antagonistic systematic beliefs. These belief systems, whether political, societal or religious become absolute truths. People who do not believe in it must therefore be fought. This type of thinking may lead to aggressive behaviors towards the group or groups of people who think differently. These aggressive behaviors may be of different kinds such as exclusion from society, rejection and, at times, physical aggression and violence.

Psychodynamically, in a certain environment, a vulnerable person may become fanatic. The person may project their own struggles or narcissistic vulnerabilities onto this issue that they believe to be the main problem in society. Fanaticism may happen slowly or rapidly, but it is generally thought to be a gradual process. An individual may choose to act on their own such as

a terrorist attack of some sort, a shooting to make a political point, or a political manifesto to gather more people. Social media is utilized by fanatic individuals to spread their message and gather more supporters. Some of these people who take action on a perceived problem by a specific group may become leaders of some sort by the members who form a social media group. Introjected fanaticism may pose a higher risk for pathological narcissism and make an individual more prone to narcissistic rage and aggressive behaviors of different kinds.

Fanaticism may affect a bigger group, and at times a whole society or a nation. Historically, we have seen examples of it repeatedly. A fanatic leader may take possession of a government and impose their fanatic ideas. Society may become absorbed by unrealistic ideas. Human beings have a natural tendency to follow authority's orders. This psychological phenomena was shown after Stanley Milligram's obedience experiment. Fanaticism in these scenarios can lead to group aggressions of thousands and at times to terrorism, wars and genocides.

Fanaticism may happen virtually in any political, religious, or belief system. It is important that we all as a society become insightful about our own fanatic beliefs. Sometimes we may not be aware of our fanatic ideas for some specific aspects that rule our own lives. No one is invulnerable to it. Mental health workers such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and nurses must learn about the psychological mechanisms affecting individual and group fanaticism in order to prevent it in our society.

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Icons of Psychiatry

The Assassination Of Saint Peter Martyr

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Saint Peter Martyr was a Catholic priest born in Verona in 1202 AD. He gained popularity in the Catholic world as preacher who helped control the Catharist heresy. Saint Peter Martyr is now thought to have been born in a family that sympathized with the Catharism. This heretic Christian movement had started in 12th century South France and gained popularity in the areas of what are now Northern Italy and Northeast Spain. The Catholic Inquisition was originated in the Southern French Region of Languedoc mainly to face the Catharist heresy. Catharism



Saint Peter Martyr being assassinated by Beatus Carino of Balsamo , Fra Angelico, Saint Peter Altarpiece Detail, Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy

differed from Catholicism by establishing a dualistic belief about God. In contrast to Catholic monotheism, Cathars believed in two Gods, the good one and the evil one. For the Cathars, the good God was the one from the New Testament whereas the evil God was the one from the Old Testament. Whereas the evil God had created the world, the good God would have to save it. Despite the influence of Catharism in his area and possibly in his own family, Saint Peter Martyr went to Catholic School, studied at the University of Bologna and was said to have maintained his orthodoxy for the Catholic Church. After meeting Saint Dominic he became a friar of the order and soon gained popularity as an effective preacher. Due to his success spreading the Catholic theses, he was appointed Inquisitor in Lombardy, at the time a prestigious position. It is not known if Saint Peter participated in trials against Cathars as an Inquisitor; however, as a successful preacher he elicited many conversions and brought many Cathars back to Catholicism. Due to his efficacy as a preacher a Cathar conspiracy started against him in Milan. For that purpose the conspirators hired the assassin Carino of Balsamo to end with Saint Peter's life. One day when he was returning from a trip from Como, Carino followed him and struck Peter's head with an axe. The death of Peter caused much commotion in society and a cult around his persona started soon. He was canonized eleven months after his death making the fastest canonization in Catholic history. Probably shocked by society's reaction after Peter's death, Carino quickly went to a Dominican monastery in Forli and confessed his crime. After showing true repentance he was forgiven and eventually became a Dominican lay brother. Today, Carino is venerated as Beatus by the Catholic Church, especially in the town of Forli where his veneratorators refer of him as a Saint.

Due to his tragic death, Saint Peter Martyr is iconographically represented with a bleeding wound in his head and an axe on top. In the Late Medieval Church, suffering was considered a way to imitate Jesus during the passion and achieve holiness. This depiction of a suffering Peter would reinforce to his viewer his holiness and connection with Jesus. Saint Peter became a martyr of the Christian church as he died for his beliefs. There are multiple depictions of Saint Peter Martyr in the history of art. For the purpose of our theme in this issue, I selected Saint Peter Martyr's Altarpiece by Fran Angelico in 1442 AD for the journal's cover. The Altarpiece is today at the Museo di San Marco in Florence. One detail of this Altarpiece depicts

the moment of his assassination. The piece is a universal image of fanaticism. In the detail from the Altarpiece we can appreciate Carino of Balsamo who is about to stab the Saint another time in fury and without mercy. According to the legend, the Saint's response to the violent attack consisted of using his own blood to write with his fingers on the floor the first sentence of the Creed "Credo in Deum" which were his last words. The interesting point of Saint Peter's story is a message of hope for fanaticism in society. Once Carino understood the seriousness of his crime and confessed, he found redemption and became a prominent figure of the Church. Fanaticism should not be combated with violence but with empathy, mercy, piety and love.



Saint Peter Martyr is iconographically depicted with the axe on his head, Zanino di Pietro, Book of Hours

Essays

Stanley Milgram: *Experimenter*

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In 1961, Nazi SS leader Adolf Eichman was tried in court in Jerusalem. Eichman had been captured in Argentina and brought to Israel for the trial. His accusation: organizing the Holocaust and the logistics of the massive deportation of the Jews. During his trial, Eichman alleged that he was obeying orders and had no choice. According to his testimony, he was simply following the orders of Muller, Heydrich, Himmler and, ultimately, Hitler. In his account of the facts, he was only a mere instrument of his leaders.

Inspired by the Eichman trial in Jerusalem, research psychologist Stanley Milgram conceptualized an experiment that challenged everyone's thoughts about humanity. In his experiment, Milgram explored the level in which a person would follow orders that were potentially in conflict with their own conscience. The research subjects, who varied in levels of education, were asked to administer electric shocks to a man based on his responses in a learning game. The research subjects did not know that the shocks were not real and the learner was an actor. In the experiment, the actor eventually would purposely fail the questions so that the



Adolf Eichman during his trial in Jerusalem

maximum level of electric shock would be administered. Contrary to what Milgram initially expected, 65% of research subjects delivered 450 massive, and potentially fatal, electric shocks to the learner. The experiment's results stunned the scientific community and the entire society.

The experiment also came with criticism. The subjects did not know the circumstances of the study, and they suffered by having to deal with the personal conflict of injuring another person. Probably, they also suffered by realizing that they would have obeyed authority and injured a person despite knowing the consequences of their actions. With our current



The research subjects had to learn the potential damage caused by the electric stimuli before the learning game started

Institutional Review Board policies, today it would not be possible to reproduce the study. Almost five decades later,



Stanley Milgram during the experiment

Milgram's experiment is still addressed, referenced and discussed by scientists, psychologists and lay people in forums, debates, and media. In 2015, Michael Almereyda directed *Experimenter*, an American film about this experiment. This film can be seen today in Netflix and other streaming channels.

When I first learned about Milgram's experiment during my psychiatry residency, my own beliefs were challenged. I felt ontologically insecure about myself. Following the statistics, more likely than not, I would have had administered a fatal shock to another human

being just because an authority figure had instructed me to do so. There is no way to predict that I would have been one of the 35% people who decided against following the order. If we think about it, in our routine lives, we often follow rules and orders and do things that carry negative consequences towards other people or society. To an extent, our natural tendency for conformity permits connivence. Last year I had to review the experiment for a podcast and reflected on it again. I believe that the conclusion that we can gather from Milgram's experiment is that not only 65% of people are vulnerable to follow orders and cause harm on a person or a group, but we are all truly susceptible. Depending upon our knowledge about the process, our own personal circumstances, the setting and the particular situation, we are vulnerable to these psychological effects. Our defense against this universal vulnerability will be to cultivate ourselves by thinking, reading, and learning in order to be, as much as we can, cognizant, insightful, ethical, lucid, and consequent with our principles and values.



Almeryda's film *Experimenter* (2015)

Articles

Fanaticism And Passion

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'If a fanatic is willing to give his life for a cause, he's probably willing to give yours as well.'

Antonio Porchia

What were the guys who flew the planes into the Twin Towers thinking? During the final moments did they think about their childhood and family? What train of thoughts enabled them to act against the deeply ingrained desire to live? Did they think they were doing something moral or immortal?

Yet they acted rationally and were in control of their actions. They were not in a state of hypnosis nor psychosis.

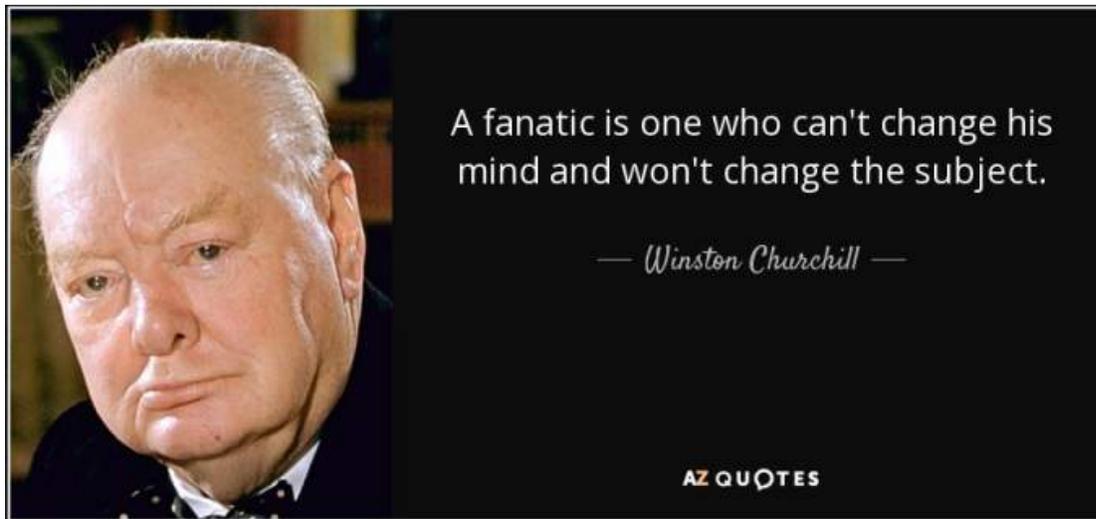
They were fanatics blinded and deafened by a belief and a leader.

Mao, Stalin and Hitler were fanatics. Destroying, bloated with self-justification, yet ultimately self-destructive because of an inflexibility. Take an airplane wing as a metaphor. It is reassuring to watch it bend and flap under the stress of wind and cloud. If it did not do this – if the wing were built with a fanatical rigidity – it would shatter, taking the whole plane down with its rigidity.

The fanatic has a goal that absorbs his psychic energy and closes off external communication and debate. Self-referential between themselves and unto himself. Passionate.

How do we distinguish between passion and fanaticism?

Beethoven was obsessed, passionate and fanatical about his music. However his biographer makes clear that Beethoven listened, consulted and learnt for the sake of music.



Similarly, was not Churchill fanatical in his desire to defend England and defeat Hitler? One guesses that obsession, commitment and self-sacrifice had similarities between Hitler and Churchill. A fanatic passion. However Churchill listened whilst he led – and was flexible in the process. The other difference is deceptively simple – Churchill worked for good, but Hitler for evil.

Eric Hoffer (1898-1983) in 'The True Believer' wrote: 'There are, of course, rare leaders such as Lincoln, Gandhi, even F.D.R., Churchill, and Nehru. They do not hesitate to harness man's hungers and fears to weld a following and make it zealous unto death in service of a holy cause; but unlike a Hitler, a Stalin, or even a Luther and a Calvin, they are not tempted to use the slime of frustrated souls as mortar in the building of a new world.... They know that no one can be honorable unless he honors mankind'.

Some thinkers suggest that fanaticism is an abreaction to doubt. Jung (1875-1963) said: 'Fanaticism is always a sign of repressed doubt'. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) concurred: 'Defined in psychological terms, a fanatic is a man who consciously over-compensates a secret doubt.'

However Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) demurred by noting that fanatics appear 'so certain of themselves. But it is the wise who are filled with doubt.' The fanatic for whatever reason hides behind the rigid façade of certainty and in the process feels righteous and secure.

Lots of us have inner doubts however we are not fanatical as a consequence. Maybe fanaticism is group sociopathy.

Hitler's fanatics did not seem to have much doubt. If there were doubt it was not the doubt that was responsible for the slaughtered millions. The doubt did not stay their swords or guns. Besides – if fanatics do wrong or evil then they should be judged for that – not for some hidden insecurity. Call a spade a spade.

The fanatic has no doubt.

Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) postulated envy as a motive for dictatorial, fanatical control: 'Common, vulgar spirits are never distinguished and since they are unable to bear the fact that others are, they attempt to impose on other(s) more fortunate (than him), the uniform of dogma.'

Eric Hoffer continued: fanaticism is a 'malady of the soul' but one which paradoxically is a 'miraculous instrument for raising societies and nations from the dead – an instrument of resurrection'. A revolutionary movement 'is pioneered by men of words, materialized by fanatics and consolidated by men of actions.' The malady he referred to was the desire of frustrated inadequate individuals to throw off responsibility of and for self, and allow mass movements to control them. In this sense he did not see a great difference between extreme cultural movements - whether religious, social, or national.

Fanaticism seeks to convince and to control others for whatever belief is being peddled. It does not have a moral vector per se. It is a mechanism that can lead to outcomes - good or bad.

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Asian Eyelid Surgery: Cosmetic Surgery's Role In Racial Identity

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It is not uncommon for young East Asians to grow up hearing the term, “you would be prettier if your eyes were bigger.” In fact, many of my friends were offered money by relatives as their high school graduation gift to get a blepharoplasty, a procedure that creates a “double eyelid” in those who do not naturally have creases in their eyes. It is the most commonly requested cosmetic procedure in Asia and the third most common among Asian Americans.¹ This has been a controversial topic because this procedure alters features that are characteristic of the East Asian race.

A pioneering paper investigated the roots of this procedure that has gained popularity at an accelerated rate since its inception in the late 1800s.² Here, Kaw argues that Asian American women undergo blepharoplasties in order to attain not only a Western standard of beauty, but also societal acceptance and better socioeconomic status. Modifying conventional markers of racial identity is therefore a rejection of one's own culture in favor of Western ideals. Racial minorities use cosmetic surgery as a tool to conform to a society that has otherwise alienated them.

¹ Nguyen MQ, Hsu PW, Dinh TA. Asian blepharoplasty. *Semin Plast Surg.* 2009;23(3):185–197. doi:10.1055/s-0029-1224798

² Kaw E. Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly.* 1993;7(1):74-89. doi:10.1525/maq.1993.7.1.02a00050

In my personal experience, Asians portrayed in media in the United States, like Lucy Liu, usually have the classic slanted eyes and sleek black hair, while celebrities in my motherland Japan as well as the K-pop idols that have garnered cult followings worldwide are often blonde and have surgically altered eyes. Anime characters have oversized, light colored eyes that people in ethnically homogenous Japan fantasize about. Japanese makeup tutorials frequently emphasize ways to make eyes look bigger, including techniques like crease tape, crease glue, and colored contact lenses. Western culture is not the only culprit in the pressure for Asians to achieve a more Caucasian appearance.

Internalized racism and a desire to achieve Caucasian beauty standards seem to be abundant in many different parts of the world. Speight claims that the internalization of racism is the most damaging psychological injury due to racism, leading to self-sustained oppression.³ She calls the awareness of the negative views held by society towards one's own group "stigma consciousness." Decades of caricatures of Asians with lines as eyes depicted in World War II propaganda, yellow face in Hollywood classics such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and hostile comments directed at Asians through the years have devalued the very characteristics that make the Asian race unique. Although one may not see the overt racism that was once plentiful in media today, an accumulation of these historical likely contributed to the psyche of those who were targeted. Speight mentions that minorities look to the larger society to construct a sense of self, and in our context, the defining characteristic of East Asians are the monolid eyes. Internalized racism likely contributed to the explosion of blepharoplasties in East Asians.

Another perspective regarding blepharoplasties is that Asian women are reprimanded for getting surgery on "ethnically marked features" while their Caucasian counterparts are forgiven for getting procedures to look younger, tanner, have fuller lips, wider hips, and larger breasts.⁴ Heyes points out that when people of color undergo cosmetic procedures, their motivation for physical alteration is politicized, forcing them to justify their choices. This author calls for the

³ Speight SL. Internalized Racism. *The Counseling Psychologist*. 2007;35(1):126-134. doi: 10.1177/0011000006295119

⁴ Heyes CJ, Jones M. *Cosmetic Surgery: a Feminist Primer*. Routledge; 2016.

approach that reads all physical characteristics as ethnically marked, and that Caucasians also partake in racial body conformity and appropriation as well.

Cosmetic surgery gives us the ability to alter our appearance, and sometimes that means changing what makes us ethnically unique. The decision to go under the knife is a private one between the patient and the surgeon, but many times the patient has a lifetime of pressure from society, family, and media that has implanted the idea that they must look a certain way. We also live in a time when social media gives a whole new meaning to how we present ourselves aesthetically to the world, with celebrities, influencers and makeup gurus seeming to effortlessly showcase similar looks. The question of whether or not internalized racism subconsciously challenges an Asian person's perception of his or her natural eyes may be debated for the indefinite future, but one thing is for certain-cosmetic surgery is here to stay and is gaining more acceptance every year.

Fanaticism And Its Similarities To Mental Illness

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Fanaticism, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, describes extreme beliefs that may lead to unreasonable or violent behaviour. (1) It indicates a single-minded and uncritical attitude towards causes, be they ideological, political or religious. Fanaticism is also marked by strict adherence to tenets laid out by the object of belief with no tolerance for diverging opinions and a willingness to use violent means to achieve ideological aims.

Kalmer Marimaa explains that the term is derived from the Latin adjective *fanaticus* meaning enthusiastic, raging, furious or ecstatic. (2)

The term can also be etymologically traced to the Latin noun *fanum* meaning temple, which hints at its religious origins because it was in these temples that Bellona, the Roman goddess of war, was celebrated. Her priests were reputed to descend into a raging religious frenzy and would contort and mutilate themselves while prophesying and in worship of the goddess. They were called the “fanatici” (3)

Harmon notes that fanaticism “involves great energy, single-minded direction and a lack of any restraint or moderation. It is characterized by extremes of effort and fervour of intensity” (4)

Some have argued that fanaticism has positive aspects but the concept of fanaticism has become synonymous with violent acts of hate and is mainly associated with excesses of political or religious ideology. This negative connotation may also be due, in no small part, to the media spin placed on the term in recent times.

Fanaticism, in its contemporary usage and from a philosophical standpoint, is usually demonstrated where there is an element of uncertainty surrounding the object of belief. (3) Fertile areas of uncertainty where fanaticism may arise are religion and politics. An illustration of this paradox is the level of belief surrounding the existence and nature of God. Some people do not believe in God while others are not sure about the existence of God. Some believe in God but even persons in this subset differ in their personal understanding and worship of God and a fanatic may arise out of any of these groups.

The above illustration of course raises the question of how to distinguish a fanatic from merely a committed believer. A fanatic's behaviour is usually distinguishable by the willingness to act in a manner that violates prevailing social norms. (5) In addition, even among the peer group from which a fanatic may derive his ideals, his views and methods may not be shared by the members of the group. (6)

The focus of this article is to examine attributes of fanatics and draw parallels between these and psychopathology, which may be seen in psychiatric practice.

The first attribute we shall consider is the fact that a fanatic has an 'unwavering conviction about the absolute rightness of one's understanding. (2)'

Now a person may harbour strong beliefs without considering himself faultless and cling to his beliefs while conceding that others may have a right to contradictory opinions. Fanatics are however dogmatic and abandon skepticism. They are convinced that they hold the truth and divergent opinions are intolerable. The mere thought that there may an alternative is heretical to them.

Under psychiatric scrutiny, this 'unwavering conviction' sounds rather similar to delusional beliefs. An unshakable belief held on inadequate grounds despite evidence to the contrary or in the face of rational argument is a hallmark of delusional thought and is usually pathological. Delusions are usually out of keeping with the sufferer's educational, cultural or religious background. If you recall we had mentioned earlier that a fanatic's views might diverge from even his own ideological peers.

Delusions can also centre on any of myriad themes; religious, persecutory, grandiose and at times bizarre variants abound. Indeed what else can we make of a person who believes that his knowledge of his ‘creator’ and his understanding of his religion is infallible such that he is unwilling to entertain the mere suggestion that he may be mistaken or alternatives exist? We may justifiably conclude that such a person is deluded.

Baekeland (3) notes also that paranoia is a mental structure underpinning fanaticism. Paranoia in this case is the unhealthy belief that one is the target of some imagined harm or conspiracy. It is marked by irrational fear or anxiety and is usually a symptom of psychosis. To the fanatic, any divergent ideology is evil and may harm him and thus everything must be done to destroy it.

Kurt Schneider in his book *Psychopathic Personalities* (9) also describes among others the “fanatical psychopathic personality”. This personality type is characterized by paranoia, querulousness and being unnecessarily jealous. Furthermore, they tend to commit political crimes and burden society with suffering.

Another characteristic of fanatics is the possession of a dualistic worldview. (2) This ‘us versus them’ mentality far transcends that of a friendly sports rivalry. The view held is that others are the very embodiment of evil and should be eradicated completely. History is replete with examples of ‘Crusades’, ‘Inquisitions’ and ‘Holy Wars’ aimed at winning victories for God and destroying ‘enemies’ because a higher power wills it.

Splitting is a common psychological ego defense mechanism that is characterized by unconsciously projecting good and bad qualities unto persons or events in the environment. (7) Also known as black-and-white thinking, people’s actions and motivations are evaluated as all good or all bad with no compromise or middle ground, with the ‘good’ embraced and the ‘bad’ readily discarded. (8)

Fanatics usually dichotomize ‘good people’ who share their ideological values or passions from the ‘bad ones’ who oppose or are skeptical. They idealize their ideologies or beliefs while opposing views and doctrines are devalued. This dualistic view thus mirrors

splitting, which persons with personality disorders especially the borderline and narcissistic types tend to exhibit.

Fanatics also demonstrate a self-sacrificial devotion to the goal (2) and do not hesitate in using extreme measures. They are prepared to do away with any perceived obstacle to their faith and are not averse to sacrificing others or even martyring themselves as a sign of devotion to the cause. It will be instructive to recall all the instances people have killed or taken their own lives in furtherance of religious ideology.

At one time or the other, we have all had to forego a pleasure or take a loss in order to make some future gain. This ability to sacrifice is a hallmark of self-discipline and an admirable quality. However, practitioners in the field of psychiatry are aware of a feature of the manic state in which persons demonstrate an increase in goal-oriented activity. Here, persons among other symptoms are overly-focused on completing some project or meeting some target that they have set for themselves. It may be studying feverishly to ace exams to the point of neglecting sleep, food and drink for prolonged periods. Some also develop the desire to propagate the gospel or Word and may go to the extent of quitting jobs and/or selling possessions in order to devote themselves fully to achieving these aims. This example is of course no attempt to equate the feverish, chronic ideological devotion of a fanatic to the rather acute and often transitory hyper-religiosity seen in manic episodes but rather to draw attention to the tenacious goal-directedness seen in both states.

Obviously, fanatics are out of touch with the effects their conduct have on others. They do not view their beliefs or actions as abnormal and this loss of insight is characteristic of many psychiatric illnesses.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate that fanaticism as a term has assumed predominantly negative connotations and is now largely associated with 'terrorism', 'extremism' and 'fundamentalism'. The aim of this article is to highlight similarities between some of the characteristics of extreme fanaticism and symptoms of mental illness as understood by the author. The debate however continues in the field of psychiatry whether to classify fanaticism as a mental illness or not. (10,11)

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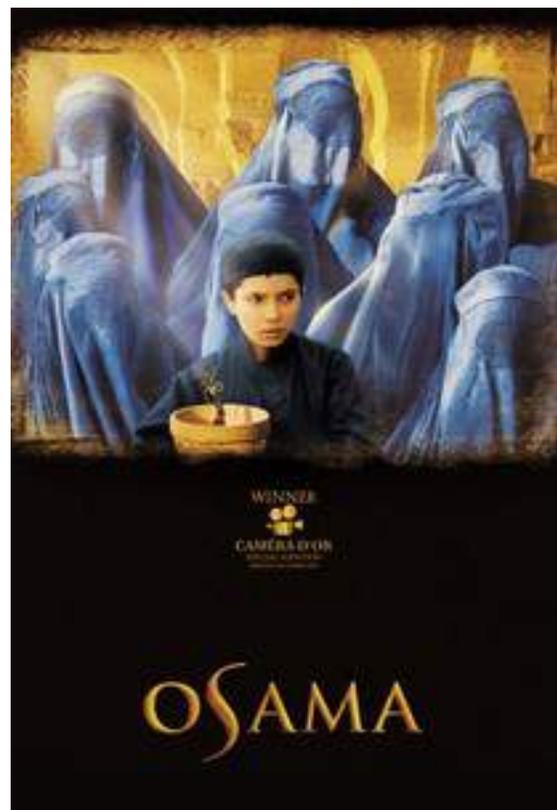
Cinema and Psychiatry

Osama

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Within the opening scenes of *Osama* we are thrust into an event that would surely mean danger and harm for its participants; a women's march for the right to work. While this seems to be nothing out of the ordinary for a modern-day American but to participate in such an event in the Taliban controlled Afghanistan was equivalent to signing your death warrant. Bullets and water raining down upon the female participants can be seen as they disperse hoping to save their lives. Caught in the crossfire are the movie's protagonist and her mom. As Osama, the girl forced to be a boy, watches through a door at the carnage unfolding, spots a body floating through the water. This is an early foreshadowing of what will sadly happen to her.



The socioeconomic effects of religious fanaticism are present throughout the entire production. The Taliban have taken away the right to work of women and in doing so have taken away their ability to attain power or freedom in any relationship. This is not done without purpose. By making sure that women are dependent on men for their money they are securing

what they think is the loyalty of any women they marry. Even healthcare workers are not exempt from this ban. As we see Osama's mom, a nurse, cower and shrink away when the Taliban catch her tending to a patient. It is during this scene that we discover that women are not allowed to be out in public anywhere without either their husband or a male family member escorting them.

Sadly this fanaticism is not gender-biased as the men and boys are affected by it too. The presentation for them comes in another way. All men are required to grow full-length beards and attend all prayers. There is even a man carrying a Kalashnikov whose sole job is to go make sure that all the men and boys are going to pray.

In order for their version of society to function, they need compliant young men who will not question their ways. They achieve this by indoctrinating boys at a young age when their mind is malleable. In order to execute that they round up all the young boys and put them in a classroom where religious fanaticism is the only curriculum. This is the formula for creating an army of children soldiers. Using children as expendable pawns allow the Taliban to shield their important reserves from the mundane and risky tasks.

In this movie, fanaticism has created a world in which an orphan girl whose father died during the war, has to disguise herself as a boy in order to provide for her family since the Taliban's patriarchal world does not allow women to work under any circumstances.

Osama's desperate attempts at camouflaging herself as a boy prove unsuccessful as her gender becomes known. With the chain of events that follow, death seems imminent. Right before being given the orders to be executed, Osama is saved from the jaws of death by an old man. Happiness and hope do not last long for her, however, as it becomes known that the old man will marry her without her consent. Osama's journey comes to a bitter end as the movie ends with her being presumably raped. This movie illustrates the horrors faced by the inhabitants of a fanatic regime.

Free Text

Good Or Bad: The Risk Of Approaching History Without Perspective

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Throughout history, nations, characters and events are treated very differently depending upon society's perspectives and politics at the time. Historical characters often receive a positive or negative opinion depending on the political utility at the moment. An interesting recent example has been the society's swift opinion about Christopher Columbus. Throughout centuries, he had been widely regarded as the person who discovered a new world; a hero for Italians, Spaniards and Americans. Now, in a relatively short time, Columbus is being blamed for starting a massive systematic genocide. All of the efforts made by the Italian-American community during the 20th century to acknowledge Columbus as an American hero are now being invalidated



The removal of Columbus Statue while people celebrate in LA.

by a new revisionist history movement. All across the country there have been many petitions to remove Columbus statues. These statues, that were once erected to support the integration of the

Italian community, are now politically incorrect. The removal of Columbus statue in Los Angeles this year resulted in a big celebration led by a person named Mitch O'Farrell who identifies himself as a surviving Native American. Originally from Oklahoma, O'Farrell moved to L.A. to join the council member of the 13th district. Does O'Farrell know that the city of L.A. was founded by a Spaniard? Does he know that the Native American community in Oklahoma, allegedly his tribe, survived to this day in part because the Spanish Jesuits taught agriculture techniques to all the Native Americans in the Southwest? One may wonder: How it is possible that we change a perspective so dramatically? Almost no historian would defend a genocide theory for Columbus. Why are city halls now listening to these historically unjustified petitions to remove Columbus' statues? Well, the Italian- American community now is well integrated and difficult to distinguish within the mainstream Caucasian society. Most Italian-Americans nowadays are far removed from their culture of origin and have become a privileged community in the United States. Their need to feel integrated in the United States has been taken care of. In contrast, the Hispanic/Latin community in the United States is now trying to improve their situation; they are still a disadvantaged group in the United States and a growing minority. Today, they are much bigger in number than the Italian one. But one may also wonder, how is it possible that Hispanic people resent Columbus? Isn't he a Hispanic hero as well? Not today. After the independence of the American countries, their new nationalisms were meant to cut ties with their Spanish culture of origin. As such, Columbus gradually became a controversial figure over the years. In addition, with globalization many indigenous cultures were lost. Perhaps as a reaction to that, the West is attempting to preserve original cultures and an anti-West or anti-European feeling that now dominates the world. People identify more with "the defeated." Even if people with European ancestry still enjoy a more privileged status in all American countries, and the mixed ethnicity or Native American population still struggles today, when talking about history, Hispanic and Latin people will tend to identify with the Native civilizations prior to the conquest rather than with the Europeans. Today, a Mexican born of Spanish ancestry would more likely identify with Moctezuma or Cuauhtémoc than with Hernán Cortés. A Peruvian born Spanish will more likely feel related to Atahualpa and look at Francisco Pizarro in disdain. One could feel that this identification comes out of solidarity with the defeated who suffered more

after the conquest, but a cognitive dissonance emerges when we pay attention to the current disparities occurring between Native Americans, mixed Ethnic Groups and the more privileged Caucasian people in all America. Paradoxically, much of the anti-European sentiment comes from privileged Americans who are mainly from European ancestry. Why take just one side? Perhaps, we can just see ourselves as inheritors of two cultures. Unfortunately, politics don't work that way. Historically Hernán Cortés, the Spaniard who allied with the Tlaxcaltecas, sieged the city of Tenochtitlan, and defeated the dominant Aztec empire, founded modern Mexico. A mixed ethnical culture with Native American and European elements was born. His last wish was to be buried in Mexico. His body was eventually transferred back to Mexico and now lies in a hidden place at Jesús Nazareno Church. After the Mexican Independence from Spain, the Mexican opinion about Cortés shifted. Once a founding father, Cortés is now seen at times as the reincarnation of the devil. I remember myself, being in Mexico City last year when the tourist guide repeated again and again how terrible the Spaniards were in Mexico. He did not seem concerned that I might have been hurt by his comments as I was from Spain. He was so convinced of his ideas that he probably thought I was going to embrace them. He even said that the night in which most Spaniards were killed, remembered as *la noche triste*



Genocide! Go Tenochtitlan!: Graffito protesting at the commemorative plaque remembering the site of the encounter between Hernán Cortés and Moctezuma, Jesús Nazareno Church, Mexico City.

(the sad night), was not sad at all. Mexico, who's name prior to the independence was 'New Spain,' as it was the closest country to Spain in America, built a nationalism around the defeated Aztecs, even when Mexicans with Spanish ancestry were the ones that declared the independence and still hold the positions of power. This year the Mexican president, whose grandfather is from Spain, went further and sent a letter to the Spanish king requesting an official

apology for the conquest. He probably knew this was not going anywhere but it was an interesting strategy to gain popularity within his voters. I wonder what would happen if the United States president sent a letter to the Queen of England requesting an apology for the U.K. colonization of North America. It would not make any sense as most Caucasian-Americans still identify with the first colonialists. It is important to remember that most civilizations and nations, including the European ones, were built out of cultural exchanges, mixing of ethnicities and, unfortunately, violence and power disputes. Today, in the United States, anything related to the European conquest of America is seen with a negative perspective. Even friar Junípero Serra, a Catholic missionary who was not involved in any military strategies, followed a pious life and founded the most important cities in California (including San Diego, San Francisco and L.A.) is now seen as a controversial figure. In contrast, other historical military figures are seen differently. Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, who led military campaigns resulting in many calamities and destructions, has a much more positive public opinion nowadays than Hernán Cortés. Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar are too far in time to cause any political friction. No nation practically would bring a debate about them. Questioning Napoleon Bonaparte, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great would have no political usefulness today.

Another historical aspect that caught my interest this year is the Spanish Inquisition as I have been doing research about physicians who were hired by this institution to differentiate mental illness from heretic behaviors. The Spanish Inquisition is generally portrayed in media as an institution that permitted torture and injustice. I myself grew up believing that the Spanish Inquisition was one of the most shameful events in Spanish history. Lately, reading more in depth about the Spanish Inquisition from historians and documented sources, I found out to my surprise that there is usually a substantial difference between the myths and the facts regarding the Spanish Inquisition. Contrary to what I originally thought, the religious institution had sophisticated methods to judge the accused people. The Inquisition had, in fact, been founded by the Catholic monarchs in order to modernize the unsophisticated procedures to judge heresy in the Middle Ages. With the Spanish Inquisition, the tribunals would then have fiscals and defendants had lawyers. Anonymous accusations were not accepted. The interrogatory process had to follow a particular method. Like all the other tribunals at the time, torture was used, but

contrary to what people think, the torture methods used by the Inquisition were among the most benevolent for the time. We must not forget that the Spanish Inquisition was a Catholic institution. As such, piety had to be an important drive. If the accused showed honest repentance, their charges were alleviated. If compared to our current values in society, the Inquisition does not look good, but if put in historical context, it actually looks like an improved version of what people had at the time. Reading about the Inquisition has made me reflect on how many other times in history we have assumed distorted ideas that we have heard from people in our society, believed them systematically without contrasting them or giving them much thought. We all have introjected many of these facts. Nowadays an institution like the Spanish Inquisition would, of course, be largely disapproved as most societies embrace religious freedom, but if we put the Spanish Inquisition in its historical context, we will be able to see it with perspective.

The opinion about historical events can change within just a few decades. During the 1960's, for example, the United States society approved and took pride on the conquest of the West. Hollywood's Western genre is a clear example of this. However, within the last two decades, more and more U.S. citizens identify with the remaining Native American culture. Custer or Sheridan have now become controversial figures whereas Red Cloud or Geronimo are now becoming the heroes of the resistance. Even non-European heroes are now more valued in North America than their own. Genghis Khan could be a good example of this. The great Khan was well known at his time for their terror inducing in Europe. The Mongolians were the most feared people of the time. With their strategies of surrender or die, they caused death and significant demographic changes in the Asian populations during the Middle Ages. Myths about Mongolians as sanguinary monsters spread in Europe during the Middle Ages. However, in our current Western society, a person may find it a lot easier to talk about Genghis Khan in good terms than about a Western hero. I remember recently a TV show in which the presenter asked an invited guest which figure in history he admired the most. This person, who seemed to be an American with European ancestry, responded after thinking for a few seconds, that the person he admired the most in history was Genghis Kahn. This could be surprising, initially, as culturally speaking Genghis Kahn might be quite distant from this person, but after analyzing this response, one can easily see that this answer makes the most sense for a person living in 2019 United

States. George Washington, George Patton or Audie Murphy would have been seen as not appropriate. In contrast, Genghis Kahn, a Mongolian hero who counted more deaths than any of the previous ones, was the correct answer. Almost everyone knows that he became the most powerful man on Earth at some point but, more importantly, there is no controversy in the United States about his figure. Therefore, Genghis Kahn was a safe bet on TV. This is an interesting point in my opinion because no matter how much we believe in a society that allows individual freedom and thinking, our thoughts are in many aspects of our lives just collective thoughts.

The interest about historical figures may well vary depending upon the political ideology of the person. Today, we live in societies divided by left or right political thinking. This allows for a perception of freedom and democracy: one or the other. We feel we are making a choice, but are we really? While most politicians in charge end up doing similar things depending on currency, trade, or financial aspects, society seems to make a big deal about these two different political systems of thoughts. Even when scientific research shows that liberals and conservatives have equal levels of empathic concern, many people continue to see the other political party and their voters as a problem to defeat and a major source of discord in society. I think it is very important that we all as individuals reflect on how much we are really influenced by fancy trends. From a historical viewpoint, the good and the bad division is not accurate. It is better to approach history objectively, in its context, without prejudices and with perspective. Loose correlations between the past and the present can be dangerous in the media as they polarize society and affect harmonious coexistence. The good and the bad are subjective and not scientifically determined. We must make our best efforts to be informed in order to prevent being manipulated by the media and the political authorities, to better think for ourselves and to advocate for a peaceful, conflict-free, and good-natured society.

Future Issues

Fall 2019 - The End of The World

Winter 2020 - Grief

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