



Editorial

Dossier – Fundamentalisms and Democracy

**Before thinking about the relationship between
fundamentalism and democracy**

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Fundamentalism, foundationalism, essentialism, totalitarianism, racism, sexism, patriarchy, moralism, intolerance, violence. There is nothing good to be said about it. The evil itself. Just seen from the other side. One of fundamentalism's trump cards is that it always wins, it convinces its opponents that this is exactly what they say about themselves. Moreover, it is rarely self-invoked. A few will define themselves as fundamentalists. Best (or worst) of all worlds: I am what they say about me, but I do not identify myself by what they call me. I do not carry self-identification, but everyone believes I do. And so, by attribution, observation, and accusation (it is almost irresistible not to, by the mere use of the word), fundamentalism is a place from which one believes completely, literally, inflexibly; it is practiced blindly, non-negotiably, intolerantly; it legitimizes the abuse, the imposition, the silencing, the violence. There is no irony, inconsequence, contradiction, bad conscience, incompleteness, failure: it is all or nothing. There seems to be no duplicity, division, suffering in the fundamentalist identity. There seems to be no loss, no doubt, no ambiguity, uncertainty.

Indeed, what is there to be understood about fundamentalism? Is it not one of those terms that we believe in and tremble at? Is it not always already there, the abject, the obscene, the monstrous? What more could be said, besides maybe adding to the series of outrages? Yes, we already know. Nothing can surprise us, except for the

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excess, for the transgression of the limits of what was already seen as absurd. To say fundamentalism is to foresee the whole, the one, the evil. Liberals, in thought, morals or politics, devote horror to it. The social activists and the political activists, from the center or the left, fight it tirelessly. Fundamentalism is the other side of modernity, of the post-modern, of emancipation, of freedom. What are we looking for when we name it, situate it and study it?

Nevertheless, there is temporality and a marginal position associated with fundamentalism that, when transposed or intensified, assails us as an experience of evil, unleashes our indignation and readiness to mobilize the weapons of reason, of collective action, of law. Fundamentalism is past tense, a dead time that wants to come back. Fundamentalism is a remnant that has not been extirpated from a world that would no longer exist. Therefore, if we see fundamentalism, we are certainly haunted by the ghosts of what we believe to be already overcome, buried, unmasked, neutralized, or subjugated.

Thus, our era, which is marked by an ever more acute sense of decadence and disorder, that causes reassertion, defense, resistance, regimenting protective forces of the contemporary against the specter of the return of ignorance, incivility, cruelty. What was debris rises again, like a phoenix, in the center, and at the top. It alarms those who represent the triumph of the lights of the reason, of the freedom, of the autonomy, and why not to say, of the progress. Fundamentalism seems to threaten our own experience of the time - like the tragedy that blows up from paradise, in the terrified look of the Benjaminian angel of history - and our sense of the social and cognitive order of places - either in the two-dimensional order of center and periphery, high and low or in the architecture of plurality and free construction of the self and the democratic us.

But despite the profusion of the voices that reinforce this interpretive scheme, without doubts or fears of insufficiency or injustice, there is certainly (!?) more to say about fundamentalism. If it seems to be certain that fundamentalists believe in the strength and immutability of the principles that ensure the order of things, their predictability, and their reason for being (explanation and justification), it is necessary to ask why we should also see fundamentalism as a conservative *reaction*. If it seems certain that, left without reins (and even repression), fundamentalists will not hesitate

to subvert the modern order, to take us back to the past where we will no longer be ourselves, it is necessary to wonder about the force of *seduction* (that we often want to reduce to the desire for certainty and stability in ordinary people) that makes fundamentalists *builders* of other orders, hybrid, staggered, watched over, but not controlled in the smallest details, and *mobilizers* of thousands, millions. If it seems unquestionable that there is no conciliation or possible connivance with fundamentalism and its followers (or executioners, when “in power” or close to it), it is necessary to ask about the *division and fragilities* of the fundamentalist “soul,” which make it intolerant because it feels intolerably rejected, disdained, deterritorialized. If the propensity to the intolerance of a different opinion or way of life seems to be unfalsifiable, with or without the pretension of “correcting” them using communitarian, legal, or political sanction, one must ask oneself if the manifestations identified as fundamentalist share the *same set of attributes* or a *hard core* that would allow their naming, classification, and prediction of the behavior to assume, despite the differences of context.

Since its North American and protestant modern origins, when a self-conscious, self-appointed “fundamentalist” project was articulated, the term was taken up by its opponents as an example of what it claimed to be: a rejection of the political, social, cultural, and moral modernity, but not of the technical and economic one. More than that, it was gradually being transformed into an accusatory epithet. The variations don't matter much. They do not lead us into the unfamiliar, only to the exaggerated or mitigated. The name of the pathological invariance of faith, of certainty, of decanted tradition, it seems, is that we study fundamentalism since we want to see it combated.

Up to this point, I have tried to appear neutral and provocative but distanced from the most excruciating and urgent issues. Is it not a fact that in recent years the religious plurality, the sexual diversity, the gender equality, the interculturality, the authority of science, the political freedom, the peaceful social coexistence, the international peace find themselves severely hit and increasingly engulfed by a conservative wave that is difficult to contain? Is it not true that freedom of teaching, health services, the “state compassion” of social policies (compensatory or affirmative), and legal isonomy are being eroded and dismantled by a heteroclite, but relentless, the affirmation of the dismantling of the state protector of civil liberties and human, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights? Is not democracy at risk? Why

evade the issue? To accumulate quotes, ironies, and rhetorical questions? Why preserve the monsters, the cynics, or the free-riders of fundamentalism?

These questions are very important. They alert us to the ethical-political dimension of every interpretation of reality. But they cannot be taken as enough for this interpretation. One of the injunctions of the new theories of knowledge - the same ones that aim to protect local knowledge, marginal and subject to discrimination and violence - is to be open to the others, an injunction to know before judging. An injunction that can lead to the rejection of the other, of course. But not necessarily in totum and definitively. What would be like this reading, that treats “fundamentalism” like others, in this sense? What would be, better, a reading that explores the division, the oscillation, the contradiction, the variation, and, above all, the relationality and the dispersion of this identity? Relationships that claim to be analyzed always in its context, but also never within itself, searching for the places where the borders - and there is never just one - show themselves to be uncertain, vulnerable, porous, susceptible to contestation from within and from outside. The fundamentalists and their fundamentalisms will emerge from this reading less powerful, less infallible, and more involved in internal disputes over the latitude of their beliefs, emotions, and practices. Dispersion: more than diversity, experiences of relative uncontrolled reproduction of the fundamentalist identity and way of life, generating identities and ways of life, questioning them through contact, confrontation, alliances with others.

This ethical-political injunction on the level of knowledge, this politics of knowledge, would challenge us, not so much to relativize the risk or the repulsion that, real and imaginatively, provokes the “fundamentalism”. It would challenge us, rather, to go through our toolboxes to sophisticate the analysis: if there is a mass appeal in the phenomena of the conservative wave, are we not always back to the already known - fascism, totalitarianism, dogmatism, intolerance, violence? A pluralist, fallibilist and relational sensibility for the study of these historical, social, political, cultural phenomena (understand commas as contiguity, articulation, or merging, as the case may be!) will challenge us to perceive the symbolic-practical fundamentalist complex (complex in the psychoanalytic and complexity theory senses), its “fundamentally” problematic, troubled, anxious, contesting and contesting character. The symptom of fundamentalism, paradoxically, is an irreconcilable and resentful experience of the uncertain, the multiple, the ephemeral, the antagonistic. It will challenge us to

rediscover the otherness of the fundamentalist experience, both its desperate response to the present times and its pastoral arrogance and political intuition of the need, if one wants to live in the stability, predictability, and security that was projected in the past, struggling to bring it back. Which means, in other words, ironically, actively building and reproducing it.

The *conundrum* of fundamentalism: is it what we say about people, their practices, and their organizations, making themselves honest about what they say, without calling themselves, fundamentalists? Up to what point is the fundamentalist a "fully constituted" being, in the welcoming bosom of his reference community, sheltered from and before the encounter with the otherness that removes the ground from under his feet? How much of a no-holds-barred struggle is there against fundamentalist people, particularly those who are not even aware of how they are perceived, outside the shrillness or supposed clairvoyance (even mystical, oracular) of their leaders' discourse? Is it possible to be "empathic" with the fundamentalist subject, without becoming another and without being radically and summarily rejected by it? How to deal with the gender of the/in the fundamentalism? How to understand the self-repression of the fundamentalist that sees himself/herself differently from him/herself and about his/her equals? How to operate with a division to detach fundamentalist segments in some respects, but "reasonable" and "sensible" in others, thus mitigating the most threatening in the ghost of fundamentalism - religious, political, economic, cultural? How to be a democrat and democratic in the relationship with fundamentalists?

This is what, without knowing it yet, and without having seen or read it, I would expect to find in the sequence of papers in this issue of *Horizonte*, which so generously offered me the space for these words, perhaps untimely, certainly improvised, but deliciously free of the scriptures of academic form. In this comfortable - but authorized - place of the editorial, I would like to "guide" in advance, but without knowing it, the protocol of the look that the reader will devote to the texts that follow. For which I have you to thank, for lending yourselves to this imaginary dialog, but one carried by feelings of urgency, indignation, and anxiety about the fate of our religions, moralities, and politics. Awaiting...