

THE IMPLICATURES OF KNOWLEDGEABLY IGNORED IMAGE: The Narcissism of Power

Abstract: One of the central arguments that at the heart of relations between the West and the Rest is the problem of knowledge. In precise terms, it is the problem of 'knowledgeable ignorance': knowing people, ideas, civilizations, religions, histories as something they are not, and could not possibly be, and maintaining these ideas even when the means exist to know differently. The use of such technique made the postmodern passion of the stereotypical negative characteristics of the Rest as natural consequence of beliefs and facts. While knowledgeable ignorance acts as the gatekeeper of what it is relevant and necessary to know about the rest, rather than listening to what they have to say of themselves, mutual understanding can never emerge. To understand is to systematically uncover the implications and motifs of such a technique and then history can be rewritten and facts re-modified. *Key words:* Knowledgeable Ignorance, Clash of Civilisations, Hatred, Politics of Fear, Narcissism

The events of September 11 were a major trauma for the world's psyche, and in particular for the American people. The horrifying enormities and atrocities of these events are something quite new in world affairs, not in their scale and character, but in their target. Since the War of 1812, the American national territory, for the first time, has been under attack or even threatened. The United States battled against many nations, but for the very first time, the guns have been directed the other way. The change is dramatic; the number of victims is colossal.

These events have spawned innumerable courses, classroom initiatives and literature at all levels of the US/world education systems and Medias. Thousands of documents were written trying to explain these events. But unfortunately, the only question taken for granted, as the *Boston Globe's* Beverly Beckham declared, was that "They hate us." Beckham said: "these people [are] from a culture we don't know and don't understand and never gave much thought to until now." Moreover, she added that this hatred is not like any other. "We have people who hate right in our own back yard, whole groups of haters, who lash out against blacks and gays and Catholics and Jews. But this hate directed at ALL Americans is bigger and deadlier because it's fuelled by rage that is calculated, then unleashed, no matter what the cost." These words, alas, echoed the general consensus of much media coverage on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trying to answer the question of "Why do they hate us?" it needs to be, firstly, identified and then explained. It cannot be explained in one line relationship, but a

mutual one that has to be unfolded, understood and resolved. Hatred, that evokes a response, creates a set of mutual perceptions between those people who hate and the subject of their hatred. History shows that it is as dangerous to consider oneself the subject of hatred, to fear the onslaught of other people's hatred, as to hold others as the object of hatred. History, as well, shows that sporadic battles and atrocities in the past could be knitted together into a homogeneous narrative of 'ancient conflict.' Ranko Bugarski comments "[...]it was only through the protracted and vicious abuse of language in the service of propaganda and war that a sufficient amount of interethnic hatred could be generated to make traditionally good neighbors – indeed, frequently members of the same ethnically mixed family! – get at each other's throats." Evidently, hatred coursed through the veins of entire peoples. "Slowly the poison the whole blood stream fills [...] The waste remains, the waste remains and kills."

Unfolding the roots constructing the set of mutual perceptions of *They vs. Us' hatred*, we find that it actually lies in the problem of knowledge. From the very beginning, getting to know the others was not done in an appropriate way. The West's, in general, and Europe's, in particular, interests in knowing the alien cultures, as given by the colonial historians such as Donald Lach or J. H. Parry, were based on actual encounters with those cultures, usually as a result of trade, colonialism, or military expansion, conquest, empire, or accident. Interests are not to be ignored in such a scheme, for they "derive from need, and need rests on empirically stimulated things working and existing together – appetite, fear, curiosity, and so on – which have always been in play wherever and whenever human beings have lived." But since that all knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, therefore it rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that interpretation neglects the existence of facts or data, but they got their importance from what is made of them in the process of interpretation itself. In this way, knowledge of other cultures was especially subject to "unscientific" imprecision and the circumstances of interpretation. Edward Said, who presented this dilemma, does not want to leave it without any suggestion neither. He suggests tentatively that knowledge of another culture is possible, and that it is important to add, desirably, if two conditions are fulfilled. First: "the student must feel that he or she is answerable to and in uncoercive contact with the culture and the people being studied." Second, which complements and fulfills the first, is knowledge of the social world that is at the bottom of what Said called interpretation. Interpretation "acquires the status of knowledge by various means, some of them intellectual, many of them social and even political." They are simply defined as the unscientific nuisances as feelings, habits, conventions, associations, and values that are intrinsic part of any interpretation. Interpretation is, first of all, a form of making: that is, it depends on the willed intentional activity of the human mind, molding and forming the objects of its attention with care and study. Such an activity takes place, perforce, in a specific time and place and is engaged in by a specifically located individual,

with a specific background, in a specific situation, for a particular series of ends. Therefore the interpretation of texts, which is what the knowledge of other cultures is principally based on, neither takes place in a clinically secure laboratory nor pretends to objective results. It is a social activity, inextricably tied to the situation out of which it arose in the first place, which then either gives it the status of knowledge or rejects it as unsuitable for that status. No interpretation can neglect this situation, and no interpretation is complete without an interpretation of the situation.

Analyzing the first condition suggested by Said, we, unfortunately, find that the West, from the very early phase, knew about the non-Western world in the frame of colonialism, which represents coerciveness. Thus, approaching the subject of the *Other*, by the European scholar, was from the general position of dominance, and therefore what he said *about* this subject was said with little reference to what anyone but other European scholars had said. So as long as this framework stands, the *Other* cannot be known. This, regrettably, is particularly true in the United States, and only slightly less true in Europe.

The ignorance of the conditions of interpreting the *Others'* cultures, by different interpreters throughout history, led to the formation of a particular kind of knowledge, which is called in precise terms, the 'knowledgeable ignorance'. This knowledge is defined: "knowing people, ideas, civilisations, religions, histories as something they are not, and could not possibly be and maintaining these ideas even when the means exist to know differently." Norman Daniel first presented this term in his book *Heroes and Saracens*, where he strategically characterizes its usage for propaganda purposes. Daniel explains that the polemic tradition of reporting on Islam begun by John of Damascus (d. 748 AD). According to Daniel, John of Damascus essentially 'dismissed Islam as a religious fraud devised from the beginning to facilitate aggression and lust' by presenting it as something it could not be, indeed could easily be known not to be. He portrays Islam as "an anti-religion, brutal, demonic, libidinous and abandoned, fanatic and implacably opposed to all the norms of the Christian life." Notice that the endurance of this kind of knowledge, among the Christians and Muslims, lived up to the contemporary time; the crude stereotypes of John of Damascus have a continuous impact and are still alive, says Daniel. Up to recent time, this tradition has come to be known as Orientalism, and is diagnosed today as Islamophobia: 'an irrational hatred and fear of Islam and Muslims'. Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), as Daniel argues, is a contemporary example of this tradition. 'The style of the day changes, but the themes are perennial', Daniel concluded.

Noam Chomsky in his book *Hegemony or Survival* named a similar kind of ignorance as "intentional ignorance". He uses this ignorance discussing the impacts of the American primary principle of foreign policy. Chomsky argues that to protect oneself against such a policy, is to "reassure ourselves that the powerful are motivated by "elevated ideals" and "altruism" in the quest for stability and righteousness," and we have to adopt the stance called "intentional ignorance"

by a critic of the terrible atrocities in Central America in the 1980s backed by the political leadership that is, again, at the helm in Washington.”

An essential aspect of human society is that human relationships and civilizations depend on shared information, accurate information. The person who possesses more information/knowledge is usually more powerful in controlling both the environment and other persons. The purpose of an education is, in essence, to obtain greater power over the environment and, in a different way, over others in a societal setting. In this way information is associated with power. And in order to feel this kind of power, one has to deliberately affect the others in reducing their power by providing them with misinformation or by keeping aspects of his information a secret – as may occur in guilds, religious sects, etc. International politics is a fresh field for the growing of such a phenomenon, where governments attempt to maintain a high level of secrecy about weapons, economics, and industrial researches. Furthermore, misinformation is commonly distributed, particularly about military operations and diplomatic moves. If individuals or groups misunderstand their competitors, their power has been reduced. Besides, misinformation limits the rational choices available to the person to whom a lie has been told. Thus, if information is power – and that is certainly the message from both philosophers and government policymakers – then misinformation decreases power.

The transmission of false information, whether defined as misinforming or lying, in international politics is of our main concern in this paper. As we have shown, it has been symbolized or defined as ‘knowledgeable ignorance’ since the very early stages of international relations. In a hope to solve the problem, it is advisable first to understand and/or rediscover the roots of political lies and then to analyze their implicatures and causes. Political lies are categorized, as given by Charles Ford, as follows:

- 1) lies to gain election or ensure reelection (e.g., “No new taxes!”);
- 2) lies to pursue political policies (e.g., the fiction of an attack on United States ships in the Tonkin Gulf to justify increased bombing of North Vietnam);
- 3) lies to protect national security and military operations (e.g., the denial by Jimmy Carter –“I will not lie to you”– that there was a plan to attempt rescue operations for American hostages in Iran); and
- 4) foolish lies.

Although some of the lies in these categories appear straightforward in their motivation and implementation, moralists still question why do politicians make false statements that are ultimately certain to do them more harm than good? Moralists also question why politics cannot be conducted without lying? And, why lying has endured this long?

Answering all these questions, one needs to return back to the roots of the philosophy of international relations and politics among nations. Surprisingly, one finds that international relations, as a science, is based on perpetual conflicts

– differing in their scale – that shape history. Samuel Huntington says in his *The Clash of Civilizations* that, for instance, “the history of Western civilization is one of “hegemonic wars” between rising and falling powers.” Huntington argues, too, that the phenomenon of hegemonic wars is not new in man’s history. Rather it is constant, and its roots and causes are known to the others. He reasons that the civilizational “us” and the extracivilizational “them” or intra–and extracivilizational behavior stem from:

1. feelings of superiority (and occasionally inferiority) toward people who are perceived as being very different;
2. fear of and lack of trust in such people;
3. difficulty of communication with them as a result of differences in language and what is considered civil behavior;
4. lack of familiarity with the assumptions, motivations, social relationships, and social practices of other people.

Huntington holds that these behaviors have special conditions for their survival and that it is almost impossible to solve their conflicts. They, mainly, stem from, or are fed by the conflict between states and groups from different civilizations that are categorized as: “control of people, territory, wealth, and resources, and relative power, that is, the ability to impose one’s own values, culture, and institutions on another group as compared to that group’s ability to do that to you.” Conflict between cultural groups, however, may also involve cultural issues. Unluckily, the conflicts of cultural issues are the most difficult to be solved comparing to the other types of conflicts. For example, differences in secular ideology between Marxist–Leninism and liberal democracy can at least be debated if not resolved. Differences in material interest can be negotiated and often settled by compromise in one way, or another. Meanwhile, the differences between Hindus and Muslims are unlikely to resolve the issue of whether a temple or a mosque should be built at Ayodhya by building both, or neither, or a syncretic building that is both a mosque and a temple. Nor can what might seem to be a straightforward territorial question between Albanian Muslims and Orthodox Serbs concerning Kosovo or between Jews and Arabs concerning Jerusalem be easily settled, since each place has deep historical, cultural, and emotional meaning to both peoples. Cultural questions like these involve a yes or no, zero–sum choice.

Elaborating on the reasons given by Huntington, hatred needs to be analyzed as a motive for human conflicts. “It is human to hate,” argues Huntington, adding that for “self–definition and motivation people need enemies: competitors in business, rivals in achievement, [and] opponents in politics.” People naturally distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them. Michael Dibdin in his Venetian nationalist demagogue novel, *Dead Lagoon*, expresses this new era of hatred as:

“There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering after a century and more of sentimental cant. Those who deny them deny their

family, their heritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves! They will not lightly be forgiven.”

The resolving of one conflict and the disappearance of one enemy generate personal, social, and political forces that give rise to new ones. “The ‘us’ versus ‘them’ – tendency is, as Ali Mazrui said, “in the political arena, almost universal.” For instance, although the Cold War has ended, the conflicts of identities did not. In the aftermath of the Cold War, flags and symbols of cultural identity, including crosses, crescents, and even head coverings, emerged to the surface once again, because culture counts, and cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people. “People are discovering new but often old identities and marching under new but often old flags which lead to wars with new but often old enemies.” In the contemporary world “them” is more and more likely to be people from a different civilization.

Disclosing that hatred is a reason for cultural conflicts, we need to elaborate on the nature that forms such an attitude. It is the attitude – “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with regard to a given object” – that develops from fear’s displacement to reason, resulting of irrational hatred and division. The elevating of this attitude, as the professor of sociology at the University of Southern California, Barry Glassner argues, to the altitude of “fearmongering” can be done by three techniques that are: repetition, making the irregular seem regular, and misdirection. By using these narrative tools, anyone with a loud platform can ratchet up public anxieties and fears, distorting public discourse and reason.

Fear has always been a part of human life and always will be. It is a normal part of the human condition; it is universal in every human society. But unfortunately, it has always been the enemy of reason. Reason may sometimes dissipate fear, but fear frequently shuts down reason. Both fear and reason are essential to human survival, but the relationship between them is unbalanced. The Roman philosopher and rhetoric teacher Lactantius wrote: “[w]here fear is present, wisdom cannot be.” Twenty years before the American Revolution, in England, Edmund Burke, too, wrote: “[n]o passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.”

In the political arena, the presence of fear is almost inevitable. Senator Ed Muskie of Maine, speaking on the national television the night before the 1970 election, says:

“There are only two kinds of politics. They’re not radical and reactionary or conservative and liberal or even Democratic and Republican. There are only the politics of fear and the politics of trust. One says you are encircled by monstrous dangers. Give us power over your freedom so we may protect you. The other says the world is a baffling and hazardous place, but it can be shaped to the will of men.”

The dominance of fear in the nation’s immune system, which leads to errors of facts and judgment, needs to be understood by paying more attention to the new discoveries about the ways fear affects the thinking process. Luckily, recent

advances in neuroscience offer new and interesting insights into the nature of fear, i.e., how we function in relation to fear. The new technology in this field made a revolutionary impact. It is called “functional magnetic resonance imaging,” or fMRI, that enabled the neuroscientists to look inside the operations of a living human brain and observe which regions of the brain are being used at which times and in response to which stimuli. For the first time now the neuroscientists are to see the proper relationships among areas of the brain such as the amygdala and the hippocampus and the neocortex, to name only a few.

It is a commonly held assumption that citizens in democracy operate by reasoning, when presented to problems, as if every question could be analyzed rationally and debated fairly until a well-reasoned collective conclusion is reached. But the new research demonstrates that this is not the way it works at all. A scientist at Stony Brook University, Charles Taber, went so far as to say “[t]he Enlightenment model of dispassionate reason as the duty of citizenship is empirically bankrupt.”

Dr. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran - one of the world’s leading neuroscientists - has written “[o]ur mental life is governed mainly by a cauldron of emotions, motives and desires which we are barely conscious of, and what we call our conscious life is usually an elaborate post hoc rationalization of things we really do for other reasons.”

There are other mental structures that govern feelings and emotions, and these structures have a greater impact on decision making than logic and reason. Moreover, emotions have more power to affect reason than reason does to affect emotions—particularly the emotion of fear. Joseph LeDoux, a New York University neuroscientist and the author of *The Emotional Brain*, reinforces the idea by saying “[c]onnections from the emotional systems to the cognitive systems are stronger than connections from the cognitive systems to the emotional systems.” Our capacity for fear is “hardwired” in the brain as an ancient strategy that gives us the ability to respond instantly when survival may be at stake. By contrast, reason is centered in parts of the brain that have most recently evolved and depends upon more subtle processes that give us the ability to discern the emergence of threats before they become immediate and to distinguish between legitimate threats and illusory ones. Moreover, whatever the cause of fear, the phenomenon itself is difficult to turn off once it’s turned on.

The interference of fear with reason in the presence of imminent fear can, also, be exercised in the same power over reason when it comes to the realms of memory. It is an assumption commonly held wrong that memory is the exclusive province of reason. Fear has its own memory circuits in the brain. In the course of their lives, people recall traumatic emotional experiences and memories – whether consciously or unconsciously – and are constantly retrieving them to guide them (people) in new situations. By retrieving memory, the amygdala is activated, and that memory is coded and stored differently. In effect, the “time tag” is removed – so that when the traumatic experiences are later recalled, they

feel “present.” Interestingly, memory has the ability to activate the fear response in the present moment – even though the trauma being remembered was a long time ago – because the intensity of memory causes part of the brain to react as if the trauma were happening again right now – with the same kinds of responses, such as faster heartbeat and increased feelings of fear. Surprisingly, psychologist Dr. Michael Fanselow describes “[t]he available evidence suggests the amygdala learns and stores information about fear-arousing events *but also modulates storage of other types of information in different brain regions.*”

Moreover, the activation of amygdala and the starting of fear response is significantly related to another phenomenon called “vicarious traumatization.” Vicarious traumatization means that if someone close to us has experienced a trauma, that person’s feeling can be communicated to us even though we did not experience the traumatic event. The linkage by identity – whether ethnic, religious, historical, cultural, linguistic, tribal, or nationalistic – researchers show, can produce the same emotional and physical responses in the listeners when listening to the traumatic events that are being described by the victims.

Throughout the world, stories about past traumas and tragedies are passed down from one generation to the next. Long before television, vivid verbal descriptions of traumas evoked extremely powerful reactions – even centuries after the original traumas had occurred. For example, if you look at the conflicts in almost every conflict zone in the entire world – the Indian subcontinent, in Sri Lanka, in Africa, in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East – you will find an element of amygdala politics based on vicarious traumatization, feeding off memories of past tragedies.

As we have noticed in the neurotic explanation of fear, it, and its reawakening from time to time, can crowd out reason. In times of disorientation and disturbance, people reach for the strongest tree they can find, which is always the one that has the deepest roots. The tree with the deepest roots is always faith and its role is society. With the absence of reason, many people feel a greater need for the comforting certainty of absolute faith. Moreover, as they cling ever more firmly to their religious traditions, they can become more vulnerable to ideas and influences that reason might filter out in less fearful times. They even become vulnerable to the appeals of secular leaders who profess absolute certainty in simplistic explanations, portraying all problems as manifestations of the struggle between good and evil.

The incubation of fear in the public’s mind is revived, as to some analysts, by the feeling of superiority by certain group - the first reason in the list of conflicts’ causes mentioned above by Huntington. It is the factor that suits mostly the analytic study of the policy of ‘knowledgeable ignorance’. Sigmund Freud argued that people have tendency to feel themselves superior to other communities. In fact, there is a tendency in any human group, defined in virtually any way, for example sports teams, to define itself as superior to all others. And “when it is difficult to identify traits that set one’s group apart from the rest, negative traits

are created in what Freud called as the “the narcissism of minor differences”¹. Note that by narcissism it is meant the “poor reality testing; the outside is perceived in very personal terms, and the internal world is contaminated with grandiosity.” The aims of this testing’s paradox are either the individual aspiration to power, or maintaining the status quo of authority and governing. Kets de Vries and Miller (1985) described three types of narcissistic personality and their effects on the functions in leadership. These three types are:

Reactive narcissists, who experienced rejecting and unresponsive parenting, are often ruthless in their use of power. They tolerate no disagreement and crush dissension. Their distorted reality (including their self-deceptions and overt lies) must be accepted by underlings if the latter wish to survive in the organization;

Self-deceptive narcissists, who as children were led by parents to believe that they were lovable and perfect, are often manipulative leaders. Such persons frequently have interpersonal difficulties because of their emotional superficiality and lack of genuine empathy for others;

Constructive narcissists are ambitious, manipulative, and occasionally, opportunistic. They generally get along well with subordinates because they have self-confidence, adaptability, humor, and the capacity to recognize the strengths and needs of other persons. As a result, they are often able to energize subordinates and achieve genuine accomplishments.

The last category reflects a degree of healthy narcissism that often promotes good leadership, but the former two are often problematic. The first category suits the description of political leadership that uses ‘knowledgeable ignorance’ to promote “distorted reality” due to the vacuum left behind by the absence of reason. It is the description of a power that is of consistent narcissistic type. Unlike politically, it is psychologically approved, by Horowitz and Arthur that the effects of narcissism, when threatened or injured, react with sadistic behaviors. On the other side, the group members will distort their own views of reality to placate the leader or the policy conducted by the leader. To notice, Kernberg (1980) has observed that in times of stress, people may turn toward and look for narcissistic leaders. But when the tension becomes unbearable, “[t]he group processes, in reaction to rages of the leader, can worsen the situation, leading to ruination, blood baths, or mutiny.”

Going through the persistence of knowledgeable ignorance and its incubation in one’s mind we find that it is very well connected to narcissism. And by the application of narcissism to this type of knowledge, which streams from the vacuum left behind by the absence of reason to politics, is what can be called ‘The Narcissism of Power’. It is a political narcissism applied in a very systematic and enduring way. Its systematical flow starts with hatred toward the *Others*, the absence of reason, i.e., fearing the *Others*, the reawakening of faith, the dominance of the Manichean thought, and to finally be herded by narcissist leaders who make use of people’s ignorance to promote or maintain the status quo. And the most important thing is that hatred is in the first step in the formula,

which is sustained by willful 'knowledgeable ignorance'. It is human to hate and it is human to believe in "constructed or manufactured ignorance". Alas, by looking through the conceptual lenses to the 'knowledgeable ignorance', we noticed its failure to examine history and acknowledge the great harm done in the name of virtue. The postmodernists sought to rewrite history and disestablish it entirely, without addressing the problem that bequeaths in today's world. But, rewriting history does not wipe the slate clean. It is impossible to rely on the strictures and limitations of good dead men to solve today's dilemmas, but to do our own thinking about the ideas that they had. So, we tried, in this study, to resolve the legacy of the problems inherited from the dead people's imperfect actions and the operation of their beliefs. And in a hope to transcend hatred and its preserve expressions, we tried to rethink the limitations of what we have learnt and what we think we know.

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ИМПЛИКАЦИЈЕ УПУЋЕНО ИГНОРИСАНЕ СЛИКЕ: Нарцизам снаге

Резиме: Један од централних аргумената који је у средишту односа између Запада и осталих је проблем знања. Прецизније формулисано, проблем је „упућено незнање“: познавање људи, идеја, цивилизације, религије, историје као нешто што нису, и не би могле бити, и одржавање ових идеја, чак и када постоје средства да се зна другачије. Коришћење ових техника је постмодерна страст ка стереотипним негативним карактеристикама оног Другог, као природна последица веровања и чињеница. Иако упућено незнање делује као чувар онога што је релевантно и неопходно да знате о Другом, више него да се саслуша шта они имају да кажу о себи, међусобно разумевање се никада не може појавити. Разумети значи систематски открити импликације и мотиве такве технике, а затим историја може бити преписана и чињенице поново модификоване.

Кључне речи: упућено незнање, сукоб цивилизација, мржња, политика страха, нарцизам

