In recent times the Isis phenomenon has got into the collective imagination so rapidly and in such a radical way as not to allow real achievement of awareness, either regarding the phenomenon itself or the hypothetical future scenarios. Yet, if the conventional organs of information are excluded, little is said of the Isis phenomenon in today's *agora*, or in what is left of it. It is almost as if there were a kind of refusal to discuss the matter. When the common man expresses himself on the subject, what emerges is substantially an attitude of emotional distancing, of refusal disguised as moral condemnation and of delegation of the problem to those military Institutions that fight against Isis, and at the moment seem to have no other role than to allow people to sleep quietly as long as possible.

So how should we interpret an attitude of the kind? How is it possible that anyone, in every possible circumstance, misses no chance to complain about politics or the present degeneration of the socio-economic system, while the issue of Isis, a real threat for our civilization, is relegated to the borders of our reflections or at the most considered as a phenomenon of collective madness that only bombs producing devastating results can resolve?

Starting from an observation point that geographically appears optimal for the purpose, i.e. the south of Europe looking out on the Mediterranean, and *through the magnifying glass* of individual and collective *deep psychology, in these pages I will try to try to make sense of many of the matters that concern Isis, outside and inside the west.*

Although the large majority of us Europeans until a couple of years ago had never heard of Isis, IS, Black or Islamic Caliphate, it is evident that a phenomenon of the kind cannot arise and develop in a very short time. *There is an enormous difference between the moment when an event starts and the moment when we begin to perceive it.* We therefore have to imagine a *long period of incubation and preparation during which the Isis phenomenon grew in silence, in the shadow, and was essentially nurtured by the adhesion of an ever increasing number of people that shared its objectives and its worldview and above all in it found a sense of affiliation and identity.* But where did Isis arise, and also what is this worldview that so many individuals have shared and in which they are continually interested and want to adhere to? And why all this?

Although it is not my intention to propose a socio-economic or historical analysis of the Isis

phenomenon, we inevitably have to make reference to such aspects as gateways into the issue that here we are mostly interested in highlighting and trying to understand. Geographically, Isis arose and developed in an Afro-Asian area in which in the last hundred years, primarily for economic reasons, i.e. oil, the interests of the western world were concentrated. Though remaining superficial on the subject, *it is now clear that in that area the west has had a key role in favouring the affirmation of national regimes prepared to maintain over time economic relations with the west that were extremely advantageous for the latter.* The balance was maintained as long as world leadership firmly remained in the hands of the northern hemisphere of the world and the governments of Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya and other nations of the area accepted, fundamentally out of oligarchic interests, the role of governing a status quo that evidently could not last over time. Not a few people maintain that regimes like that of Saddam Hussein or Gaddafi remained stable thanks to western support. When the latter was lost it was finally clear on what tinderbox the system rested. But here it is not even from the political point of view that I am interested in addressing the subject. Hence in this respect it is enough to affirm, with little likelihood of being contradicted, that *no social system can forever accept the condition of providing other people's wealth while in its own territory well-being remains a mirage for most people,* all the more so if it has technical means and media that clearly allow a comparison between people's lifestyle in a particular country and that of those who live in conditions of greater wealth. Therefore, beyond every connatural human greed for power, *the fundamental difference between middle-eastern governments in decline and emerging ones is the attempt to overthrow the present world leadership, and to enact an alternation of power between the western or "Christian" world and the Arab-Islamic one. Thus at a collective level there seems to be emerging and spreading a widespread feeling of self-affirmation aiming to maintain wealth and power in people's own territory.*

So this analysis could represent an attempt to understand the rise and development of Isis in the territories of its origin. But how can we explain the consensus that the phenomenon is achieving in so many people living in different geographical areas? And also, why does Isis go on declaring that it wants to take the clash onto western soil? Why, if the interest were only of an economic nature, do we continue to perceive from Isis a deep feeling of hatred towards each of us only because we are westerners?

In this respect we cannot forget that a contribution is being made to the growth of the Isis

phenomenon by a lot of young people both in the Arab world and in western countries. At this point we are about to cross one of the most insidious confines of reflection on the matter. I will try to do it in an orderly way: how can we interpret Isis, and what is the Black Caliphate really?

Although Isis is to be seen politically as an attempt at self-affirmation as a "state" by a regime with internal rules (and therefore laws) defined on a religious basis and physical confines subject to attempts at expansion, actually *the true identity of Isis consists in a war front in continual evolution.* Adhering to Isis, wanting to be part of it, does not mean deciding to go to live in a state, within a territory, whose existential conception or socio-economic-religious organization is shared, but taking part in a combat front, a ferocious war, in which everything that differs from one's own vision can legitimately become an object of hatred and violence. Isis, at the moment, can be considered as one of the most evident human forms of extreme aversion towards everything that is different. People do not go to live in Isis; they go to fight with Isis. From the psychological point of view this is a fundamental aspect of the process of affiliation to Isis. *Isis exists inasmuch as more and more people feel the need to make war on an enemy.*

Young Arabs and westerners, I said. If on one side it is comprehensible that so many original fighters of the Arab world can be interested in the opportunities for gain that fighting in Isis allows, what drives westerners to adhere to this war, going over to the other side? I believe that *the true opportunity that Isis is providing is a basis that is extremely sustainable and functional to the expression of hatred.* Evidently, *in a great many young Arabs and Europeans there is such a radical form of existential dissatisfaction as to find in the Black cause an unmissable opportunity of legitimization and expression.* Recently many have tried to delineate the socio-psychological profile of the foreign fighter: initially there prevailed the hypothesis that the people who joined Isis were desperate young people like French ones from the banlieues; it was realized that there were also ones that had a stable job and a family. Then the possibility was considered of young people who had severed ties with their family of origin or with the state (as in the case of Jihadi John) but also this was an unsatisfactory hypothesis to explain the complexity of the phenomenon. Consideration was given to the hypothesis of frustration of third-generation Arabs that have failed to integrate in the European territory, and then to the hypothesis that fighting with Isis giving a great opportunity for "visibility" for which all over the world a perverse necessity is now felt. But

what is the true cause of present and future adhesions to Isis? Evidently, it is all the causes given above and a single one that brings them all together, i.e. *deep western degeneration of the sense of life and the consequent uneasiness that this trend is producing in the new generations.* Despite some important positive signals, it is evident that *in the west at the moment an existential conception is prevailing that primarily, and worryingly, has bases of an economic and self-referential nature, while on the internal plane there is triumphing a nihilism and an unprecedented sense of sterility regarding millennial western culture.* In the west extreme social competition and feelings of fear are prevailing, or even anguish, typical of the most archaic forms of civilization. The most fortunate are committed to maintaining their own existences inside reassuring systems, in terms of both physical and economic security. While the most extreme violence takes the form of social indifference to those who are worse off, on the other side all the defeated people of this system (and there really are a lot of them in the west), also thanks to the recent economic crises, cannot fail to feel they are excluded, marginalized, left to their own devices; and dissatisfaction and anger become the dominant feelings in the individual. *The prevailing objectives among the young western generations are success and visibility, and Isis, paradoxically, is furnishing a very alluring opportunity to be get them for all those people that have failed in this sense,* through those very tools-values that the west has exported to the whole world, namely money and media communication. If everything I have said so far can be true as regards European sympathizers, we can imagine the proportions of the phenomenon if we look at it with the eyes of a very large part of the Afro-Asian world. Let us try for an instant to identify with all those people, not militant, that look at our world with a gaze full of that desire that, perhaps because the dream is unattainable, often turns into envy. Admitting that the latter hypothesis is sustainable, we that are inside the west, we that know the truth, know that in our world at the moment there is little to envy. The exponential increase of antidepressant and tranquillizing drugs, of divorces, of scandals, of widespread corruption, of drifts of every sort and the significant decrease in economic resources pro capita are a clear expression of a culture in profound crisis; Isis seems to be aware of these frailties, much more than us, and the continual media stimulation of our fears, our weakness, our anguishes, are an evident confirmation of this. Everything western that moves around them, be it a woman dressed fashionably or of a migrant with the Christian faith, becomes the object of violence to show to the west. *It is evident that in the eyes of the most ferocious activists the images of an old man that goes on TV to find a fiancée, of a "fairy" that is too much of an exhibitionist or of a showgirl that recounts her night-time adventures so as to*

have visibility, have the effect of nourishing people's hatred and aversion for everything that is considered degenerate, and a crusader is radicalized in an even more extreme way with every day that passes. Unfortunately, the human being hates in an even stronger way if at the basis of his or her feeling there are also, even unconsciously, feelings of exclusion, of having been rejected or of very profound failure. The first killing in the Bible happens because of Abel's feeling of envy towards his own brother. But God said "let no one touch Cain" and perhaps we still have to clarify why God did not invoke revenge against the person who had killed. *We westerners* cannot here resolve the problems that are being manifested in the Middle East and in Africa, *but we have the obligation to reflect on ourselves, on our way of living and on the reason why so many people hate our way of living.* In this perspective, Isis *can be conceived as a form of autoimmune aggression of our very own system.* Moreover, as the laws of compensation teach us, alongside a *modus vivendi* that is de-signified and de-signifying, devoid of any form of authentic collective spirituality, there is appearing another that balances through an archaic radicalism whose foundations, not by chance, are *All religion*, *All force*, *All violence*. Even before fighting Isis on the military plane, even before seeing in the other the hatred that we fail to recognize in ourselves, we have to try to shake up our consciences, *we have to become aware of the tiredness of mind that grips the west,* we have to go back to questioning ourselves on our essence if we want to try to slow the growth and expansion of the Isis monster. However, *for this to happen, the first step is to face our fears, to shed light on the shadow that is inside us.*

Every time people speak of Isis, horror and terror are the feelings that primarily impose themselves; we believe not only that these feelings have been clearly perceived by Islamic radicalism, but also that it is precisely on them that Isis is making advances on western ground that seem uncontrollable at the moment.

There is also another issue connected to the previous one: *Arab malcontent in Europe, also due to lack of representation in national governments, is another issue that absolutely must be addressed. From this perspective the terrorists are nothing but the visible points of an enormous iceberg of increasing malcontent.* To this there are added the continual injections of migratory flows, future pockets of marginalization and dissatisfaction that within a few decades will take on forms that at the moment it is difficult to imagine.

Everything that I have said so far may seem difficult to demonstrate, but from our point of professional observation it is more and more evident that many people oftener and oftener dream of natural disasters like floods, seaquakes, tsunamis that flood cities, all unconscious images of a danger that comes from the sea, a symbol of the unconscious, and invades our territory, involving the whole community. In the deliriums of psychotic patients too Islamic terrorism is gaining more and more ground.

Isis continually tries to frighten us and it does so in all possible ways, from divulgation of the most atrocious executions to other extreme form of violence like the destruction of those archaeological sites that, although they are in their territories, are nothing but a representation of the origins of our culture. Isis is undermining our historical sense of identity, with consequences that it is still too soon to appraise. Unfortunately, it was the west itself that perpetrated the same very doleful actions in other places, in other historical epochs. One need only think about what we managed to do during the centuries of expansion on American soil or the colonial experience in Africa and Asia, which left behind so much poverty and dispersion of individual and collective identity in the indigenous populations, to the extent of producing epochal migratory flows towards the west, towards those "rich" countries by which up to a short time before they had been exploited without any respect or limitation. *The many people that keep on repeating that migrants must be helped in their own countries should be reminded that Africa, before the colonial experience, was a world that lived in equilibrium with nature and in self-sufficiency;* perhaps we could even define it an archaic world, but it was surely one able to handle its own maintenance without any need for external helps and to live with an acceptable quality of life. *The experience of poverty, in the sense that we in the west give it, namely lacking the money required to buy material goods, is a concept that we have exported to the black continent. And now we are paying for the consequences.*

We therefore have a profound need to reckon with history, to look at ourselves in the mirror and to recognize to the full who we are and who we have been, from both the historical-cultural and collective points of view. It is urgent for us to do it before the sense of history is irremediably lost, thus depriving us of the possibility of recovering our community's Ariadne's thread. Jung found in Nazism not the expression of the madness of a criminal leader that Germany was unable to rebel against but rather a collective process of identification with a principle of supremacy of a whole people over all others (Hitler was

nothing but the interpreter and the spokesman of this process) (Jung 1936, 1946). Likewise today we find ourselves faced with a collective phenomenon that we cannot attribute to a few villains but to a crowd of individuals that everywhere cry out their hatred and their thirst for retaliation and revenge.

Moving towards a conclusion, we want to entrust to an American historian and psychiatrist the words, expressed in times that were above suspicion, in order to understand the Isis phenomenon and which way we have to go in the near future. He says that in the ancient Middle East, from which our western traditions derive, royal divinity was represented by the warlike god of the storm, who possessed the most important qualities of the self: thirst for dominion, greed for prestige, assertiveness and aggressiveness as stimuli to combat, ambition to extend dominion and build empires, capacity to obtain and accumulate wealth, and a flair for the technical innovations that were to produce the Bronze Age. He adds that awareness of the incessant changes in historical progress found here its uncontrolled beginning and that exercise of these characteristics started a merciless process of aggressions and freed up immense destructive force, which not only brought devastation to the people attacked but also shattered their social structures. This uncontrolled expansion in Egypt led to decadence and in China to feudalism. The kingdoms of Mesopotamia were continually fought with chequered vicissitudes until Assyria bled dry in internecine struggles. This situation led to crises and rapid cultural changes. (Perry 1987) From Perry's words we therefore have to conclude that, integrating what has been said so far, the Middle East finds itself facing a form of historical nemesis. Destruction of the archaeological sites mentioned may also represent a testimony in this sense or a destructive return to the origins in the sense that Eliade has taught us.

Identification with Islam by Isis is not a form of spirituality experienced in an orthodox way but an uncritical identification with a religious credo in which one does not in the least perceive the symbolic value of the scriptures, the symbol thus becoming a sign. However, this also happens in Catholicism: St. Ambrose urged people to read the sacred texts in their allegorical form, but this seems to have been totally forgotten, thus leaving the way open in the west too to superficial forms of literalized interpretation. But then, accepting that the west may have had an important role in having brought back to life the ancient archaic divinities that Isis is embodying, and convinced as we are that it is not in the deep sense of spirituality that Islam represents that the roots of the actions that Isis is performing are to

be found, what can the west do in this destabilized international scenario? We again entrust Perry with the task of answering these questions. He says that in distant historical epochs the psyche showed that it possessed all the necessary resources to safeguard communities against madness. He expresses the hope that it will still be possible to understand this message before our predatory interest – our quest for commodities, for luxury, for profit and for property – provokes disasters. He says we have realized our need to live in it in a spirit of collaboration. He adds that from his incursions into the histories of different cultures he has reached the conclusion that the psyche and society are organisms able to heal themselves in situations of difficulty and to organize themselves during the evolutionary process. (Perry, 1987) We cannot fail to share with Perry the basic trust not in the single individual but in that collective Psyche, in a Platonic sense, of which man is nothing but the ephemeral embodied expression. *We in the west have the arduous task of giving a meaning to everything that is happening, on this side and the other of the Mediterranean Sea, and to fight evil without fear inside and outside us.*

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