Introduction

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Since the Coronavirus (Covid-19) was first identified in 2019 in the Chinese province of Hubei its impact around the world has been unprecedented. Apart from the millions of infections and several thousand deaths worldwide, the continuing uncertainty about its mutations and transmission modes, and in the absence of an effective vaccine, there is persistent fear of this poorly understood and invisible 'enemy'.

Fear often causes mistrust of the unknown and what is alien or foreign, and when it is an undefinable, ever-present, persistent or enduring fear, it can lead to a climate of insecurity, resultant injustices, and – in the end – to misguided decisions that could have far-reaching impacts on societies.

Secondly, and not less adversely, the effects of Covid-19 on social life are evident, where normal, everyday activities and interactions have changed drastically and fundamentally: Yesterday's daily life is inconceivable today.

Despite the innumerable negative impacts of Covid-19 on health, social, political and the private sphere, such as the loss of well-being, social contacts, individual deprivation, poverty, financial insecurity and fear of the future, several groups have become more vulnerable in terms of the pandemic than others. According to a report of *UN Women*, women and children around the world have suffered physical, psychological and other forms of (domestic) violence that increased as a consequence of the lockdown.[1] Working female employees with children "were relieved of their professional duties to care for their children, reinforcing gender stereotypes that expect women to be caregivers and men to be breadwinners."[2] The

1 Cf. UN Women (2020). 'New report from UN Women brings forth voices of Palestinian women under COVID-19 lockdown'. June 9. See: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/feature-voices-of-palestinian-women-under-covid-19-lockdown, accessed on June 17, 2020.; In April 2020 "*France 24* reported a 30% increase in domestic violence, with abused partners unable to escape their abusers during quarantine." In: The Soufan Center (2020): *Intelbrief: The Plague of Domestic Violence during Covid-19*. April 17. See: https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-plague-of-domestic-violence-during-covid-19/, accessed on April 17.

2 Cf. UN Women (2020).; Cf. UN Nations (2020). *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*, pp. 1-21.

confinement measures illustrated the fact that the "burden of domestic work and childcare" in emergency situations still remains with women.[3]

Beside this gender-lens perspective,[4] another group that is specifically vulnerable towards the consequences of the pandemic are people at risk of various forms of radicalization or radical mindsets. According to *Counter Terrorism Policing* (CTP) "the impact of Covid-19 and social isolation could make some of society's most vulnerable people more susceptible to radicalization and other forms of grooming."[5]

With respect to a report of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), "the coronavirus pandemic and its social repercussions are fueling violence by both frustrated individuals and domestic terrorists."[6] Some cases are well known, such as the one of a white supremacist extremist in Missouri who wanted – beside other plans – to blow up a local hospital, a mosque, a synagogue and a school with a high population of black students, and was killed after a failed arrest.[7] The reasons for politically motivated radicalization of individuals in the Covid-19 context are identifiable in social distancing as a consequence of "the pandemic [that therefore] has created a new source of anger and frustration for some individuals. As a result, violent extremist plots will likely involve individuals seeking targets symbolic to their personal grievances."[8]

According to the *The Council conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism* of June 2020, the threat of terrorism and the prevention of radicalization remain high on the European Union's Agenda despite the pandemic.[9]

Various authors and researchers have constructed a link or rather similarities between Covid-19 and terrorism, by marking it as a new actor in the theatre of

3 Ib.; Cf. UN Nations (2020).

4 Cf. CGDEV (2020). *Approaching Covid-19. Risk and response through gender-lens.* See: https://www.cgdev.org/event/approaching-covid-19-risk-and-response-through-gender-lens#.Xoc_3hXaQx0.linkedin, accessed on April 3rd, 2020.

5 Cf. Police UK (2020). *Counter Terrorism Police highlight support services as COVID-19 pandemic is linked to greater risk of radicalization*. April, 22nd. See: https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/ctp-look-to-bolster-prevent-referrals-during-lockdown/, accessed on April 23rd.

6 Cf. Ken Dilanian (2020). 'The coronavirus pandemic and its social repercussions are fueling violence by both frustrated individuals and domestic terrorists, according to a new intelligence report by DHS'. *NBC News*. April 23. See: https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/coronavirus-its-social-effects-fueling-extremist-violence-says-government-report-n1190921, accessed on April 24, 2020.

7 Cf. Dilanian (2020).

8 Ib.

9 See General Secretariat of the Council (2020). *Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*. In Council of the European Union (Ed.). No. prev. doc.: 8742/20 + COR 1. Brussels, June 16, pp. 1-16.

global terrorism.[10] Others underline the difference[11] between terrorism as a man-made strategy with specific purposes on individual actors or certain states in comparison to Covid-19 as "a natural threat" and "an infectious disease [that] does not occur in separate individual actions, but rather more in waves of propagation."[12] Marone points out that

> "Terrorism is visible by definition. Still, the fear of COVID-19 is fueled precisely by invisibility: the pathogen is undetectable to the naked eye and for this reason contagion is, at this stage, practically not avoidable, except through social distancing. This aspect of the epidemic could lead to the risk of a state of fear that is even deeper compared to terrorism because it is invisible, faceless, without references, close to unfocused anguish."[13]

In this sense, the speech of the French President Emanuel Macron on March 16, 2020 "Nous sommes en guerres" ['We are at war.'] can be seen as a bad example of warfare related rhetoric that doesn't impart the public an enhanced feeling of security, but fuels the fear and anger towards a more readily identifiable enemy:

> "Nous sommes en guerre, toute l'action du gouvernement et du parlament doit être tournée désormais vers le combat contre l'épidémié, de jour comme de nuit, rien ne doit nous en diverter. […] Nous sommes en guerre. Et la Nation soutiendra ses enfants qui […] se trouvent en première ligne dans un combat qui va leur demander énergie, détermination, solidarité."[14]

In the video, just six minutes and 8 seconds long Macron uses the sentence "Nous sommes en guerre" ('We are at war') four times and calls on French inhabitants to battle against the so-called 'enemy', Covid-19. His demand for the solidarity of the whole "Nation" in terms of the fight ("combat") ends with the 'assurance' that "nous gagnerons" ('we will win'). The warfare-related rhetoric that the French President

10 Cf. Bruce Magnusson and Zahi Zalloua (Eds.) (2012). *Contagion: Health, Fear, Sovereignty*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

11 Cf. D. Pratt (2007). Religious Fundamentalism: A Paradigm for Terrorism? *Australian Religion Studies Review* 20(2), 195-215.

12 Cf. Francesco Marone (2020). 'A Tale of Two Fears: Comparing Terrorism and the Coronavirus'. *Eeradicalization*. May 29. See: https://eeradicalization.com/a-tale-of-two-fears-comparing-terrorism-and-the-coronavirus/, accessed on May 29, 2020.

13 Cf. Marone (2020).

14 Le Monde (2020). "*Nous sommes en guerre*". *Le discours de Macron face au coronavirus*. Élysée, March 16. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5IcMoqA1XY Minute 1:13-2:06; 2:24-2:42. This is the author's English translation of the French original: "We are at war. All governmental and parliamentary actions must now concentrate on the fight against the pandemic, day and night, nothing can stop us. […] We are at war. And the Nation will support its children, who will find themselves at the frontline of a fight that will demand their energy, determination and solidarity."

used in his speech reminds the audience of the call of religious fundamentalist groups for a battle against the non-believers and for the values of 'true' Islam. The military jargon creates a war scenario that should empower the French population to join this 'fight' towards a national opponent and impart a feeling of action possibilities towards a virus whose therapies or vaccines have not been developed yet. Macron's speech indicates the attempt to give a faceless fear a name and to fake the fight against it, by assuring the French that the government and the individuals aren't helpless towards this unknown 'enemy'.

With respect to Marone, "Terrorism is defined by definition",[15] but it does not assess its origins nor provide appropriate methods for how best to combat it – or in case of Covid-19 – how to develop a suitable cure for a disease that will infect all individuals, regardless of nationality or borders.

Against this background, it might be much wiser to search for appropriate measures of healing the infected and finding an effective vaccine against the virus in order to avoid an increase of the pandemic, instead of constructing a new (national) 'enemy'.

Nevertheless, the individual's powerlessness in the face of Covid-19 leads political leaders such as the U.S. President Donald Trump[16] or the President of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro[17] to impulsive activism instead of long-term, carefully evaluated solutions for the inhabitants of the countries they control.[18] Brazil has been hit the hardest after the USA by the pandemic. Nevertheless, both presidents refused to wear protection masks until recently. Because of his refusal to wear a protection mask in one Brazilian district where specific hygienic regulations such as the wearing of protection masks had to be observed, President Bolsonaro was sentenced by a regional court to wear a mask, before stepping further into this area. Bolsonaro, who called Covid-19 a 'little cold', fell ill himself from the virus, but recovered in the meantime.

History appears to repeat itself, as specific prejudices against religious minorities such as Jews or Muslims are in evidence in Western countries such as Great

15 Cf. Marone (2020).

16 Cf. Steffen Schwarzkopf (2020). ‚Zahlreiche Notrufe bei der US-Giftzentrale und ein beleidigter Präsident'. *Die Welt*. April 26. See: https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article207529489/Corona-USA-Mehr-Notrufe-nach-Trumps-wirrer-Idee-bei-US-Giftzentrale.html, accessed on August 9, 2020. - This article was closed before the end of August 2020, when Donald Trump was the official President of the United States of America.

17 Cf. Ivo Marusczyk (2020). ‚Bolsonaro und die „Coronagrippe". Ein Rechtspopulist stürzt Brasilien ins Verderben'. *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*. July 16. See: https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/bolsonaro-und-die-coronagrippe-ein-rechtspopulist-stuerzt.979.de.html?dram:article_id=480606, accessed on August, 9 2020.

18 Cf. BR (2020). ‚Bolsonaro: Ein Populist stürzt Brasilien ins Verderben'. July 17. See: https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/bolsonaro-hat-grippe-ein-populist-stuerzt-brasilien-ins-verderben,S4thfGl, accessed on August, 9 2020.

Britain since the current pandemic.[19] Sometimes these prejudices are fueled by specific political or ideological movements and even heads of State and Government.[20] President Trump called Covid-19 'Kung Flu' and noted that 99 percent of the cases related to Covid-19 were 'completely harmless'.[21] The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a political programme of Hindu primacy since the rise of the pandemic. In February 2020, New Delhi has witnessed large violent conflicts between Muslims and Hindus where 50 people were killed. These riots were a result of the scapegoating of the Muslim minority practised by the Hindu-majority. Many Hindus blamed the Muslim communities in India as Covid-19-superspreaders because of the celebration of Islamic holidays.[22]

According to Meyer, the "impulse to associate the outbreak and spread of the virus with supposedly less advanced Others (be they Chinese eating wild animals or religious fundamentalists) and to close the endangered "body" of the nation – or Europe as a whole – is a symptom of the will to keep such a narrative alive."[23] The idea of the nation being threatened "by intruders from outside" is defined as a "breeding ground for conspiracy ideas that attribute the spread of the Sars-CoV-2-to the new 5G-wireless network, going viral" in violent extremist networks. Therefore, it is noteworthy, "to deconstruct the use of body metaphors in discourses around Corona that naturalize a sense of the "body social" as endangered by out-

19 Cf. Lizzie Dearden (2020). 'Neo-Nazis telling followers to deliberately infect Jews and Muslim with coronavirus, report warns.' *The Independent*. July 9. See: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/neo-nazis-coronavirus-muslims-racism-antisemitism-islamophobia.a96608851.html; Cf. Arab News (2020). 'British Asians fear blame for rise in COVID-19 cases, racial abuse during Eid Al-Adha'. July 30. See: https://www.arabnews.com/mode/1712281/world

20 Cf. JoannaSlater and NihaMasih (2020). 'As the world looks for coronavirus scapegoats, Muslims are blamed in India.' *The Washington Post*. April 23. See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-world-looks-for-coronavirus-scapegoats-india-pins-blame-on-muslims/2020/04/22/3cb43430-7f3f-11ea-84c2-0792d8591911_story.html, accessed on August 9, 2020.

21 Cf. Patrick Mayer and Andreas Schmid (2020). ‚Corona in den USA: Trump bezeichnet Virus als ‚Kung Flu' - Publikum feiert ihn dafür'. *Merkur*. July 9. See: https://www.merkur.de/welt/coronavirus-usa-donald-trump-twitter-schwarzenegger-lockerungen-new-york-tote-zahlen-tests/covid-19-zr-13803461.html, accessed on August 9, 2020.; Cf. *Tagesspiegel* (2020). 'Trump erklärt 99 Prozent der Covid-19-Fälle für „komplett harmlos". July 7. See: https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/coronakrise-in-den-usa-trump-erklärt-99-prozent-der-covid-19-faelle-fuer-komplett-harmlos-25976986.html

22 Cf. Slater & Masih (2020).

23 Birgit Meyer (2020). *Religious matters. 'Dossier Corona'. Religious Matters in an Entangled World research project*. April 21. URL: https://religiousmatters.nl/dossier-corona/, accessed on May 16, 2020.

side, malevolent intruders." [24] Though "the virus is real; it cannot be deconstructed away, but […] challenge us to re-think well-trodden assumptions and biases."[25]

In this sense, the anthology *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic* tries to provide an objective approach towards the impact of the pandemic in religious environments with a fundamental notion of religion. Eight well-known scholars from the field of Buddhist, Islamic, Jewish, Christian, Religious and Political Studies and Sociology discuss the influence of Covid-19 on (militant) Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Islamic movements in Central Asia, Europe, Israel, Mali, Russia, Syria and Tibet.

The results of their investigations of the possible impact of Covid-19 on the religious groups examined vary widely: While for instance Uran Botobekov could identify an instrumentalization of the pandemic in the field of radical Islam by Salafi and Jihadi groups in Central Asia, Miguel Álvarez Ortega underlines the positive impact of teachers within the Tibetan Buddhism tradition who support their adherents in terms of balanced and peaceful reactions towards the challenges that occur due to the spread of Covid-19.

The present anthology focusses on *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic* and is based on the terminological understanding that

> "Fundamentalism […] refers to a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled "true believers" attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors."[26]

It aims to examine and to describe, why and how certain groups and actors could make use of individual fears of Covid-19 and frame these worries for their religious purposes. Although different religions are discussed in this book, their shared (and sometimes fundamentalist) notion of the criteria that should be essential for a 'strong religion' – as the opposite of a "mainstream religious establishment" with "conventional religious authorities" – is designed by their unified claim for "purity" characterized by "uniformity of belief and practice."[27]

Religious fundamentalist movements distinguish themselves from other religious movements in terms of their actions, because "they are inherently interactive, reactive, and oppositional [and] are inexorably drawn to some form of antagonistic engagement with the world outside the enclave."[28]

The religious dimension of fundamentalism occurs in its various forms such as

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24 Meyer (2020).

25 Ib.

26 G. A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby and E. Sivan (2003) (Eds.).*Strong Religion. The Rise of Fundamentalism around the World*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, p. 17.

27 Almond et al., 2003, p. 17.

28 Ib., p. 218.

> "…the charismatic leader whose authoritative interpretations of the religious tradition legitimates his religiopolitical diagnoses and prescriptions and guides his associates and assistants in setting and implementing policy. Militance, coalition building, "diplomacy" – all of the "ordinary" pursuits of minority political movements – take on unique rhythms and patterns in fundamentalisms due to their religious character."[29]

While some experts suggest that the term 'fundamentalism' should solely be applied to the three monotheistic religions Judaism, Islam or Christianity[30] because of the aforementioned definition of its elements and its origin in the field of an alliance of an orthodox Protestant group who strongly adhere to the *five fundamentals,*[31] others such as Almond et al. point out that religious entities are constrained by both, "the boundaries of the host religion and by their own antitraditional character."[32]

In his chapter *Cultural Wars and Communal Perseverance: Jewish Fundamentalism in Our Time*, Yaakov Ariel points out, that Jewish fundamentalists could be defined "as those taking affirmative religious stands in face of secularization and liberalization of Jewish life; those upholding and strengthening tradition in face of other options in Jewish culture." In view of Zionist-Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox groups, Ariel describes how "Jewish fundamentalists insist on the validity and authority of the Jewish sacred scriptures, see special merits in studying the texts as central to Jewish life and identity, and are protective of the narratives the texts offer" with regard to the pandemic. Similar to some reactions of Islamic fundamentalists, "a number of *Haredi*, ultra-Orthodox, leaders expressed their opinion that the pandemic came as a punishment, a retribution for the lax morality of women and other members of the community".

Ariel discusses the development of "movements within a larger social, cultural and religious context in which they have evolved and to which they have reacted", for instance with regard to their support of Right-wing governments and various reactions according to Covid-19.

Though Zionist- and ultra-Orthodox groups both "believe in the need to maintain the *Halacha*, and observe Jewish law and Jewish rituals", their approaches to

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29 Ib., p. 219.

30 See the discussion of this position for instance in: Martin Riesebrodt (2001). *Die Rückkehr der Religionen. Fundamentalismus und der ‚Kampf der Kulturen'*. 2. Aufl., München: Beck Verlag, p. 52.

31 Martin Riesebrodt (2004). Was ist "religiöser Fundamentalismus"? In Clemens Six, Martin Riesebrodt und Siegfried Haas (Eds.). *Religiöser Fundamentalismus. Vom Kolonialismus zur Globalisierung*. Wien: StudienVerlag, p. 16. The *five fundamentals* are the absolute inerrancy of the Scripture, the virgin birth, the representative sin offering, the physical resurrection and the return of Christ in terms of establishing of his millennial reign before the Last Judgement. In: Klaus Kienzler (2007). *Der Religiöse Fundamentalismus. Christentum, Judentum, Islam*. 5. Aufl., München, p. 30.

32 Almond et al., 2003, p. 219.

achieve these aims varied widely since the rise of the virus and the need for modifying religious rituals in order to care for their adherents and to protect their private from public spheres arose. High numbers of sick and dying in the ultra-Orthodox communities have been a result of the refusal to follow governmental rules in the first time since Covid-19 occurred. This development fueled the anger of groups such as the Orthodox and the Zionist Orthodox towards the ultra-Orthodox communities. For Ariel, "the Corona pandemic created a dramatic rift between the Zionist Orthodox and the ultra-Orthodox", in terms of separatism and modernity and highlighted "the character of the Orthodox communities as well as altered it in some measures". This development will have deep impacts on the future cohabitation and "the inner life of the communities".

Almond et al. describe the "willingness [of religious fundamentalists] to manipulate the religious tradition and [to] introduce innovation for political rather than strictly spiritual purposes"[33] as one reason for the loss of reputation of the self-declared 'true believers'. By doing so, they delegitimize their 'religious' claims in the eyes of other believers.[34] As a consequence, the term fundamentalism was applied on religious movements of other religions such as Buddhism as well, because some Buddhists have been involved in bloody conflicts with individuals of other religious heritage, for instance the Tamils in Sri Lanka.[35]

In his chapter *Global virus, international lamas: Tibetan religious leaders in the face of the Covid-19 crisis* Miguel Álvarez Ortega discusses the question if the extension of the term fundamentalism in view of Tibetan Buddhism might be appropriate. Álvarez Ortega "attempts to analyze how the Covid-19 crisis has been treated by leading Tibetan teachers in the global media". He examines the Buddhist concepts in terms of sickness that contains "a depiction of time cycles in which the notion of degenerate times or decline of the Dharma" is essential and sets them in relation to public statements of well-known Tibetan Buddhist teachers such as Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse who sees "our present time as "kaliyuga" (the Hindu Age of Quarrel) and "dark age".

33 Ib.

34 Ib.

35 Riesebrodt, 2004, p. 17.; Cf. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) (1991). *Fundamentalisms Observed. (The Fundamentalism Project)*, Vol. I. Chicago [et al.]: University of Chicago Press.; Cf. Martin E. Marty. and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) (1993/1). *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family and Education (The Fundamentalism Project)*, Vol. II. Chicago [et al.]: University of Chicago Press.; Cf. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) (1993/2). *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies, and Militance (The Fundamentalism Project)*, Vol. III. Chicago [et al.]: University of Chicago Press.; Cf. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) (1994). *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Chicago [et al.]: University of Chicago Press.; Cf. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Eds.) (1995). *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*. Chicago [et al.]: University of Chicago Press.

Álvarez Ortega's conclusion of the Tibetan Buddhists' response to Covid-19 is defined by "an appeal to an external compliance with the authorities, and an internal plural interpretation that reflects a common tension between a symbolic and a transcendental construal of religious categories." In addition, he tries to enable the reader to comprehend why Tibetan Buddhism lacks "successful fundamentalist or millennialist reaction" but offers a "particular suitability of Buddhism to accommodate to the crisis." In this context, he underlines the dichotomy of Buddhist discourses in view of the pandemic that tries to respond to this demanding situation appropriately in terms of "a native and an international audience in a context where Science arguably tends to hold, so far, the epistemological monopoly." This balancing act is characterized by Álvarez Ortega as follows: "On the one hand, there is this idea that practice helps us be calm and focused, and also gives us courage, but that prayer is no counterfeit to the virus and the "mamos" are but a metaphor for our relationship with nature; on the other hand, there is this call for rituals, for specific prayers that can tame the virus and appease real evil forces unleashed by humans."

In contrast to Álvarez Ortega, Uran Botobekov's contribution *How Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi Groups are Exploiting the Covid-19 Pandemic: New Opportunities and Challenges* deals with the misuse of the crisis in the field of Islam by global Salafi-Jihadi-Movements. Botobekov analyses the impact of the virus on Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi groups such the Uighur jihadists of the Turkestan Islamist Party (TIP) and on its "parent organizations such as the Taliban, al Qaeda and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham". He points out that the motives to use Covid-19 as a propaganda tool of "the Uighur and Uzbek Islamist extremist groups from Chinese Xinjiang region and post-Soviet Central Asia are affiliated precisely with these major players of the Sunni jihadist world, such as ISIS and al Qaeda, which are their military patron[s] and ideological banner[s]."

Botobekov aims to underline the strategy of various Salafi-Jihadi groups in Afghanistan, the five former post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, and the Middle East to make use of the pandemic, e.g. as an "invisible soldier of Allah" sent to weaken the enemies of Islam and punish the disbelievers" in the sense of Al Qaeda, with regard to their specific political goals towards the Afghan government, the suppression by the Chinese government and their opponent Bashar al-Assad in Syria as well as his main allies from Russia and Iran.

The mutual goal of these religious fundamentalists is to establish a strict form "of Islamic rule in their controlled areas" by drawing a picture of themselves "as the only military and religious-political force in the region, caring for the health of Muslims in "Islamic territories".

The focus of Botobekov's examination lies on the role of Central Asian Salafist communities whose influence in the region is still unbroken, but had currently been overtaken by the threat of Covid-19. He assumes that they aim to gather their

strength by using the pandemic for their "violent extremism and terrorism, associated with Salafi-Takfiri ideologies", is a strategy that might "have huge implications and effects on the security of the world in the medium and long term."

The need for the distinction between traditional and fundamentalist approaches to religion is crucial in the field of religious studies, though fundamentalism is often taken as a strike against modernity or the return to the Middle Ages. According to Riesebrodt, these definitions are misleading, because fundamentalism is neither anti-modernistic nor purely traditional but represents a process of a conscious revitalization of the tradition that arises from the tension between tradition and modernity and tries to incorporate both aspects.[36]

Olga Torres Díaz describes in her chapter *Islamic Fundamentalism Framing Politics in Mali: From the Middle Ages to the Age of Pandemic* the amalgamation of tradition and fundaments in Mali in terms of "the imported and the purely local beliefs of the country." She points out that "alternating between periods of peaceful cohabitation and others of open confrontation, has not concealed a basic distinction between what is foreign and what is indigenous, what is revolutionary – in the sense of bringing a major change – and what is traditional."

Torres Díaz draws a picture of "the centuries-long path of the mutualistic relationship between political power and Islam represented by two fundamentalist tendencies clearly discernible in Mali until today." One of these two types of Malian fundamentalism is "a textual and Arabic fundamentalism while the other is an oral and vernacular fundamentalism, but both remain attached to what is settled as original and essential in their respective realms." Though the first one has been related "historically as at present, to educated and Arabised minority elites; the other [one is associated with] the less favoured majority of common people." Against this background, the impact of "Frenchification and later Arabisation" concerning the Malian society and its roots of religious fundamentalism are discussed by Torres Díaz in order to facilitate a "comprehension of current [Islamic] movements – personified by imams and preachers such as Muḥammad Dicko and Sheikh Madani Haïdara – now that the emergence of the Wahhabi trend has begun to compete again with the prevalent traditional Malian Islam in modulating the orientation of the government."

In her conclusion, she calls for a more differentiated approach to the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' in view of Mali, based on the differences of Islamic terrorist extremism and Wahabi fundamentalism that can be observed currently[37] and will pose challenges for the area in the long-term.

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36 Riesebrodt, 2004, p.19.

37 Cf. Deutsche Welle (2020). ‚Präsident und Regierungschef Malis festgenommen'. August 18. See: https://www.dw.com/de/p%C3%A4sident-und-regierungschef-malis-festgenommen/a-54608659

The possible interlinking between jihadism and millenialism in terms of the current pandemic is discussed by Nina Käsehage in her contribution *Towards a Covid-Jihad – Millenialism in the field of Jihadism*. Käsehage selected two groups that might be specifically vulnerable towards jihadist narratives since Covid-19 occurred: former Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) who have already returned to their countries of origin as well as female inhabitants of detention camps in Syria and their children who (still) cannot return to their 'home' countries. For different reasons, both groups join the jihadistic narratives regarding an end time battle between the 'good' and the 'evil' that is supposed to be announced by the rise of the pandemic. Mobilizing supporters in terms of 'the end of all days' is explained by Käsehage as also "a well-known tradition in the field of millennialism" that helps to convince adherents to fight for a particular purpose. With respect to the concerned groups, it assures both, adults and children, a bright future in paradise, if they will join the fight.

By observing the use of "elements of religious fundamentalism, especially in view of its millennialist and apocalyptic elements" with regard to jihadist narrative of groups such as AQ and IS, Käsehage points out that "[w]hereas IS could be defined as a religious movement that strives to obtain the *world domination* with the support of its adherents, the female detainees who have unsuccessfully tried to *escape* the camps in *reality*, abandoned their plans and *escaped symbolically* within the camps by remaining among their religious peer group, the other female IS members."

For Käsehage, the strategy of AQ and IS to misuse the pandemic for a 'Covid-Jihad' towards their self-declared 'enemies' is accompanied by "the increased attempts of the use of biological weapons for terrorist attacks by jihadist groups and actors [and] seems to mark just the beginning of an era of bio-warfare that will be fought by various fundamentalist and extremist groups in the upcoming years."

In her contribution *The impact of Covid-19 on Orthodox Groups and Believers in Russia* Anastasia V. Mitrofanova concentrates on the reactions of various Orthodox groups and individuals from the field of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in view of the pandemic. Apart from the responses of the fundamentalist milieus to Covid-19, who assume for instance that the origin of the virus might be a "special operation" against Russia" and spread the conspiracy of the 5G-wireless network as the 'real' source of the pandemic, other ROC voices arose that sympathized with the fundamentalist approaches towards an ecclesiastical lockdown, that were subsumed by Mitrofanova under the name of the "so called "corona-dissidents" within the Church." This group includes moderate traditionalists, liberals and other believers that usually corresponded with the official ecclesiastical opinion.

The mutual starting point of these groups' refusal of the national and ecclesiastical lockdown is their collective remembrance of the religious suppression in Russia within the 20th century. During this period, the conditions within churches have

been blamed as harmful in view of the individual health. The current resistance of different Orthodox believers and groups towards the solidarity of the Patriarch in terms of the ecclesiastical lockdown and his call for the disinfection of sacred objects reflect their traumatic experiences with the Soviet anti-religious strategy in the past.

Another reason for inner-church resistances is located in the transfer of the communion in the virtual room. Beside formal aspects such as the necessity of technological skills, the presence of technical equipment and the money to buy such in order to participate in the digital communion, Mitrofanova explains that "for the first time in the post-Soviet history of the ROC, its speakers officially declared that the communion and the church attendance in general were not necessary conditions with regard to the salvation." Therefore, the term «self-isolation» became popular within Russia instead of the term 'lockdown', "because this approach implies a voluntary subjugation to the antichrist."

The major content-related difference between the live and videoconference is located in the Liturgy: since the attendees of a videoconference Liturgy remain *observers* of the performance of the sacrament, the assembly of the live Liturgy becomes *a part* of it.

In the eyes of the fundamentalists, the compliance to the lockdown indicates a return to former political times. They associated the virus with a "corona-posession" (*koronabesie*) accompanied by worldwide lockdowns and "safety measures as an analogy to being possessed by evil spirits." In addition, they doubt the need of the governmental measurements that "represent the real threat in their eyes […] a pandemic of fear created with the help of the mass media."

Furthermore, the rise of the pandemic and its appropriate handling visualized the inner-church problems between canonical and non-canonical voices and between an 'official' and a 'folk' religion and religious practice.

Against the background of "Soviet policy of state-imposed atheism" the mistrust within the Russian Orthodox community seems to be a major factor for the interlinking between various religious groups that are commonly not representing the same religious position, unified in terms of their fear that contemporary Russia has become "a godless state" such as the Soviet Union was. Mitrofanova's contribution with regard to *the Impact of Covid-19 on Orthodox Groups and Believers in Russia* could therefore been seen more as an attempt to dismantle the deeper societal problems within former (religiously) 'suppressed' societies that will occur whenever a possible relapse into governmental old habits, for instance in the context of nationwide lockdowns with regard to the pandemic, might appear rather than just the description of the impact of Covid-19 on specific Orthodox believers in Russia.

The present anthology aims to deconstruct the stereotyping of all adherents of certain religions for instance such as Islam as religious fundamentalists as a consequence of selected reactions towards Covid-19 of *some* believers.

The rise of the virus caused most of the losses within Europe in Italy and had a deep impact on Italian society. As we can see in Barbara Lucini's contribution *Dismantling prejudices on Muslim Communities in Italy in Times of Pandemic: not just Religious Fundamentalism*, it is important to examine "the role that perceptions and cultural aspects of a crisis, such as that cause from Covid-19 virus can generate in ethnic communities such as the Muslim one."

Therefore, Lucini explores the interaction "of perception and interpretation […] between [a] possible exploitation of the pandemic by Islamic extremism and the way in which the Muslim community in Italy is facing the crisis from Covid-19." During this process she observed that "the sense of identity of the Muslim community in Italy" is "complex and fragmented" and varies between the call for respect towards the nation-state as a "religious duty for Muslims" and their perception as a "threat" linked with the prejudices that all Muslims are terrorists and sympathizers of Daesh which is often fueled by (social) media. One of her findings is the result that "the characteristics of the context before the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus affected not only the perceptions of such crises, but also the interpretations, thus going to better delineate the specific fragmentary and complexity of the Islamic experience in Italy." That shows the "lack of explicit reference to Islamic fundamentalism" that is primarily linked with 9/11 and not in view of Covid-19 in Italy.

In addition, Lucini observed an increased solidarity "during the emergency and in the first months of the pandemic: at the local level among Muslims, while at the national level the offers have also spread to Italian institutions and organizations."

The use of the term religious fundamentalism is discussed controversially within scientific discourses. Though a detailed debate on the various pros and cons of the systematic use of this term would lead too far (in this context) and can be found in the work of other authors,[38] the two major critical aspects regarding the term fundamentalism are mentioned in the following. The first critique of this term deals with its misuse within political debates where ideological 'enemies' make use of the term fundamentalism in order to destroy the political and individual reputation of their opponents.[39] The second critical aspect concerning the word fundamentalism is found for instance in authoritarian countries that discriminate against religious minorities and are willing to blame these groups

38 Cf. Marty & Appleby (1991).; Cf. Marty & Appleby (1993/1).; Cf. Marty & Appleby (1993/2).; Cf. Marty & Appleby (1995).; Cf. Almond et al.(2003).

39 Riesebrodt, 2004, p. 17.

as 'fundamentalists' in order to delegitimize their role and weaken their position within society.[40]

In his contribution Peter Antes discusses the question, if *Religious Fundamentalism* could be seen as *a misleading concept* in itself, in the sense of a category that itself becomes an actor. Starting by the description of the religious roots of fundamentalism, Antes explains the various (mis-)uses of this term that might lead to "at least four major consequences of such general interpretative terms: the addressees, protest as a moral claim against the economy worldwide, the local differences, and the historicity and ambiguity of terms and texts." With the help of examples of different religious developments e.g. in Iran, Algeria and Chechnya, Antes underlines the importance of "a close look at local problems and reasons for protest, in order to avoid thinking that all is embedded in the interpretative framework of global protest as a general trend typical of each of the great religions in the world".

Antes' approach is seen as very important in terms of the need for a multifaceted understanding of religions and religious practices, especially *in the age of pandemic* when discrimination against and othering of religious groups are en vogue (again) in certain societal and political circles.

Therefore and with regard to Riesebrodt, the term religious fundamentalism should not be avoided in scientific discourses but should go through continuous specification and become a part of systematic further development.[41]

This edited volume offers a selection of multidisciplinary approaches towards the questions, if religious fundamentalism is conceptually and semantically applicable to the concerned religions and religious groups and how these groups' reactions in view of Covid-19 might differ from each other and could be shaped by both societal and political impacts.[42]

Though 'the rise of the pandemic' has just begun, we do not know at present if and how other forms of this or other types of viruses might occur in the future and jeopardize world health, but we can imagine how much our lives could change in comparison to the status quo. As far as the future development of the global health crises is not predictable, the responses from religious groups or individuals in terms of this development are not estimable either. The misuse of the pandemic – coming from political, religious or other types of ideological groups – is nothing new, but appeared before as a negative accompaniment of global catastrophes.

Another positive side effect of the pandemic might be the growing solidarity for people at risk or in need and the increased care for each other within the crisis, as

40 Cf. Mark Jürgensmeyer (1993). *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State.* Berkeley.; This strategy is also followed in terms of the blaming of individual or political opponents as 'terrorists'.

41 Riesebrodt, 2004, pp. 18-31.

42 The present anthology provides no uniformity with regard to the diacritical characters in view of the Arabic terms.

described by Lucini. This could also underline the calming and harmonizing effects of religions in terms of their adherents to face the pandemic together, peacefully, and to receive positive energy through faith as Álvarez Ortega points out.

In this sense, the discussion about the development of *religious fundamentalism in the age of pandemic* might become our constant companion in the future, although it is not possible at present to predict if the violent or the peaceful intentions of religious groups or actors will gain the upper hand.

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