

MIT ONE - INTERVIEW

Topic: Why do people become radicalized?

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Interviewer: Stagona Ioanna, Greece

Interviewee: Michael Legakis, Professor of Philosophy.



INTRODUCTION: We live in a world where radicalization and extremism are at their "best". Radicalized perceptions and racist behaviors characterize a large proportion of the planet, and their effects are often irreversible. As part of our program, we wanted to interview our professor in order to hear his thoughts and answers on this issue.

-“Where and how do you think the racial and racist attitudes were created?”

-“The first thing you have to look at is the rage which is produced by social injustice and the chronic politics of the western world towards the Muslim countries of the Middle East; to start with, poverty and social exclusion. Marginalized children who feel like they have no prospect, that they don't fit in this world and that this world does not match their dreams, are really angry. And so they become prone to calls of people who, speaking in the name of revenge, give them a political target, a social role and individual dignity. Particularly children of Muslim families living in Europe as minorities are marginalized because of their poverty and ethnic origin. So they are not

entitled to the same dreams as other children, they see "closed doors" everywhere, they feel like waste, and that's why they are much angrier. Therefore, the religious leader who will invite them to avenge in the name of Allah will give them back not only their personal but also their cultural pride.

The reason of these propagandists is reinforced or "legitimized" by the policy that the Western states (and above all the US) use to have for decades facing the Middle East countries. Israel's provocative support despite the crimes that has committed (and continues to commit) against the Palestinians, as well as the repeated invasions of the IRAQ since 1990, have brutally invaded Arab nationalism and have stimulated the cycle of violence that continues until today. In addition, the unspeakable support of the Muslim children of the Taliban in the Afghan war against the Soviets, as well as today's Saudi Arabia, the most complete and religious state of the world, has "breathed the egg of the Islamist fascist" , which threatens to "bite" us.

Finally, the major cause is the huge ideological gap that left the collapse of the left wing, which represented the great mundane dreams of the poor, their hope for a fair world, equal rights and prospects. This ideological and political vacuum has come to cover religion and nationalism. New children and adults searching for answers, and above all a life goal, a vision, a prospect of coming out of their miserable life, turn to God, whom they treat as a punishment and vengeance. As a result, they become an easy game in the hands of any alleged religious authority."

-“Does this situation scare you?”

-“Yes, it scares me both personally and socially-politically. I do not know whether there is any real danger of some sort of fundamentalist dictatorship being imposed in today's world. It seems that an attempt to create a criminal state like ISIS has no hope of survival. But what scares me more is its political counterparts on a global level. It is the effect that exerts in the whole political life and in the consciousness of the people in the West and East. ISIS may have left the frame, but a large part of the Middle East population has been irrevocably conservative. Just a few decades before this entire region were governed by secular Ba'ath regimes. Today, on the contrary, it is dominated by political Islam. The entire political geography has been moved to the right, with religion and intolerance leading, sometimes taking even criminal dimensions (as in the case of the Taliban or ISIS). The same happens in Europe, as there is an upsurge in the xenophobic, racist and even neo-Nazi extreme right, which in some countries also holds the prime minister (such as in Hungary or Austria). There may not be any dictatorship, but we see a non-stopped

continued hardening of measures against immigrants and minorities in general and an intensity of racist or nationalist rhetoric. The political face of Europe is getting more and more the black color of ISIS, but at the same time it takes on the old style of the white-collar colonel who overthrows the "uncivilized" third-person."

- "Have you ever cancelled a trip because of the terrorist attacks that have been observed?"

Traveling now to Europe, especially when it involves children, has its risk. This is a victory for these movements that have brought terror to the heart of Europe. I'm afraid for my children, not for me, I've planned a trip, but I'm still thinking about it seriously. Perhaps if I was alone and I didn't have children I wouldn't have that stress. But now it is always on my mind."

- "As a teacher, have you ever met radicalized students with extremist views or behaviors?"

- "I have encountered students with far-right, Nazi views in various cities I have taught. I remember when I was a professor in an area of Athens where the "Golden Dawn", the largest neo-Nazi organization in Greece, had a great deal of power; I had met several children with such perceptions. I had even been threatened by a schoolgirl (a member of the Golden Dawn) and her father that they would take me to court, but it didn't happen. On the other hand, I have also met a student who was formerly far-right and has now completely changed, participates in various organizations and fights for human rights."

- "Do you think that racism and radicalization can be eliminated gradually? And if so, how can this be accomplished?"

- "The first responsibility goes to the state, Europe. It should develop zero-level policies, as it's possible, and raise the standard of living for all citizens. Furthermore, it has to accept and integrate minorities in its society by treating them with equity and justice and not in a racist way. As a result, those marginalized citizens will have feelings of love instead of hate for their country of residence and will have no reason to develop terrorist behaviors in the future as revenge. Also, in the school environment, teachers have to talk to children and discuss issues of social and political relevance that concern them without fear of being exposed. They shouldn't behave as sterile and fearful civil servants looking forward to finish their lesson and nothing more,

but as integral social beings who share the same anxieties and hopes for the world with the young children. They should be able to perceive the position of children from the disadvantaged social backgrounds (refugees, immigrants, foreigners, the poor, etc.) and provide them with all the support they need, and even overcome the barriers imposed on them by the state itself. Only in this way will these children escape from the cycle of hate and learn to appreciate democracy and tolerance; when they find an equal position for themselves