

Muhamed Jusić je ambasador Bosne i Hercegovine u Kraljevini Saudijskoj Arabiji i nerezidentni ambasador BiH u Republici Jemen i Sultanatu Oman. Magistar je sigurnosnih i mirovnih studija Fakulteta političkih nauka u Sarajevu, islamski teolog i arabist sa diplomom Islamskog univerziteta u Medini, i dugogodišnji analitičar dešavanja na Bliskom istoku i Balkanu. Obnašao je funkciju savjetnika Reisu-l-uleme za odnose sa medijima i glasnogovornika IZ u BiH. Autor je više knjiga i studija o arapskom svijetu i islamu i kolumnist više medija u Bosni i Hercegovini i regionu.

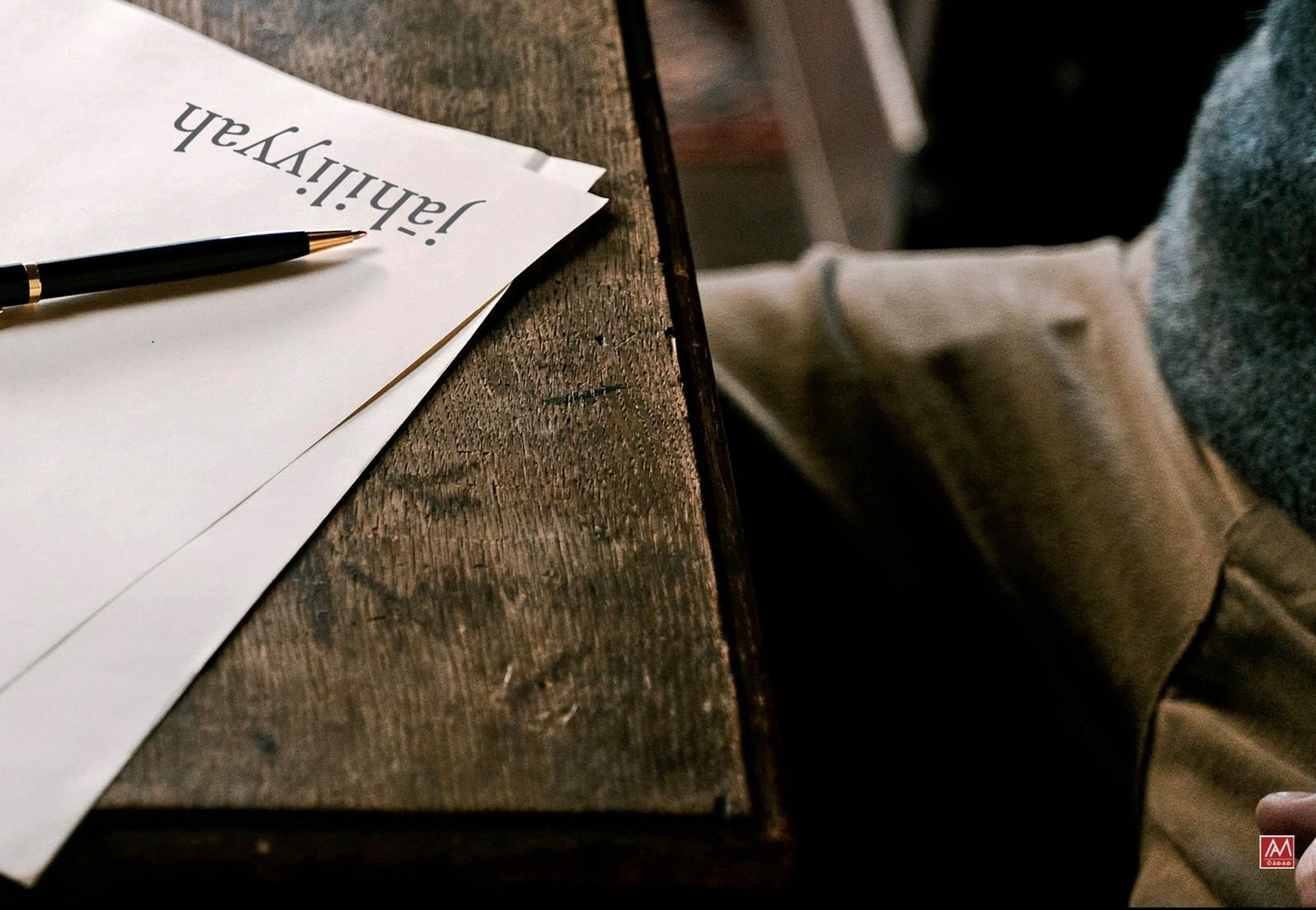
Mersiha Jusić je diplomirala psihologiju na Odsjeku za psihologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Sarajevu 2004. godine na temu religiozne orijentacije adolescenata. Na istom odsjeku 2012. stječe zvanje magistra psiholoških nauka. Na Islamskom pedagoškom fakultetu u Zenici radila je kao viši asistent na psihološkoj grupi predmeta, te bila aktivna u nevladinom sektoru u sferi rada sa ženama i aktivizmu mladih. Doktorirala je na Internacionalnom univerzitetu u Sarajevu 2019., gdje danas radi kao docentica. Autorica je priručnika Medureligijski vodič za srednjoškolce, kao i niza naučnih i stručnih radova iz oblasti psihologije.

E-mail: muhamedjusic@gmail.com

Muhamed Jusić is the Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Sultanate Oman and Republic of Yemen. He holds masters degree in security and peace studies from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo. He is an Islamic theologian and arabist with a degree from the Islamic University in Medina, as well as an analyst on Middle East and the Balkans. He is a former advisor to the Grand Mufti and spokesperson for the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He authored a number of publications and studies on Arab world and Islam. He was a columnist for many local and regional newspapers.

Mersiha Jusić graduated from the Department of Psychology at Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo in 2004, with her research-based final paper on the topic of religious orientation in adolescents. She received the title of master of psychological science in 2012. from the same department. She worked as a senior assistant at Islamic pedagogical faculty of Zenica, and was active in the field of women-related NGO projects and youth activism. She received her PhD in psychological science from the International University of Sarajevo in 2019, where she currently holds the position of assistant professor. She authored a handbook „Interreligious guide for secondary school students“, and published a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals.

E-Mail: muhamedjusic@gmail.com



Jāhiliyyah

datum prijema / date of receipt: 9.03.2022
datum recenzije / review date: 20.04.2022.
datum prihvatanja / date of acceptance: 20.05.2022.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52510/sia.v3i1.40>
UDK: 28-23-9:316.774
Professional paper – Pregledni stručni članak

MUHAMED JUSIĆ & MERSIHA JUSIĆ

**AL-DŽĀHILIJJAH I ANTIINTELEKTUALIZAM
SUVREMENOG SVIJETA**

**AL-JĀHILIYYAH AND ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM
OF THE MODERN WORLD**



Abstract

The authors analyze the question of the relationship to the concept of anti-intellectualism in contemporary societies, searching for its connection with the traditional concept of *al-jāhiliyyah* within the Muslim tradition. It especially focuses on the manifestations and possible causes of contemporary *al-jāhiliyyah* and the peculiarities, but also the consequences, of the relationship of postmodern societies, both in the West and in majority Muslim countries, towards scholarship and the imperceptible rise of general anti-intellectualism.

Key words: anti-intellectualism, *al-jāhiliyyah* – ignorance, contemporary media.

AL-JĀHILIYYAH AND ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM OF THE MODERN WORLD

Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hatred, hatred leads to violence.

Ibn Rushd – Averroes (1126–1198.)

alī bin Muḥammad bin’Alī al-Jurjāni (740-816h) in his work *Al-T’arīfāt* (“Definitions”), defining the term *jahl* (ignorance), writes: “*Jahl* is the belief in something which is the opposite to what it is”. He adds that “some objected to this definition, claiming that *jahl* can also be of something that does not exist”. However, al-Jurjāni believes that this is not a valid argument, because according to him this concept is imaginary, that is, it is only in the human mind. He then lists two more terms that he tries to define, namely *al-jahl al-basīṭ* (simple ignorance), which according to him is ignorance of what should be known, and *al-jahl al-murakkab* (complex ignorance), which is a firm conviction that does not coincide with reality.¹

In fact, this tells us that in classical Islamic thought, *jahl* was not meant as *ignorance*, but as the *illusion of knowledge*. This is all the more important because when we think about it, the illusion of knowledge is worse and more dangerous than ignorance. If *jahl* was ignorance, ignorant people would know that they do not know something, so they would search for knowledge and sooner or later would get out of that state of ignorance. In this way, the *jāhil*, the ignorant, is convinced that he knows, or that he knows as much as he thinks is enough. That is why he closes the door of knowledge to himself.

However, the only way out of ignorance is for a person to doubt his knowledge. He should not be blindly convinced that he knows everything, but should always search for the truth. Admitting ignorance is the pinnacle of knowledge.

God Almighty said in the Qur’an: “Be aware of Allah and Allah will teach you. Only Allah knows everything”.²

But the kind of Godliness mentioned in this verse is not fear of God but awe. Man should not fear God who is, as the Prophet Muhammad said in a *ḥadīth*: “More merciful to men than a mother to her child.”³ Thus, man should be in awe of God’s greatness. This awe is set by the Almighty God as a prerequisite for human cognition, that is, for the attainment of knowledge. God is for Muslims *Al-‘Ālim*, the Omniscient, He is absolute knowledge. As He Almighty says in the Qur’an: “He gives a little knowledge to men”.⁴

¹ ‘Alī bin Muḥammad bin’Alī al-Jurjāni, *Al-T’arīfāt*, Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, Beirut, 1996. p. 108.

² *Qur’an*, 2:282

³ *Ḥadīth*: Al-Bukhārī & Muslim.

⁴ *Qur’an*, 17:85

In order to understand, to be open to learning, people must first show awe before Knowledge, that is, in the case of faith people, to show their awe before God as the ultimate knowledge. Al-Zamakhsharī even claims that the etymological meaning of the word *Allah* is the One before whose Greatness people are astonished, confused, amazed, disturbed...⁵

Self-realization, let alone knowledge, cannot be achieved with arrogance and conceit. To be in awe of the Truth, of Knowledge, is the first step towards rising from the shackles of *jahl*. The arrogance of the postmodern man, his conviction that he knows everything as well as that he is the measure of everything is the root from which the postmodern *jāhiliyyah* sprouts and flourishes. Contemporary *jāhiliyyah* is, therefore, a complex ignorance based on the false illusion of omniscience and the arrogance of ultimate truths.

It would be difficult to describe all the manifestations of this contemporary *jāhiliyyah*, but some are simply too obvious to be noticed.

Anti-intellectualism as contemporary *jāhiliyyah*

One of the manifestations of contemporary *jāhiliyyah* is the growing trend of the rise of anti-intellectualism in the world. Education, but also science itself, art and the thirst for knowledge are no longer valued. They are increasingly being replaced by entertainment as the sole object of occupation, ignorance, omniscience and self-sufficiency, as well as deliberate stupidity and consciously designed dumbing down of the masses. The COVID-19 pandemic and the way we, as humanity, have responded to it has pushed this frightening trend of anti-intellectualism to the fore. Also, it has shown all the power and appeal of a superficial, conspiracy theory-prone as well as an anti-scientific movement for uneducated masses. This conspiracy is empowered by social networks where people can easily bind themselves to create “alternative facts” but also an alternative reality.



ILLUSTRATION ~ *Hospital in the atmosphere of Covid 19.*

ILUSTRACIJA ~ *Bolnica u atmosferi Covida 19.*

⁵ Enes Karić, *Prilozi za enciklopedijski leksikon Kurana*, Volume I, p. 5.

The triumph of anti-intellectualism

Something serious is happening to our world. There is no society in which the consequences of the decades-long dumbing down of the masses, where the media, political elites as well as increasingly a quasi-academic parallel are being created without a sign of ending. It would be a wonder to expect that the collapse of educational systems and an ending of the content of dumbing down have not a serious impact on the world we live in. That image of the world about how the educated elites will lead the world as well as push the wheel of civilization forward, even if the masses were not enlightened and even if they remained lulled in their imaginary world of indolence and cheap entertainment, is now seriously shaken. In a world where the nominal principles of democracy rule, it is realistic that the majority rules. If the majority is unenlightened, it will for sure find a way to shape the world according to its will. Through the elections, the majority's attitudes, priorities and vision of the world will very quickly become a political and social reality to which everyone has to adapt.

Those "enlightened elites" who in their salons were horrified by the primitivism of the masses are now surprised that these masses do not share their values and that they elect political representatives with whom these masses can identify and do not recognize the greatness and brilliance of the elites.

All kinds of elites both in our country and in the world have been born among their people. But they are surprised when their people, the masses, no longer perceive them as their leaders, but look for those who are closer to them.

It is obvious that there is a feeling among the broad masses that they have been left behind by elites who are corrupt and flirt with the political and economic power for their own benefit. All kinds of elites no longer have authority because the masses feel that they have given birth to their problems, fears and hopes, thus opening up space for others who will fill that void. The ignorant betrayed by the learned now lead themselves.

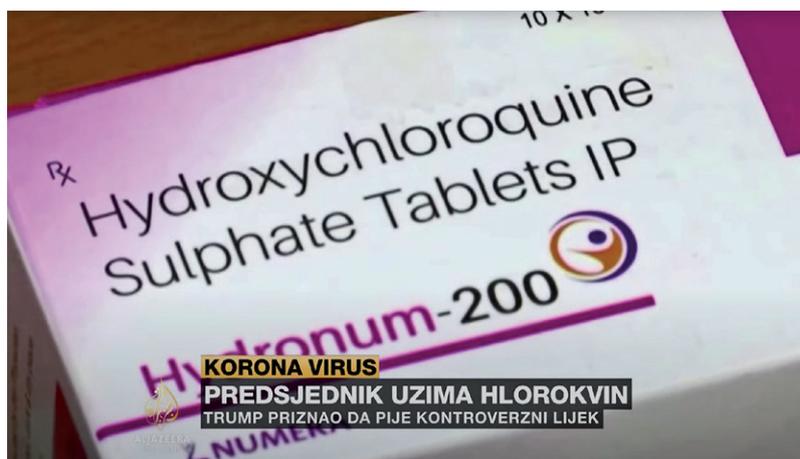


ILLUSTRATION ~ USA: Withdrawal of approval for the use of antimalarial drugs (hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine) in the treatment of COVID-19 (June 15, 2020).

ILUSTRACIJA ~ SAD: Povučeno odobrenje za upotrebu lijekova (hidroksiklorokin i klorokin) protiv malarije u liječenju COVID-19 (15.06.2020.).

In the United States of America, as the leader of the modern and postmodern world and those who have been imposing trends on the world for decades, this process, according to some authors, has gone the furthest. The popularity of Republican President Donald Trump, as well as the policy he led, the “argument” he used, his vision of the world and the simplistic solutions to complex problems he promoted can be the proof of that.

Ray Williams of psychologytoday.com has done an excellent overview of some of the views of authors who have warned against this trend that has long been taking hold in the United States.⁶

Similarly, Susan Jacoby, the author of the book “The Age of American Unreason”, wrote in a piece published in *The Washington Post*: “The definition of stupidity, to paraphrase the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, has gradually



ILLUSTRATION ~ Mark Bauerlein; Charles Pierce.

been lowered for several decades by a combination of hitherto irresistible forces. These forces include the triumph of video culture over print culture, the split between America’s rising level of formal education and the decline of their general understanding of the basics of geography, natural sciences, history, and the fusion of anti-rationalism with anti-intellectualism.⁷

Indeed, there is a long tradition of anti-intellectualism in America, far longer than in other Western countries. The 1964 Pulitzer Prize winner Richard Hofstadter described in how the foundations of anti-elitism, anti-rationalism and anti-scientific sentiment were laid in American society and how they became an integral part of their political and social fabric. He writes in his book “Anti-Intellectualism in American Life”, (he was given a prestigious award for it) the following: “There is a cult of ignorance in the USA, and it has always been there. The thread

⁶ Ray Williams, *Anti-Intellectualism and The Dumbing Down of America*, June 2014.

⁷ Quoted according to *The Week*, *How dumb can we get?*, 09.01.2015.

of anti-intellectualism has always run through the pattern of our political and cultural life, fed by the mistaken attitude that democracy means that my ignorance is as valid as yours.”⁸

Mark Bauerlein in his book, “The Dumbest Generation” reveals how an entire generation of young people is being dumbed down by their aversion to reading anything of value (substance) and their addiction to digital “shit...” on social media.⁹

Journalist Charles Pierce, author of the book “Idiot America” offers a different perspective of the same problem when he writes: “The rise of today’s idiotic America represents – the ultimate goal of which is to achieve profit, but for cynicism to be greater and political advantages in the struggle for power – the consequence of the cessation of existence consensus that acquiring knowledge is good. It also represents a victory for the attitude that we should least trust the people who know best what they are talking about. In the age of new media, everyone is an expert.”¹⁰ We often witness that in the public media space, in dialogue shows, “ordinary people” and experts face each other and “discuss” narrowly specialized topics, such as vaccination or global warming. This creates the impression that it is quite normal to have a layman’s opinion about topics that one deals with all his life, and whose work as such is subjected to rigorous scientific criteria. It opens up a space for public approval or disapproval based on blanket criticisms or objections, which Asa Wikforss discusses in more detail in his book “Alternative Facts”. Alternative facts, no matter how legitimate they are marketed to the public, by the nature of things cannot exist. Facts should not be discussed and cannot be made into controversial topics.¹¹

“There is a perverse suspicion of entitlement, privilege, knowledge, and specialization,” says Catherine Liu, author of *American Idyll : Academic Anti-elitist as Cultural Critique*. This professor of film and media studies from the University of California claims that the university’s mission has changed: “We are no longer educating people.” We train them to find a job”¹².

But this is not the case only in America. As in many other things, America is just a little ahead of the rest of the world. Slowly but surely, this trend is spreading throughout the world, which has for a while in its history, passed the period of enlightenment. The other world which did not experience the enlighten, is in an agony of unfree and dictatorial state ruled by forcefully imposed political elites for a long time. People, it seems, were overly confident in themselves and in their societies as well as in the belief that the wheel of civilization must always move forward. This is a completely unfounded assumption. History teaches us that this is not the case and that the wheel of civilizational progress can easily roll backwards.

⁸ Isaac Asimov, in *Newsweek A Cult of Ignorance*, 21.01. 1980.

⁹ Mark Bauerlein: *The Dumbest Generation : How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*, Penguin, New York, 2008

¹⁰ Charles P. Pierce: *Idiot America How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free*, Doubleday, New York, 2009.

¹¹ Asa Wikforss: *Alternativne činjenice – o znanju i njegovim neprijateljima*, Naklada OceanMore, 2021.

¹² Catherine Liu: *American Idyll: Academic Anti-elitism as Cultural Critique*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2011.

It is said that the comedian George Carlin said that: “Never underestimate the dangers of fools in large groups”¹³. That is why today the ideas of enlightenment, working with people and educating the masses are once again so relevant. But in order to take that path, the media, politicians, the academic community and everyone else must stop pandering to the masses and running after profit. That is a sacrifice that no one is ready to do it. Until then, the wise will yield, the fools will rule and the *jāhiliyyah* will triumph.

Ignorance is a powerful weapon. It may not be stronger than knowledge, but it is certainly more destructive and more susceptible to manipulation.

Superficiality

Contemporary *jāhiliyyah* has another striking feature. It rests on superficiality, on intellectual and emotional non-introduction, on the absence of complex thinking. The accelerated world does not allow us to devote ourselves to anything, any idea or even emotion. He forces today’s man to make hasty conclusions, baseless and superficial assessments that lead to capriciousness and fanaticism, which should replace the insecurity and ungroundedness of superficial worldviews and attitudes.

Nicholas Carr in his book “Shallow”¹⁴ from 2010, writing about what the internet is doing to our brains as one of the sweeping changes in the way most people think and experience the world, he sees overexposure to the internet and the virtual reality social media world. He writes about how media are not only information channels. They provide people with material for thinking, but also shape the thinking process.



ILLUSTRATION - The internet infrastructure is simply a network of networks.
ILUSTRACIJA - Internetska infrastruktura jednostavno je mreža mreža.

¹³ Iselin Aspen, *Never Underestimate the Power Of Stupid People In Large Groups – In memory of comedian George Carlin*, Medium, 12.05.2021. <https://medium.com/the-collector/never-underestimate-the-power-of-stupid-people-in-large-groups-1cf0bcb68cc2>

¹⁴ Nicholas Carr: *Plitko – Što Internet čini našem mozgu*, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 2011.

Thus, he claims that humanity, just as McLuhan had predicted, has reached an important turning point in intellectual and cultural history, and has entered a transitional period between two ways of thinking. “In exchange for the riches of the Internet – and only a madwoman would turn her head away from hidden treasures – we’ve stripped ourselves of what Karp calls ‘the old linear thinking process.’ The calm, focused, undistracted, linear mind is giving way to a new kind of mind that wants and needs to siphon and spew out information in short, intermittent, often interlaced bursts – the faster, the better.¹⁵ John Batelle, once a magazine editor and professor of journalism who now runs an Internet advertising company, describes the intellectual exhilaration he experiences while surfing the web like this:

“When I do *bricolage* in real time and it takes hours, I ‘feel’ my brain getting lighter, and I ‘feel’ like I’m getting smarter”.¹⁶ Most of us have experienced something similar. These feelings are intoxicating – to the extent that they can distract us from the deeper cognitive effects of the Internet.¹⁷

In the past five centuries, since Gutenberg’s press made book reading a universal endeavor, the linear, literary mind has been at the center of art, science, and society. Subtle and subtle, it was the imaginative mind of the Renaissance, the rational mind of the Enlightenment, the inventive mind of the Industrial Revolution, and even the subversive mind of Modernism. Such and such a mind could soon go to the dustbin of history” – writes Carr.¹⁸ He further writes that dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educationalists and web designers point to the same conclusion: by entering the Internet, we enter an environment that encourages superficial reading, distracted and hasty thinking, and superficial learning.¹⁹

Jordan Grafman, head of the Division of Cognitive Neuroscience at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, explains that constantly shifting our attention while we’re online can make our brains more nimble at multitasking, but as our ability to divide our attention develops, our ability to think deeply and creatively stunts.²⁰

The Internet is hardly the only culprit for the superficiality of modern man, but it is probably a factor that has contributed to the upbringing of a new generation that digests the world around it like a flow boiler. They cannot and do not want to devote enough time to anything to try to understand something out of awe of knowledge. Because excessive incentives constantly offer new content, according to which they must express themselves, take a stand. And the exposure to a lot of these incentives that are presented as “information” and “facts” and are very often of a dubious nature, create a false feeling that everything is known.

Furthermore, that postmodern man, frightened by the complexity of the world, flees into its reductionist interpretations that give us a false image of simplicity and security. Today, black and white are triumphing,

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 17.

¹⁶ John Battelle: *Google: Making Nick Carr Stupid, But It’s Made This Guy Smarter*, John Battelle’s Searchblog, 10. 6.2008.

¹⁷ Nicholas Carr: *Plitko – Što Internet čini našem mozgu*. Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 2011. p. 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 18

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 146.

²⁰ Cited in Don Tapscott, *Grown Up Digital* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), p. 108-9, quoted according to Carr 2011.

i.e. simplified pictures of the world with simple utopian solutions for complex problems. That is why such interpretations of faith, politics and reality triumph. Today, people listen to and consume only what is superficial, what they can understand without much effort.

Ignorance of the Other

although it would take too long to describe all the manifestations of contemporary *jāhiliyyah* and its consequences not only for Muslim societies, but also for the future of humanity, one more of its manifestations is important to note. Namely, the so-called modern man lives another special type of *jāhiliyyah* in which he not only knows nothing about the Other and the different, but, due to his absurd arrogance, does not want to know. He is convinced that he himself is the measure of everything. Perhaps in ancient times, people did not have the opportunity to meet other peoples and civilizations. A man could be born and die without leaving his village or town. With the exception of merchants and pilgrims, who were a privileged elite, few were given the opportunity to interact with different nations and civilizations over the centuries.

It was a time of racism and colonizing consciousness. Racism was suppressed, if anything, due to the development of genetics as a science, but it was replaced by civilizationism, an ideology based on exclusionary practices and discrimination against less valuable, if not individuals, and their cultures, religions and civilizations. This new racism rests precisely on the arrogant *jāhiliyyah*. These racists blindly believe in their own superiority and do not want to learn about the Other, let alone accommodate them. While this arrogant Eurocentricity and Western-centricity could be understood in the past, understanding does not mean justifying it, because multi-confessional and multi-ethnic societies, especially in Western Europe, were a real rarity. In addition, the moral and ethical justification for colonialism had to rest on the civilizationism of the time, which did not recognize that civilizations or civilized people existed outside of Western Europe.

Today, in a globalized world, the experience of the Other and the different is available to anyone who wants to go beyond stereotypes and create their own experiences. But that desire is less and less. Especially among young people. A complicated world is easier to be understood through prejudices and long-established stereotypes. Curiosity and the desire for knowledge are no longer a virtue. Today, everyone has the feeling that they know everything and that it is only a matter of how to convince as many people as possible of their own attitude and vision of the world. They are only tolerant of those who are like “us” and who recognize the superiority of “our way of life”.

Ignorance breeds fear. I guess by nature, people are afraid of the unknown. That brings us to a serious problem, brings us to the “power of nightmares” that rules today’s societies ensnared in the illusion of omniscience.



ILLUSTRATION - Propaganda photo of ISIL.

Muslims and contemporary *jāhiliyyah*

muslim societies are not spared from this trend and challenge either, but with numerous specificities and particularities arising from cultural, historical and any other heritage and circumstances in which these societies develop.

Today's "average" and "learned" Muslims are convinced that the age of *jāhiliyyah* is behind them, but if they had enough intellectual courage to look at the realities of the world they live in, they would realize, even though their Prophet so often warned them against it, that they have returned: "with the traces of their heels" (*inqalabū 'alā 'aqibaihim*) to the *jāhiliyyah* period, which is no longer just theirs but a global trend into which they brought their peculiarities. This new *jāhiliyyah* of the *ummah* is not only in the fact that they have neglected learning, not only religious but general learning, i.e., intellectualism, the thirst for knowledge as such, which is evident in all parameters of the social development of their societies. This new *jāhiliyyah* is reflected in their capriciousness, blind *'aṣabiyyah* and exclusivity towards everything different, new and foreign. Once again, the tribalistic spirit of *jāhiliyyah* has triumphed, the *jāhiliyyah* which Islam had modified.

Again, some Muslims returned to that pre-Islamic *jāhiliyyah* social rule that prevailed among the Arabs "help your brother when violence is done to him but also when he is a violent one". When was the last time we saw Muslims willing to admit their mistakes and condemn those among them who commit violence? If there were such convictions, as is the case with the convictions of ISIL's crimes, they were very often for many of them, but of course not for all, forced by the pressure of world powers, fear of consequences and often accompanied by different relativization of the crime.

The tribalization of consciousness, the dominance of emotional and reflexive reactions seriously threatens today's *ummah*, which perfectly fits but is also reinforced by the global trend of anti-intellectualism, superficiality and reductionism. Only sometimes it seems that Muslims in their societies are fighting a special internal struggle with these modern manifestations of *jāhiliyyah*.

Again, some Muslims returned to that pre-Islamic *jāhiliyyah* social rule that prevailed among the Arabs "help your brother when violence is done to him but also when he is a violent one". When was the last time we saw Muslims willing to admit their mistakes and condemn those among them who commit violence? If there were such convictions, as is the case with the convictions of ISIL's crimes, they were very often for many of them, but of course not for all, forced by the pressure of world powers, fear of consequences and often accompanied by different relativization of the crime.

The tribalization of consciousness, the dominance of emotional and reflexive reactions seriously threatens today's *ummah*, which perfectly fits but is also reinforced by the global trend of anti-intellectualism, superficiality and reductionism. Only sometimes it seems that Muslims in their societies are fighting a special internal struggle with these modern manifestations of *jāhiliyyah*.

Muslims react to provocations. Let's just remember the reactions to caricatures of the Prophet, (a.s), in the way pre-Islamic Arabs would have reacted; aggressively, sacrificing everything just to preserve their presumptuous honor (so-called *sharaf*), which was an imaginary construct developed within the social dynamics of the tribe. This reaction was far from the one to which the Almighty God through His Messenger taught the inhabitants of Arabia steeped in *jāhiliyyah*. We read in the Qur'an: „And when you call them to the right path they don't hear; you see them staring at you but they don't see. You hold on to forgiveness, call for good and stay away from the ignorant (*jāhil*)“²¹ (El-Araf 198-199.)

In fact, Karen Armstrong has an interesting interpretation not only of the concept of *jāhiliyyah*, but also of what the mission of Prophet Muhammad, (a.s.), represented and in what way it ended that dark period in the history of Arabia. In her book “Fields of Blood, Religion and the History of Violence,” she writes:

„Muslims traditionally refer to the pre-Islamic period as *jāhiliyyah*, which is loosely translated as ‘time of ignorance’. But the original meaning of the root J-H-L is ‘timidity’ or ‘irritability’, a sharp sensitivity to honor and prestige, excessive arrogance and, above all, a chronic penchant for violence and revenge.“²²

Muhammad (a.s.) was well aware of both things, both the oppression and injustice of Mecca, and the warlike danger of *jāhiliyyah*.

The fundamental message of the Qur'an was not some new vague doctrine, like the one that tore apart Byzantium, but simply a “reminder” of what constitutes a just society, and which challenged the structural violence that arose in Mecca: that it is wrong to accumulate private wealth, and good to share one's wealth with the poor and vulnerable, who must be treated fairly and with respect. Muslims constituted an *ummah*, a community that provided an alternative to the greed and systemic injustice of Meccan capitalism. Eventually, the religion of Muhammad's followers is called *Islam* because it required individuals to surrender their whole being to Allah. A Muslim was simply a man or woman who had made that surrender. But, in the beginning, the new faith was called *tazakkā*, a word that can roughly be translated as *purification*.²³ Instead of hoarding wealth and ignoring the plight of the poor, Muslims were encouraged to take responsibility for one another and feed the needy, even when they themselves were hungry.²⁴ They replaced the timidity of *jāhiliyyah* with the traditional Arab virtue of *hilm* – leniency, patience and gentleness.²⁵

By taking care for the vulnerable, freeing slaves, and performing small acts of kindness every day, even hourly, they believed that they would gradually acquire a trusting, merciful spirit and cleanse themselves of selfishness.

²¹ Qur'an, 7:198-199.

²² R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge, 1953. p. 83., quoted according to Karen Armstrong: *Polja krvi religija i historija nasilja*, Buybook, Sarajevo, 2016. p 174.

²³ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, 1953, str.83., quoted according to IBID p 175.

²⁴ Qur'an, 90 :13 -17.

²⁵ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, p. 28. quoted according to Karen Armstrong: *Polja krvi religija i historija nasilja*, Buybook, Sarajevo, 2016. p 176.

Unlike the tribesmen who retaliated violently at the slightest provocation, Muslims must not retaliate, but leave revenge to Allah²⁶, consistently treating all others with gentleness and kindness.²⁷

Using *jāhiliyyah* against *jāhiliyyah*

Among the Muslims, there were those who, following the ideas of Sayyid Qutb²⁸ and his like-minded people, began to talk about how the Muslim societies of the second half of the last century were actually *jāhiliyyah*, but most of them only came to the conclusion that these societies and, therefore, those who live in them have ceased to be believers because they do not judge by “God’s laws”.

Many of those who fought against *jāhiliyyah* ideology did not see that they were actually advocating to replace one ideology with another. In the midst of the ideological struggle between East and West, communism and capitalism, they wanted to make Islam only a third ideology with all the negativity associated with ideologies. They fought for people’s freedom against alleged tyranny without seeing that they were becoming tyrants themselves. They said that people should not serve each other, that people should not rule over people, but that they should be ruled by their Creator. But when they embarked on the realization of their ideology, then they proclaimed themselves “lawyers of God on earth”. They explained to people what God was asking of them and did not hesitate to use force to bring them back to the “arms of God’s grace”.

Although they publicly advocated and defended theocracy, they actually offered clericalism and not only in the sense of some imaginary priesthood as a never-defined circle of people with clear membership, but the mere rule of those who convince themselves that they act in the name of God. Usually, there was no place among them for the traditional ‘*ulamā*’, who were accused of betraying the principles of Islam, of not being active and decisive enough in imposing Islamic values. Under the guise of fighting *jāhiliyyah*, they pushed the Muslim world into even greater *jāhiliyyah*.

Today, when the world is facing new manifestations of *jāhiliyyah*, knowledge, cognition and learning can, as so many times throughout the history of mankind, be the only way out, but the first step on the path to knowledge is the realization of one’s own ignorance.

²⁶ *Qur`an*: 14:47, 39: 37, 15:79, 30:47, 44:16

²⁷ *Qur`an*: 25:63.

²⁸ Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) was an Egyptian author, educator, Islamic scholar, theorist, revolutionary, poet, and a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1966, he was convicted of plotting the assassination of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and was executed by hanging. He is considered as “the Father of Salafi jihadism”, the religio-political doctrine that underpins the ideological roots of global jihadist organizations such as al-Qaeda and ISIL.

reference / references

- ARMSTRONG, KAREN: *Polja krvi: religija i historija nasilja*, Buybook, Sarajevo, 2016.
- ASIMOV, ISAAC: *A Cult of Ignorance*. Newsweek od 21.01.1980., str. 19, dostupno na: https://aphelis.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/ASIMOV_1980_Cult_of_Ignorance.pdf datum pristupa: 15.01.2022.
- ASPEN, ISELIN: *Never Underestimate The Power Of Stupid People In Large Groups – In memory of comedian George Carlin*. Medium, od 12.05.2021. dostupno na: <https://medium.com/the-collector/never-underestimate-the-power-of-stupid-people-in-large-groups-1cf0bcb68cc2>
- BATTELLE, JOHN: Google: *Making Nick Carr Stupid, But It's Made This Guy Smarter*. John Battelle's Searchblog, od 10.06.2008. dostupno na: https://battellemedia.com/archives/2008/06/google_making_nick_carr_stupid_but_its_made_this_guy_smarter, datum pristupa: 15.01.2022.
- BAUERLEIN, MARK: *The Dumbest Generation : How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*. Penguin Books, New York, 2008.
- CARR, NICHOLAS: *Plitko – Što Internet čini našem mozgu*. Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 2011.
- EL-DŽURDŽANI, ALI BIN MUHAMED BIN ALI ET-TARIFAT: *Darul-kitanel-Arabi*. Bejrut, 1996.
- JACOBY, SUSAN: *How dumb can we get*. *The Week*, od 09.01.2015. dostupno na: <https://theweek.com/articles/516564/how-dumb> datum pristupa 15.01.2022.
- KARIĆ, ENES: *Prilozi za enciklopedijski leksikon Kurana*. I svezak, neobjavljeni rukopis.
- LIU, CATHERINE: *American idyll : academic antielitism as cultural critique*. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2011.
- MONTGOMERY, WATT W.: *Muhammad at Mecca*. Oxford, 1953.
- NICHOLSON, REYNOLD A.: *A Literary History of the Arabs*. Cambridge, 1953.
- PIERCE, CHARLES P.: *Idiot America How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free*. Doubleday, New York, 2009.
- TAPSCOTT, DON: *Grown Up Digital*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 2009.
- WIKFORSS, ASA: *Alternativne činjenice- o znanju i njegovim neprijateljima*. Naklada OceanMore, 2021.
- WILLIAMS, RAY: *Anti-Intellectualism and „The Dumbing Down” of America*. *Psychology Today*, 2014. dostupno na: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/wired-success/201407/anti-intellectualism-and-the-dumbing-down-america>, datum pristupa: 15.01.2022.



ILLUSTRATION - Émile Deckers, *Portraits of three members of the traditional 'ulamā'*. Algeria, 1959.
ILUSTRACIJA - Émile Deckers, *Portreti trojice pripadnika tradicionalne ulame*. Alžir, 1959.