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Germany Year 1968: Democratic Turning Point or Annus Terriblis? Germany's debate over the rebellious sixties has everything to do with the present

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"The upper hand in the interpretation of the past determines who will hold power in the future; this is why the historical view of the victor is always so vigorously contested." — German historian Edgar Wolfrum

There's no place like Germany for wrenching, introspective public debates over national history and collective memory. This phenomenon itself is one of the legacies of the 1967-1969 student movement, known in shorthand here as "'68," and last year – once again on an anniversary decade– the subject of bitter dispute. Like the hard-fought "historians' controversy" of the 1980s over Germans' understanding of the Nazi past,[1] this row is inextricably bound up with the present and the future: the historical legacy of the late sixties has been instrumental in shaping socio-cultural values in the Federal Republic and providing both legitimacy and orientation to progressive leftist movements and parties. It has thus been fiercely contested terrain ever since and this most anniversary, the 40th, was no exception. A critical reexamination of the anti-establishment, countercultural uprising that had peers across the globe filled the pages of newspapers and spawned dozens of new books and films.

The student movement, which in past years had been credited with the "fundamental liberalization"[2] of postwar Germany and extolled as a "second founding of the republic"[3] was being compared to the far-right German student movement of the 1930s and blamed with societal ills from teenage dereliction to the sagging birth rate. This reconfiguration is a process that is happening at a time when left liberal forces inGermany today, which consider themselves the heirs of '68, are disoriented and lagging badly in the polls. Although there is little chance of a full-scale roll back of the progressive advances made in the "culture wars" of the 1970s and 80s — nor of a re-nationalization of German political culture — the socio-cultural assumptions of theBerlinRepublic remain disputed. WithGermany almost certainly entering a new conservative era, the place of the tumultuous sixties in the republic's historical narrative is being challenged anew.

The current controversy must be distinguished from the efforts of German conservatives who have long tried to discredit the student movement and the *kulturrevolution* that followed in its wake. The modernizing tremors that reverberated from the sixties changed the way Germans thought about sexuality, gender, child-rearing, education, authority, the nation, civic

responsibility, and the relationship of the Nazi past to the German present. This more liberal, heterogeneous republic jettisoned much of traditional Germanness–especially that considered tainted by Nazism — and introduced new lifestyle choices, from alternative family models to homosexuality. German conservatives argue that this process undermined Germans' respect for law, the work ethic, the nuclear family, and the patria. The editor of the mass-circulation daily *Bild-Zeitung*, Kai Dieckman, recently summed up many conservatives' feelings about '68 as an "epochal shift [in German society] in the direction of egocentrism, mediocrity, and laziness."[4] The current pope, Benedict XVI, a German who studied at West German universities in the sixties, claims that 1968 was where Germany, and indeed all of Western culture, took a wrong turn, from which it has yet to right itself.[5]

The difference between this cultural warfare and the present debate is that today's critique issues from the ranks of the "'68ers" themselves. While their intent is not to restore the conservative mores of the 1950s, the impact of a debate that distorts the legacy of the student uprising in the long-term could lead to an erosion of the liberal postulates that underpin the post-1968 republic — the very issues at stake in the culture wars. Certainly it would deprive progressive forces of one of their most important sources of legitimacy at a time when they are out of power and in the midst of a painful realignment. A public debate over the West German student movement and its legacy — including its flaws — is fully legitimate, but some of the present discussion lapses into populism. On the other hand, aspects of the inquiry are overdue and pose searching questions that this precocious generation has long evaded.

The German *Studentenbewegung*, 1967-1969

Although there had been growing student activism throughout the course of the 1960s, including protests against the US war in Vietnam since early 1966, leftist-minded West German students were outraged when, in December 1966, the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) and the party's popular chairman, Willy Brandt, joined in a ruling "grand coalition" with the Christian Democrats, whose chancellor candidate was Kurt Georg Kiesinger, a former Nazi party member. The formation of the grand coalition convinced many that opposition could now only come from outside the structures of power, in the form of "extraparliamentary opposition." Though the *studentenbewegung* had much in common with other like-minded movements around the world, these young Germans (born roughly between 1940 and 1950) had come of age in the shadow of the Nazi dictatorship. The conservative postwar governments led by Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer had set aside a coming to terms with the Nazi past in order to get on with the business of stabilizing the war-ravaged country. From the very beginning the German student movement had a strong generational component: these young Germans took their parents and teachers to task for their complicity in and silence over the Nazi crimes. Armed with the critical theory of the New Left, they saw in the Federal Republic an authoritarian society that retained much of the ethos of National Socialism; evidence of this continuity was that former Nazis held leading positions in the universities, commerce, and the justice system, as well as government.

The breadth and tenor of the protests changed dramatically with the killing of student activist

Benno Ohnesorg on June 2, 1967. Ohnesorg was shot by a West Berlin police officer during demonstrations against the Shah of Iran's visit toWest Germany. Furious, students took to the streets and the ranks of the previously obscure Socialist German Student Association (SDS) swelled with new members. By 1967 the students also had a charismatic frontman by the name of Rudi Dutschke, a 27-year old sociology student. A gifted speaker, Dutschke was the face of a movement that espoused an undogmatic, anti-authoritarian socialism as an alternative to free-market capitalism and "bourgeois democracy" in the West, and the Soviet-style communism of the East. Another icon of the German student uprising was the Kommune I co-op inWest Berlin, a real-life experiment in communal living, free love, and drug-induced spirituality.

The student movement was in full swing inWest Germany's university towns when in April 1968 a right-wing assailant shot Dutschke inWest Berlin. The man, who called Dutschke a "dirty communist pig" before firing on him, was in possession of newspapers published by the conservative Springer publishing house, which demonized Dutschke and portrayed the students as violent communist rabble-rousers. As Dutschke lay critically wounded in the hospital, riots broke out across theFederalRepublic. Stones and Molotov cocktails rained on the Springer facilities, presenting the country on the frontline of the Cold War with the gravest crisis of its existence. Dutschke's shooting as well as the assassinations that year of Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, the crushing of the Prague Spring, the rioting at the Democrats' convention inChicago, and the passage of the notorious Emergency Law (a statute giving the West German executive special emergency powers), were blows from which the movement never recovered. By late 1969 the student uprising was a spent force and the SDS was splintering into sectarian groupings. No single unifying figure emerged to replace Dutschke and the SDS was officially dissolved in early 1970.

At the time, most of the student rebels concluded that their revolt had failed: it hadn't stopped the Vietnam War, blocked the Emergency Law, mobilized the working class (as their French and Italian counterparts did, briefly), or so much as dented the Federal Republic's structures. In its aftermath the ex-student partisans scattered across the left side of the republic's political spectrum. Many, inspired by the new Brandt-led government that came to power in 1969, joined the Social Democrats.[6] Others struck out on their own engaging in single-issue grassroots projects called citizens' initiatives, many of which focused on women's and environmental issues. Yet there were others too, like the 22-year old Joschka Fischer, who refused to give up on revolutionary socialism. An eclectic array of Maoist, Leninist, and anarchist groups set out to do what the students couldn't, namely to inspire the German working class and, ultimately, to overturn a state that they understood as proto-fascist.

Anniversaries Past

The first ten-year anniversary of the student revolt, in 1977-1978,[7] was anything but celebratory. It coincided with the harrowing German Autumn of 1977, the height of Red Army Faction (RAF) terror and, in response to it, the state's crackdown on the entire West German left. The myriad of New Left groups and Marxist splinter parties that understood themselves as the *studentenbewegung*'s heirs were in disarray, shocked by their own violence and that of the

authorities. Most of them acknowledged that they had also failed to entice the working class. With their radical agenda in tatters, the revolutionary project begun in the 1960s came to an end. Some of the radical left, like the anarcho-syndicalist Joschka Fischer, retreated from political activity altogether, deeply disillusioned with New Leftism and bitterly distrustful of the Federal Republic. As for ordinary Germans, the *Bild-Zeitung* summed up the feelings of many lumping the '68ers and the RAF together as "Hitler's children."[8]

It was in the wake of the New Left's foundering in the late 1970s that the concept of the protest movement veterans as a distinct "generation" began to take hold: it encompassed those who shared the experience of the student revolt and peers who shared their socio-cultural affinities. Until then, the left had rejected the label of "generation" as being unpolitical and diffuse: it referred to a broad category of people of a certain age group rather than a specific political project or movement. But by 1978 this had begun to change: in the New Left journal *Kursbuch* one prominent author admitted that the "we" of the movement and a common socialist utopia had been replaced by a "we" of those in their mid-thirties who identified themselves in terms of the cultural revolution.[9] The unity of the greater West German left was thus – at least culturally – reconstituted [reasserted].

Tellingly, the activists behind the citizen's initiatives and the New Social Movements (NSM) that emerged from them in the mid-1970s (the environmental, the women's, and the anti-nuclear energy campaigns) let the first ten-year anniversary pass without much ado. Although these movements and the civic imperative that empowered them would have been unthinkable without the student uprising, the grassroots campaigns didn't consider themselves following in the footsteps of the student rebels in the same way that the New Leftists did. The citizens' groups and social movements were far broader, incorporating urban and rural activists, different generations, and more equal numbers of women and men, many of whom didn't see themselves as "left" at all. Moreover, in the late 1970s these diverse movements weren't bemoaning a failed project but rather experiencing an unprecedented mass mobilization. They were also in the process of building "green" electoral slates to run in local elections — the precursors to the Green Party, which would come to life in 1979.

Ten years later, in 1988, the twentieth anniversary of the student movement was another story entirely: the '68 generation, as the ex-student partisans now proudly referred to themselves, gushed with confidence and self-congratulation. The labels "'68 generation" and "'68er" constituted an *ersatzidentität* for protest movement progeny that had the distinct advantage of enabling them to speak in the name of a whole generation associated with modernization rather than a diminutive revolutionary subject on the fringes of society.[10] Moreover, the assumptions of the *kulturrevolution* now prevailed across large swathes of West German society; counterculture blended into and transformed the cultural mainstream. In a way that the activists of 1968 could never have foreseen, their experimentation with alternative lifestyles and questioning of societal norms had set processes in motion that changed the way Germans thought, lived, and loved. The '68ers basked in the glow: "Everyone loves 1968,"[11] one commentator wrote in 1988.

Sixty-eight received such good press not least because the German media was now full of ‘68ers. Uniquely, the ‘68ers were able to write their own script, which for years enabled them to dress up past exploits and gloss over less noble aspects of the student uprising. Indeed, by the late 1980s their “long march through the institutions” of the republic was well underway: The movement veterans had inundated not only the media but the school systems, the social services, the universities, and many professional fields like psychiatry and law. And this entry into the institutions didn’t preclude civic activism: in the early eighties several million protested the deployment of additional nuclear missiles in northern Europe, reflecting a new critical *geist* that challenged authority but not the state itself. In 1983, the Greens, a grab-bag of activists from the NSM and the detritus of the New Left parties, put 28 people into the Bundestag thus infiltrating one of the establishment’s last bastions. Just two years later the ex-anarchist Joschka Fischer assumed a ministerial post in one of the *laender* (regional states). The ‘68ers – and most observers as well — were convinced that before the decade was out their march would end in the chancellor’s office, in the capitalBonn.

Five years later, the student movement’s 25th anniversary in 1993 happened against an altogether different backdrop, with the Greens and the SPD nowhere near power. The collapse of Soviet communism had resulted in German unification, something that the ’68 generation had neither foreseen nor desired. They were children of the old Federal Republic who had grown up in a Cold War-divided Germany and harbored a deep suspicion of nationalism, particularly of the German variety. Germany’s division was the rightful price that Germans had “paid for Auschwitz.”[12] The Greens opposed unification until long after it was a fait accompli. And even though most of the German left had been harshly critical of East Bloc communism, the ungracious demise of “real existing socialism” implicitly delegitimized its agenda and the possibility of new left-wing experiments. Whatever one may have thought of the Soviet system, free-market capitalism was now triumphant. Quite suddenly, the student rebels’ utopias of the past looked infantile, if not destructive, and the right was able to reoccupy the high ground of interpretive authority. In an article entitled “The Generation of Failures,”[13] historian Kurt Sontheimer lambasted the ’68ers’ “ideological escapades” as “reactionary” and their influence on the republic as harmful in almost every way: “It is only because [the Federal Republic’s] democracy could assert itself over and against the protest movement … that it was possible to chase the genie [of the ‘68ers] back into its bottle and, in the end, integrate this generation into the political system.” Its legacy, he concludes, is political chaos (the Greens), a value-free society, naïve pacifism, and discursive intolerance.

A further blow, theFederalRepublic’s new citizens – 17 million eastern Germans – neither shared the experiences ofWest Germany’s ‘68 generation nor its post-materialist credo. The backlash of unification and the new conservatism had immediate political consequences: in 1990 (and again in 1994) the conservative government led by Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl swept to victory. His party’s 1990 campaign slogan was “no more experiments.” The Greens experienced an electoral debacle that could be traced straight back to their ambivalent response to unification: for the first time since 1983 the party failed to win representation in the Bundestag.

Five years later, in 1998, the tables turned again. Unification euphoria had petered out as had unsuccessful attempts by conservatives to “re-nationalize” the country. A Social Democrat-Green (“red-green”) government replaced the conservatives after 15 years in power. The ’68 generation was back en vogue, the heroes of the moment, its most prominent faces being foreign minister Joschka Fischer and the new SPD chancellor, the’68 fellow traveller Gerhard Schröder. The red-green administration was hailed as the “political project of the ‘68 generation” and the government’s cabinet was stocked with protest movement progeny who radiated modernity, change, and cool. Weaving the movements of the 60s and 70s into the narrative ofGermany’s liberalization, the first postwar-born leadership took credit for theBerlinRepublic’s cultural modernization and its place in the European mainstream.

2008: Twilight of the ‘68ers

The 40th anniversary of the student revolt this year comes at a conspicuous moment for the ’68 generation itself: in their sixties, they are nearing the end of their professional lives. Schröder and Fischer, for example, who left office when the red-green administration was voted out of power in 2005, are no longer involved in domestic politics. The “political project of the ’68ers” is considered to have run its course. In politics, as well as elsewhere, the protest generation is making way for younger generations for whom 1968 is a historical footnote. The new chancellor, Angela Merkel, is from eastern Germany, and like her fellow easterners feels no special connection to the West German 60s. She even disputes that the changes brought about by the protest movements have anything to do with her becoming Germany’s first woman chancellor.[14]

Although the ’68ers may be retiring, they continue to dominate the debates about 1968’s legacy. But in contrast to previous skirmishes, this time the gravest detractors come from their own leagues. Politically, the discussion comes at a time when the Greens are in opposition and unsure of the way forward in the post red-green world. The Social Democrats, though sharing power with the Christian Democrats in a grand coalition, find themselves in deep crisis, haemorrhaging voters and party members faster than ever before. Moreover, a new left-wing party, the Left Party, seems to have found a place in the German political landscape, signalling the necessity of a realignment of the republic’s left-wing parties.

The most current re-evaluation of ’68 began well before 2008, in fact it commenced shortly after the fireworks of 1998. The single most crucial event was the rise and fall of the red-green government, so closely associated as it was with the sixties. For its loyalists, the administration etched into law an array of progressive measures that reflected the essence of the protest movements: liberal citizenship and gay marriage statutes, anti-discrimination law, and ground-breaking environmental measures, including the phasing out of nuclear energy. Yet the red-green coalition left office not with a bang but with a whimper, and its accomplishments are not generally touted. Leftist sceptics argue that the red-green leadership compromised so much, on so many core issues [examples?] that its record amounts to a betrayal of the movements that brought the Greens to life and catapulted red-green coalitions to power across the country. Furthermore, the red-green government took Germanyto war for the first time since World War

II, in Kosovo and then in Afghanistan. Although Schröder and Fischer stood up to the U.S.on Iraq, Schröder reverted to nationalist populism on the campaign trail in 2002. Perhaps most egregiously, the Social Democrat-led coalition embarked a neo-liberal economic course that cut taxes for the well-off and reduced welfare benefits for the jobless. By 2005 the coalition lacked the majority it needed to continue and in early elections it was soundly voted out of office, replaced by the present conservative-led government. "The retreat of the generation that influenced every aspect of our society since 1968 has begun," announced the weekly *Die Zeit*. In a multi-page spread entitled "Democrats in Spite of Themselves,"[15] the middle-of-the-road weekly *Focus* wasted no time in demolishing "the myths of 1968:" the student protesters didn't liberalize the Federal Republic, the author argued, but rather the country became liberal in spite of the Marxist radicals.

It was, however, a series of episodes in 2000 and 2001 that restarted the debate over 1968 — and first threw a distinctly negative light on it so soon after the inauguration of the red-green administration. Although it was well-known that the Greens' Joschka Fischer had been an anarchist during the 70s, many Germans were not aware of the details of his part in the fierce street militancy of those years and his group's relationship to the urban guerrilla factions. Bits and pieces about Fischer's past trickled out slowly, beginning with the trial in early 2000 of one of his less reputable street fighting comrades, Hans-Joachim Klein, who was charged with murder in a 1975 terrorist attack in Vienna. Fischer, though not involved in Klein's guerrilla troupe, was required to testify at his trial. Shortly thereafter, information emerged that Fischer's co-op inFrankfurtmight have sheltered a RAF fugitive. Another awkward fact surfaced, namely that as an SDS activist Fischer had attended a PLO solidarity congress inAlgiersin 1969.

While these events provided grist for the opposition's mills, it was in January 2001 that the monthly *Stern* dropped a bombshell: a series of black-and-white photos showed Fischer in 1973, then 25-years old, doling out a beating to a Frankfurt police officer together with two accomplices. Fischer is head-to-toe in leather and wearing a menacing black motorcycle helmet. The source of the incriminating photos contributed to the sensational nature of the revelations: it was Bettina Röhl, the daughter of the late Ulrike Meinhof, one of the founding members of the RAF. Even, it seemed, their own children were turning on the '68ers.[16] The flood gates were now wide open and a cascade of questions, charges, and incriminations followed about the '68ers' relationship to violence, terrorism, and the rule of law in general. "Can a man who threw stones and beat up police officers represent the Federal Republic and the chancellor to the rest of the world?" asked the newsweekly *Der Spiegel*.[17] Although the scandal faded away with Fischer still in his office, much to conservatives' dismay, the brouhaha brought one of the less flattering aspects of the era to light and posed serious questions about the radicalism of those years — more were to come.

Right on its heels, for example, came the publication of independent scholar Gerd Koenen's *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967-1977*.[18] Koenen coined the term "red decade" to refer to the journey of the extraparliamentary left from Ohnesorg's death (1967) to the German Autumn (1977). The two moments of violence as bookends for the

years under study reflects the gist of his thesis, namely that violence was integral to the era. Moreover, “red decade” implicitly excludes the civic-minded products of the *studentenbewegung*, such as the citizens’ initiatives and the NSM. Koenen, a veteran of theFrankfurt radical left himself, treats the student revolt as a farce perpetuated by middle-class kids with father complexes. The self-important students stuffed themselves with Marxist jargon and became convinced that they were among the vanguard of a worldwide revolution. The ‘68ers’ theoretical framework — from Adorno to Mao — contributed to the radicalization that culminated in the terror of the armed factions.

Two works by historian Wolfgang Kraushaar released in 2005 were even more consequential. Kraushaar is the pre-eminent chronicler of Germany’s postwar social movements and has contributed mightily to their study. Like Koenen, he also marched in the late 1960s and went the way of the radical splinter parties in the seventies. Until 2005 Kraushaar counted as one of the more enthusiastic pro-’68 voices in Germany. “1968” was, in his words, “the year that changed everything.”[19] This, however, changed with the publication of *Die Bombe im Jüdischen Gemeindehaus**[20]*** and *Rudi Dutschke Andreas Baader und die RAF*.[21] [note to eds.: there is no comma between Dutschke and Andreas in the book’s title]The former presented the startling revelation that in late 1969 a guerrilla group calling itself the Tupamaros West-Berlin[22] had planted a bomb in Berlin’s Jewish Community Center. The devise was anticipated to explode on November 9, 1969, (the anniversary of Reichskristallnacht) when several hundred visitors, including Holocaust survivors, would be there for a commemorative event. The plot’s mastermind was Dieter Kunzelmann, a leading student activist and co-founder of the legendary Kommune I. The bomb failed to detonate, and information about the group and the attack lay buried in archives for decades. Extrapolating from the episode, Kraushaar draws larger conclusions about anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in the latter years of the student movement. While the charge of anti-Semitism in the 1970s New Left was nothing new, its currency in the student movement was thought to have been less tangible. Although SDS had been firmly pro-Israel in the fifties and into the sixties, for example actively facilitating kibbutz exchanges and lobbying for Israel’s recognition, many students adopted the Palestinians’ cause after the Six Day War in June 1967 (which broke out just days after the killing of Ohnesorg) and began criticizing Israel as the US’s bridgehead in the Middle East. Kraushaar argues that the students’ assumption that as leftist anti-fascists they were somehow immune to anti-Semitism hindered a constructive processing of anti-Semitic continuities in their thinking and preserved them under the guise of anti-Zionism and even philo-Semitism. For some, like the Tupamaros West-Berlin, the Middle East replaced Vietnam as the central theater of the anti-imperialist struggle, Israel replaced the US as the main enemy, Zionism replaced fascism, Al-Fatah replaced the Viet Cong, and the Palestinians replaced the Jews as the victims. According to Kraushaar, the thin philo-Semitism of the student movement was punctured easily, opening the door to the more blatant forms of anti-Semitism.

The second jolt delivered by Kraushaar concerned Rudi Dutschke, the iconic student leader who was shot in 1968 and died from attendant complications in 1979. As symbol and martyr of the movement, Dutschke’s reputation had been sacrosanct — at least on the left. He was the

eloquent proponent of SDS's anti-authoritarian wing, and just before his death one of the founders of the Greens. But in an extended essay Kraushaar portrays a Dutschke who not only advocated revolution but actually put his words into practice. Although there was plenty of talk about armed struggle in the 1967-1969 period, it was considered to have remained rhetorical until the 1970s when the urban guerrilla factions emerged (and Dutschke was not politically active inGermany). While Dutschke expressly approved of anti-imperialist Third World revolutions, – and even said he'd take gun in hand in such circumstances — he said armed struggle "wasn't necessary" in the Federal Republic; "violence against things, not against people" was the appropriate means to expose bourgeois society's contradictions and reveal its inherently repressive nature.

In "Rudi Dutschke and the Armed Struggle," Kraushaar argued that new evidence had come to light (a 1967 SDS paper, Dutschke's personal notes, and a biography by his widow, among other sources) that proved that Dutschke had backed "urban guerrilla warfare" in the Federal Republic since 1966 – making him the very first student activist to do so — and that he had even transported explosives on two occasions for use in attacks (that never materialized). Dutschke, according to Kraushaar, actively strove to put Che Guevara's theories of guerrilla warfare into practice by creating an "urban military apparatus" in West Germany.[23] Moreover, in contrast to the image of Dutschke as an undogmatic leftist, Kraushaar contended that the Chinese dictator Mao Se-Tung was particularly central to Dutschke's thinking, much more so than previously thought. He concluded: "Alone the example of Dutschke shows how far the idea of armed struggle had progressed before 1968. And he was not alone with his adoption of Guevara's focus theory and thoughts about the creation of an urban guerrilla group."[24]

Two further incidents set the tone for the 2008 debate. The first was the media attention around the pronounced right-wing drift of a handful of prominent '68ers. The most spectacular case was that of Horst Mahler, one of the student movement's high-profile activist-lawyers and a founding member of the RAF. First in 1998, Mahler, who had served ten years in prison for armed robbery, expressed his sympathies for a volkish German nationalism and then in 2000 he joined the neo-fascist Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands. Following the Mahler publicity came the outing of Bernd Rabehl, a close friend of Dutschke's and student activist of the first hour whose nationalistic convictions led him to circles around the right-wing weekly *Junge Freiheit* and the far-right group Danubia. To these audiences like those of Danubia, Rabehl argued that '68 was really a nationalist movement and that German unification had been a top priority for Dutschke. The two close friends envisioned a "nationalist socialism" in a unifiedGermany that was free of both superpowers, theUS as well as theSoviet Union. Three further well-known '68ers – among them "Hamburg's Dutschke" Reinhold Oberlercher — were also exposed as sympathizers of the far right. [Guenter Grass covered up his SS past.]

Not least, the student movement's 40th anniversary followed the 30th anniversary of the 1977 German Autumn. Although there was very little new information about the climax of the showdown between the West German state and the RAF, there was a flood of media attention around the 2007 decennial, including an array of documentary and feature films, an exhibition, several novels, and a play. The hype underscored the lines of continuity reaching from the

student revolt to the terrorism: more than a few RAF militants had belonged to SDS; Andreas Baader was a regular at Kommune I; Meinhof was editor of the New Left monthly *Konkret*. The RAF's issues were the same as those of the students – imperialism, the Middle East, the war in Vietnam, and the falseness of bourgeois democracy. The terrorists, implied *Spiegel* editor and RAF expert Stefan Aust in a two-part TV documentary *Die RAF*, just took the students' thinking one step further.

Thus the latest revision of '68 was already in full swing by 2008. A sign perhaps of a larger trend, the new French president Nicolas Sarkozy chipped in blaming 1968 for a crisis of "morality, authority, work and national identity."[25] The European Green MP and prominent '68er Dany Cohn-Bendit protested that "'68 was being held responsible for „everything." In Germany, although a score of new publications have appeared — not by any means all negative[26] — the brunt of debate has focused overwhelmingly on historian Götz Aly and his *Unser Kampf: 1968 — Ein irritierter Blick Zurück* (Our Struggle: 1968 – An Irritated Look Back.) Aly is another '68er and a well-known expert on the Holocaust. Born in 1947, Aly studied in Munich and then in West Berlin where he participated in the student movement as of late 1968. In the early 1970s he belonged to a short-lived Maoist group and then to Rote Hilfe, a solidarity group concerned with incarcerated urban guerrillas. He was one of the founders of Germany's left-liberal daily *Die Tageszeitung* and has held a number of adjunct professorships over the past twenty years. For this reason, among others, *Unser Kampf,* which as the title implies draws parallels between the 1960s students and the Nazis, came as such a shock and has received such vast media interest. Unlike Aly's other works, *Unser Kampf* is written in a provocative tone that often reads more like a political pamphlet than a standard work of history, something fellow historians have pointed out disapprovingly.[27] Yet many of his arguments buttress those made over the last ten years.

In the course of the 200-page tract Aly compiles a litany of charges against the sixties' rebels, many familiar, accusing them of romanticism, hypocrisy, middle-class naiveté, and a narcissism that amounted to egomania. In his researches, Aly discovered an unexpected sympathy for the students' adversaries of that day, such as the students' Number One hate-object, the former Nazi and 1966-1969 chancellor, Kurt Georg Kiesinger, who Aly concludes was far more open-minded than the fanatic students. But most damning is Aly's comparison of the 1960s *studentenbewegung* with the far-right nationalist German *studentenbewegung* of the late 1920s and early 1930s, whose ranks infused the Nazi movement. Aly argues that both groups of student activists were deeply illiberal, those of the 1960s – when shorn of their libertine, anti-authoritarian trappings — every bit as totalitarian in both theory and practice as their National Socialist predecessors. Aly provides quote after quote comparing the students' forms of protest, movement character, language, fascination with violence, and cults of personality. Like the Nazi students, the young Germans of the 1960s endorsed collectivist notions of *gemeinschaft* over bourgeois liberal concepts of *gesellschaft*. It wasn't by chance that the co-ops of the 1960s and 70s were called *wohngemeinschaften*. Both movements rejected parliamentary democracy as a ploy of the powers-that-be, and called for university reform, politicization of the student body, and new faculty. In the spirit of the national conservative thinkers like Carl Schmidt and Ernst Jünger, the student activists – and Dutschke foremost

among the ‘68ers — embraced the actionist strategy of inspiring revolutionary will power through direct action and struggle: A new consciousness – and ultimately a “new man” – would come about through participation in acts of violence.

Try as they did – and this is the crux of Aly’s argument – in the end the West German students (and he considers himself among them, often using the pronoun “we”) couldn’t escape their parents or their early socialization. Young Germans wanted desperately to break with the values of the World War II generation – with its anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, and authoritarian mindset–but, ultimately, they fell back into/onto/ the only categories they knew. Thus the same students who lit candles for the murdered American president John F. Kennedy could shout “USA-SS-SA,” comparing theU.S.to the Nazi regime, just a few years later. Unconsciously, they redirected their furor from its initial object, their parents, to the state, the Federal Republic, which Aly argues had already begun liberalizing reforms and a self-critical processing of the Nazi past. The children of mass murders found themselves paying homage to Mao Se-Tung, another mass murderer. ”Ho-Ho-Ho Chi Min” replaced ”Heil Hitler.” One of the few differences Aly notes between the two movements is that that of the ‘68ers failed, fortunately.

Whatever one’s opinion of it, the Aly book served to rekindle debate for the anniversary year by prompting a spate of reviews, published interviews, TV talk shows, and public panel discussions – some of which wound up addressing a number of highly relevant, and hitherto glossed over, issues. To begin with, more than one critic took the opportunity to call attention to the broad heterogeneity of the *studentenbewegung*. All too often, they argued, “the student movement” was spoken of as a homogenous entity or reduced to the SDS leadership when in fact it included a diverse spectrum of young people including liberals, social democrats, Catholics and Protestants, high school pupils, and even some non-students (like Joschka Fischer). Many of them didn’t belong to SDS at all and disagreed fundamentally with Dutschke and the SDS leadership.[28] It was pointed out that SDS never had more than 2500 members, just 10 percent of the nationwide student body, which itself was only five percent of young people of that age. And even within the Marxist-oriented SDS there was constant clashes and permanent discussion over almost every issue. *Berliner Zeitung* editor Harald Jähner argued: “Dutschke and Rabehl certainly thought of themselves as the avant guard of social transformation. In fact they were only secondary figures in the transformation process that we label ’68, and that included experimental film, provocative pop music, androgynous fashion, redefined sexual relations, the rejection of the Protestant work ethic, and the refusal to save money. Everywhere there were changes in the way people lived in western industrial societies. This reached much deeper into lifestyles and civilization than the rhetoric of a few political science students.”[29] The “we” that Aly refers to, several observers pointed out, was actually just the movement’s most radical elements, which Aly (as well as Koenen and Kraushaar), belonged to. Aly’s critique and self-criticism, it was noted, was welcome and overdue but it did not apply to the movement as a whole: Unfairly, critics like Aly and Koenen read the militancy of the seventies back into the student movement years and ignore the civic off-shoots of the *studentenbewegung*, like the NSM, which were far more relevant to the Federal Republic.

Only the conservative standard bearers in the media like the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt* expressed any sympathy for the comparison of the 1960s' students to those of the 1930s. As historian Norbert Frei documented in his contribution to the '68 commemoration[30] – filling a gap in the scholarship — the rebellious sixties was a thoroughly global phenomenon with counterparts in Asia, Latin America, North America, and on both sides of the Iron Curtain. How can the West Germans' protests against the Vietnam War and for university reform be traced back to the Nazis when young people in Paris, Prague, and Chicago took to the streets for the same reasons? Frei, among others, noted that the German students' foremost influences came via the U.S., from the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, the civil rights campaign, and the Marches on Washington, as well as popular culture.[31] More than one reviewer also criticized Aly's empirical evidence as superficial and formal: both German student movements may have wanted reforms and new faculty, and criticized liberalism, but this says nothing about the content of those demands: "Without content and functional differentiation everything remains in the in dark: murderers and surgeons both use knives,"[32] argued historian Rudolph Walther. In the same vein, others charged that the comparison of the 1930s student movement with that of the 1960s implicitly relativized the misdeeds of the Nazi-allied students, who constituted an important source of support and personnel for the regime. In the old Federal Republic, observed one critic, such a gaffe would have resulted in censure, not media stardom.[33]

Despite the thoughtful responses to Aly and the others, the legacy of '68 has definitely been dealt a blow at a time when the '68 generation itself is on the way out. The republic, it seems, has entered a conservative era that will last for some time, if past experience is any measure. The debate around '68 is just one indicator of this; it is also a resource that could serve to support a new conservatism. In terms of extraparliamentary movements, there is nothing comparable to those of the seventies and the negative '68 clichés are regularly used to discredit grassroots movements such as the anti-globalization group Attac. The achievements of the NSM are so underrepresented in the republic's collective memory that most young people today have no idea even who the internationally renowned peace activist Petra Kelly was. Interestingly, the Left Party (a merger of a handful of western German socialists and the followers of the reformed East German communist party) has picked up on '68 for its own purposes, even naming its youth organization "SDS." But the association of this dubious mixture of disenchanted radicals and former East German cadre with '68 serves only to undermine it further. The up-and-coming young generations of Greens and the Social Democrats, as well as extraparliamentary groups like Attac, seem to be searching for new sources of legitimacy and inspiration, ones that pertain more directly to their own experiences. One option is to sever ties with '68 and to throw in their lot with the conservatives by way of a vague consensus that skirts controversial issues like immigration, domestic intelligence gathering, and educational reform. (This is possible only because the aftershocks of '68 transformed the conservatives too, whether they admit it or not.) The Social Democrats are already in a ruling coalition with the Christian Democrats, who dominate the administration's agenda and are flying high in the polls. The Greens are shopping for new partners now that the red-green project is passé — and lacks majorities these days because of the SPD's weakness. In fact, there are Christian Democrat-Green (black-green) governments

inHamburgandFrankfurt, which seem to be working quite well. The journey of ’68 is not over with the fading of the ’68 generation, but its concerns are unlikely to have the same profile unless a new generation with an inspired and progressive vision steps up to fill its shoes. There is, however, none in sight.

Notes

[1] See Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[2] Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution*. *Kleine Politische Schriften VII* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/M. 1990), p. 26.

[3] Claus Leggewie, “erordnete Gründung—verfehlte Nachgründung—vertane Neugründung,” *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Geschichte*, 6 (1993), p. 698.

[4] *Der große Selbst-Betrug: Wie wir um unsere Zukunft gebracht werden* (Munich: Piper, 2007) p. 13.

[5] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977* (Ignatius Press, Ft. Collins, CO, 1998)

[6] Between 1969 and 1972, 300,000 new members joined the Social Democratic party (SPD).

[7] By the first 10-year anniversary of the student uprising neither the label of “’68” nor the concept of “’68 generation” had taken hold. Also, at the time 1967 was considered the pivotal year of the *studentenbewegung*, and not 1968. Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968: Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000), p. 256.

[8] The label was also used by British author Jillian Becker in her 1978 book on the RAF *Hitler’s Children*.

[9] Albrecht von Lucke *68 oder neues Biedermeier: Der Kampf um die Deutungsmacht*, (Wagenbach, Berlin 2008) pp. 30-32.

[10] Von Lucke, p. 35. The moniker of "68ers" also had the added benefit of drawing a parallel with the "48ers' of the liberal democratic revolution of 1848. Edgar Wolfrum, " "1968" in der gegenwaertigen deutschen Geschichtspolitik," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 22-23/2001, p. 31-32.

[11] Von Lucke, p. 36

[12] See Joschka Fischer's long *Tageszeitung* article in Paul Hockenos, *Joschka Fischer and the Making of the Berlin Republic: An Alternative History of Postwar Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 220.

[13] „Eine Generation der Gescheiterten," *Die Zeit*, 15/1993, p. 11.

[14] Merkel has made it clear that she does not see 1968 as a caesura in the history of the republic. In 2001 she said: "Our state, the Federal Republic of Germany, has been a free, socially minded, worldly republic continuously since 1949 and something that we can all be proud of." Wolfrum, p. 31.

[15] "Demokraten wider Willen," *Focus*, August 1, 2005.

[16] *So Macht Kommunismus Spass! Ulrike Meinhof, Klaus Rainer Röhl und die Akte Konkret* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2006).

[17] „Mit Molitow-Cocktails nie etwas zutun gehabt," *Der Spiegel*, January 18, 2001.

[18] (Trans.: The Red Decade: Our Little German Cultural Revolution, 1967-1977), Kiepenheuer & Witsch, Cologne 2001.

[19] *1968: Das Jahr, das alles verändert hat* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1998).

[20] (Trans.: The Bomb in the Jewish Community Center),Hamburg:Hamburg Edition, 2005.

[21] Wolfgang Kraushaar, Karin Wieland, Jan Philipp Reemtsma (Trans.: Rudi Dutschke Andreas Baader and the RAF)Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005.

[22] Tupamaros, also known as the MLN (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* or National Liberation Movement), was an urban guerrilla organization in Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s.

[23] *Rudi Dutschke*, p. 30

[24] Ibid, p. 50. During 2005 there was an extended discussion of the essay in the left liberal daily *Die Tageszeitung*. Most of the authors defended Dutschke.
[25] *The Telegraph*, "Sarkozy attacks 'immoral' heritage of 1968," 01/05/2007.

[26] See von Lucke; Peter Schneider, *Rebellion und Wahn. Mein '68: Mein '68. Eine autobiographische Erzählung* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch Verlag, Hamburg, 2008); Hajo Funke, *Das Otto-Suhr-Institut und der Schatten der Geschichte* (Verlag Hans Schiler,Berlin: 2008).

[27] Axel Schildt, "Wüten gegen die eigene Generation, *Die Zeit*, Feb. 21, 2008, No. 09.

[28] "In welcher K-Gruppe waren Sie denn?" Interview with Götz Aly and Katharina Rutschky in *Die Tageszeitung*, December 21, 2007.

[29] "Gehen wir abschlaffen," June 2, 2008.

[30] Norbert Frei, *1968: Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest* (DTV:Munich, 2008).

[31] „Blöde Lämmer, schwarze Schafe," *Jungle World*, 10/21/2008.

[32] Rudolph Walther, "Flucht aus der Empire," *Freitag,* March 7, 2008.

[33] Elmar Altvater, "Das 68er faszinsum," *Freitag*, February 15, 2008; Clemens Heni, *Blaetter fuer deutsche und internationale Politik*, 4/2008, pp. 48-49.

The Social Forum in Belem Do Para

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

As is known, the World Social Forum was created by an initiative of social movements in 2001, as a counterpiece to the World Economic Forum of Davos, a celebrated conference of the financial and political elites of the Western capitalist world. The WSF soon became an important planetary meeting place for popular movements – trade unions, peasant associations, women movements, ecological networks – NGO's, intellectuals and youth, united by their opposition to neo-liberalism – "The World is not a Commodity" – and their hopes for change : "Another World is Possible!". In reality, the Forum is only the most visible part of a larger current, the Global Justice Movement – *altermundialista* in Spanish or Portuguese – a world-wide "movement of movements" born in 1999 with the mass protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization. After several meetings in the southern Brazilian town of Porto Alegre, the WSF moved to Mumbai, then to Nairobi and now returned to Brazil, but this time in the Amazonian town of Belem, capital of the state of Para (territorially, several times bigger than France).

Unlike the meeting of Nairobi, which was a semi-failure, this one was very successful: 130 thousand participants, 2,400 workshops, and many interesting debates. Half of the delegates came from Belem and the state of Para, some 30% from other areas in Brazil, and some 20% from other countries, mainly Latin America and Europe; some Asiatic and African participants were able to come, in spite of the long distance and the expensive fares. Many of the delegates were youths and women, and there were, for the first time, several thousand indigenous people, from the Amazonian forest or the Andean mountains. In spite of the (terribly wet) heat, of the (torrential) tropical rains, and a lot of mud under the feet, the atmosphere was cheerful. The Forum took place on two campuses, the Federal and the Rural University of Para, which were supposed to be near, but it was almost impossible to move from the one to the other; the only practical way of communication was through small boats in the river – an tributary of the Amazonas – which took you from one campus to the other. The most important activities took place under huge tents in the Rural University, which were distant several kilometers from the entrance of the campus; fortunately, some « taxi-bicycles » were available for older people, like the author of these notes.

The most obvious feature of the Forum is its *diversity:* thousands of initiatives, from mass meetings against capitalism, to small workshops on Esperanto or free software. Obviously, the issue of the Amazon forest, and its inhabitants – indigenous communities, landless peasants – was central in the debates ; the first day of the meeting was a Pan-Amazonian Forum. Many issues were debated in other meetings and roundtables: the financial and economic crisis, the ecological crisis, the food crisis—and what emerged from these discussions was the idea of a common root for all these developments: a *crisis of civilization*, a crisis of industrial capitalism, of modern civilization. This thesis was developed by indigenous delegates, ecologists,

Marxists, and feminists, each through their own critical lens.

Personally, I took part as a speaker and listener on several initiatives concerning *ecosocialism*, one of them was a meeting under a huge tent attended by some 500 people. An international ecosocialist manifesto was distributed in Portuguese and English, and many people wanted to join the Brazilian ecosocialist network.

Five progressive Latin American presidents attended the Forum as invited guests: Luis Inacio Lula da Silva (Brazil), Hugo Chaves (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia), Fernando Lugo (Paraguay), Rafael Correa (Ecuador). Their participation obviously documented the social and political importance of the Forum. There was a common meeting with the five presidents attended by ten thousand people, and the next day, a meeting of the social movements with the four ones considered to be attuned to the anti-imperialist and anti-neo-liberal spirit of the event. These included the leaders mentioned above with the exception of Lula, who was seen as too moderate and too favorable to big business.

The spirit of the Belem World Social Forum was quite explicitly anti-capitalist, in a more obvious way than in the previous meetings. The strong leftist currents in Latin America and the world economic crisis produced a certain radicalization among the participants of the Forum. This was visible in the documents approved by the various thematic assemblies, which took place in the last day of the Forum, and in particular in the document presented by the assembly of social movements – Via Campesina, workers unions, Climate Justice, the World March of Women, etc – which says :

« We are confronted with a global crisis provoked by capitalism, which has no issue within this system. (…) This system is based on exploitation, brutal competition, the promotion of individual private interests against the collective ones, and the frenetic accumulation of riches by a handful of billionaires. It generates bloody wars, nourishes xenophobia, racism and religious fundamentalism ; it intensifies the oppression of women and increases the criminalization of social movements. (…) The process of social emancipation for the twenty-first century raised by the ecological, socialist and feminist projects wants to liberate society from the domination of capitalists over the means of production, communication and services, by supporting forms of property of social interest ».

The document of the social movements also called for an agenda of international mobilizations, in solidarity with Palestine (March 30), against NATO (April 4th), for Mother Earth and against the commodification of Life (October 12).

Obviously the Forum cannot substitute social movements, political parties or (leftist) governments; but it is a unique place where people of different origins and practices can exchange their experiences and learn from each other. It is a breeding ground for an international culture of resistance and struggle, for the discussion of practical propositions, and for the invention of utopias. The participants know that the Forum is not going to change the world nor bring down the powers that be, but they believe it may become a source of hope

and inspiration for all those, around the world, that search for radical alternatives ; in other words, become a small grain of sand in the gears of the System…

The Ruses of Reason

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Strategies of Exclusion

Are animals “bons à penser” (good to think [with])?1 According to French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, the answer to this question is positive. As is well-known, Levi-Strauss’s claim referred to the specific role played by animals in symbolic thought. But if one asked the same question in a more general sense, the answer could be very different. In Western culture, the role most often played by animals is that of negative term of comparison within a discourse directed at establishing human superiority. This very role can generate the suspicion that self-serving distortions may permeate claims and arguments, and that human thinking in general, and human ethical reflection in particular**,** may be at its weakest when nonhuman animals are the subjects. In fact, it was recently suggested that if one looks at our philosophical history, one finds that “admirable theorists, who have been giving scrupulous and impartial attention to other questions tend, when the animal issue heaves up its head, to throw the first argument which occurs to them and run”.2

The results of a survey of the claims advanced during the centuries with an eye to drawing a line between *Homo sapiens* and the members of other species – a line having to do with the rules as to “what can be used, eaten or killed, and what not”3, that is, with the arrangement of beings in the moral community – seem to confirm such harsh judgment. I have argued elsewhere that no conclusive argument can be advanced in defense of the attribution of an inferior basic moral status to intentional members of species other that our own.4 What is offered here is instead a sort of catalogue and critique of the problematic claims which accompany the course of our philosophical reflection and which have been advanced by authors from the most disparate schools and ages with the more or less avowed goal of excluding nonhumans from moral protection. Several of such claims were advanced with reference to some human beings: but in these cases too animals were involved as absent referents – that is, as beings whose treatment is appropriated as a metaphor for the treatment of other beings5 – and in fact the humans in question were “animalized” or “dehumanized”.

In what follows the arguments I am examining are grouped not by date or author, but by their defects.

Rejecting Evidence

The first category is that of plain falsehoods, or false statements. Obviously, false statements can be more or less easily refutable. Just to give an example, it is one thing to refute the statement that it is impossible for a woman to run faster than a man, and quite another to rebut the claim that a particular illness is caused by a particular virus. In view of this complicating factor, the occurrences of falsehood which are given center stage here are

confined to the less uncontroversial.

For instance, every sensible person thinks that rationalist philosopher René Descartes' claim that animals are mere natural automata, acting "mechanically, like a clock which tells the time better than our judgment does",6 is patently false – indeed, David Hume observed that "[n]ext to the ridicule of denying an evident truth, is that of taking much pains to defend it; and no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men. The arguments are in this case so obvious, that they never escape the most stupid and ignorant".7 Even the allegation that, if animals could speak, they could as easily communicate their thoughts to us as to their fellows, since they "have many organs which are allied to our own" is false, as we know that the capacity for producing consonants is, for physical reasons, the prerogative of very few vocal systems.8 But in the former "automata" case there were scholars who for decades saw the claim as worth defending, and in the latter a detailed scientific evidence wasn't as yet available. There is, however, a further statement by Descartes which can be questioned in the easiest way – that is, by merely by pointing to a single contrary instance. In the context of his attempt to show that, unlike humans, nonhumans are mere machines, Descartes states:

"For it is a very remarkable fact that there are no men so depraved and stupid, without even excepting idiots, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts".9

Unfortunately, the contrary instances here are – and have always been – many more than a single one. In the words of a German professor of Special Education, among severely intellectually disabled people, there are individuals who "[do] not respond to any stimuli in a perceptible way, [are] unable to take part in communication, and cannot react to other people or [their] surrounding at all".10 Descartes himself could not but be aware of this, as we know that in the seventeenth century small hospitals for the sick lodged lots of disabled people – among which them individuals with severe impairments – rejected by their families, and turned into targets for public amusement and ridicule.11 Nonetheless, the commitment to his implausible thesis of a radical dichotomy between ourselves and the other animals led him to reject evidence all around him.

Another impressive case of turning one's face away from reality is offered by Arthur Schopenhauer, the nineteenth century German author who is credited as an outspoken philosophical defender of animals, due to his attack on Kant's view of animals and to his advocating an extension of compassion beyond the boundary of the human species.12 In the context of his condemnation of cruelty to animals, Schopenhauer gets to the issue of the requirement of vegetarianism, and here is what he writes:

"For the rest, we may observe that compassion for sentient beings is not to carry us to the length of abstaining from flesh, like the Brahmans. This is because, by a natural law, capacity for pain keeps pace with the intelligence; consequently men, by going without animal food, especially in the North, would suffer more than beasts do through a quick death, which is

always unforeseen; although the latter ought to be made still easier by means of chloroform. Indeed without meat nourishment mankind would be quite unable to withstand the rigours of the Northern climate".

Quite apart from the alleged relation between "capacity for pain" and "intelligence", and from the biased balancing of human and nonhuman interests, the last sentence of this passage is amazing. Peter Singer tersely comments that Schopenhauer "gives no basis for [the] geographical distinction" between the regions where the Hindus live and the "Northern" regions.13 And we can add that already in Schopenhauer's time his claim could be easily belied, if not by good medical advice, by the fact that Great Britain harbored a significant vegetarian movement, which was starting to spread in other European countries.

The last instance of falsehood we shall mention is a little more peculiar, and this for two reasons. First, because the author in question, Claude Levi-Strauss, is, according to a custom we too have followed in the opening lines, usually classified as an anthropologist rather than as a philosopher, though he now also tends to be spoken of as one of the philosophical founders of structuralism, the approach according to which the elements of a set must be understood in terms of their relationship to the entire system. Second, because the involved claim is less directly falsifiable than the ones previously considered.14 While discussing at the end of the 1940's the relationship between nature and culture with an eye to the animal/human distinction, Levi-Strauss states:

"The social life of monkeys does not lend itself to the formulation of any norm. Whether faced by male or female, the living or the dead, the young or the old, a relative or a stranger, the monkey's behavior is surprisingly changeable. Not only is the behavior of a single subset inconsistent, but there is no regular pattern to be discerned in collective behavior".

Such a claim is particularly surprising. When Levi-Strauss wrote, the discipline of primatology was living through a period of rapid growth. Indeed, Levi-Strauss himself mentions some of the relevant literature. Since among the works cited there is Solly Zuckerman's famous book *The Social life of Monkeys and Apes*, we can directly entrust the rejoinder to Zuckerman, who, in a further edition of the volume thus refutes the Levi-Strauss's dismissive judgment at three different levels. First, he states that, far from being inconsistent, the behavior of monkeys and apes reveals a versatility which is "the expression of a clearly-defined dynamic as opposed to rigid pattern of social behavior". Then, he argues that the specific characteristics of nonhuman primate behavior are identical with certain features of the behavior of the primitive human group. And finally, and quite sensibly, he objects that if the behavior of "creatures from which we were evolved" had been as rigidly specialized as, e.g., the behavior of ants, it would have been impossible to conceive of a process leading towards humanity.15 (The reference to insects is especially interesting, and we shall come back to it.)

Replacing Arguments with Beliefs

In periods in which religious and philosophical reflection tended to overlap, such as, for

example, the Middle Ages one obviously finds a number of both direct and oblique appeals to authority, or, to use a term coined by Jeremy Bentham, "ipsedixitisms" (from the Latin "Ipse dixit", "He, himself, said it"). Ipsedixitisms are given as though no supporting argument is necessary, with the result that mere assertions are smuggled into arguments. For obvious reasons, their use is particularly frequent within defenses of discriminations, and this both in the nonhuman and in the intra-human case.

As far as nonhumans are concerned, good examples are offered by Christian authors. For example, in his *Summa Theologica* – a great theological work with philosophical ambitions written in the second half of the Thirteenth Century and revolving around a collection of disputations – Thomas Aquinas asks whether it might be "a sin to slay dumb animals and plants".16 And, though his negative reply is also supported by some arguments – which will be examined later – Aquinas makes in this context ample use of appeals to authority. Of course, he mentions the commandments of "God Himself": "Everything that moveth and liveth shall be meat to you" (Gn. 9:3), commenting that "[a]ccording to the Divine ordinance the life of animals and plants is preserved not for themselves but for man". But he also refers to Aristotles's dictum that "it is not unlawful if man use plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man" (Polit. i, 3) as well as to Augustine's statement that "by a most just ordinance of the Creator, both their life and their death [i.e., of animals and plants] are subject to our use" (De Civ. Dei i, 20). Thus, apart from God, the authority of both Greek philosophers and Christian authors are called upon to grant plausibility to a problematic ethical move.

Among the latter, the fourth century theologian Augustine of Hippo was certainly a good choice, as his work as well, as it is apparent from the quotation above, was embedded in appeals to authority in the form of appeals to "faith" – something that, despite any philosophical disguise, relies by definition on beliefs that do not rest on logic or evidence. And, against the background of the theological fights of the Fourth Century CE, such appeals were not only explicit – "And first Christ shows your abstention from killing animals… to be the greatest superstition"17 – but also more circuitous, as it is the case with the general view that God brings good out of evil, on the basis of which we are told that those who question the suffering of animals "have a perverted sense of values", since they do not understand that such suffering produces the greater good of making us recognize the striving for unity of the "lower living creatures" and, accordingly, the superior unity of God.18

In a sense, however, given the contexts and agendas of both Augustine and Aquinas, all this, though regrettable, is not wholly surprising. What is more surprising is instead that the long shadow of such an approach casts itself well over the Seventeenth Century, that is, the age of the scientific revolution. In fact, if there is a discourse most decidedly conditioned by a complex system of external, extra-philosophical, prohibitions and demands emanating from religious power, it is that of one of the founding father of modern philosophy, that is, once again, Rene Descartes. Indeed, starting from the famous passage in which he declares his commitment to adhere "constantly to the religion in which by God's grace, [he] had been instructed since [his] childhood",19 one can detect in Descartes' work a number of tributes to the dogmas of faith –

and this also with reference to the status of nonhuman beings. Consider e.g. the following excerpt:

“I have here enlarged a little on the subject of the soul, because it is one of the greatest importance. For next to the error of those who deny God, which I think I have already sufficiently refuted, there is none which is more effectual in leading feeble spirits from the straight path of virtue, than to imagine that the soul of the brute is of the same nature as our own; and that in consequence, after this life we have nothing to fear or to hope for, any more than the flies and ants”.20

Isn’t all this argument revolving around religious beliefs accepted as authoritative? Cannot one detect, looming in the background of such a passage, a veiled reference to the absolute degree of appeals to authority – that argument “by authority of the scepter” that occurs when, either implicitly or explicitly, a threat of force is made? A subject “of the greatest moment”, an error “already sufficiently refuted”, another error exceptionally “powerful in leading feeble minds astray from the straight path of virtue”…. Indeed, the threat of the Inquisition seems to hang over not only the reader, but the timid philosopher himself.21

Trifling with consistency

Falsehoods and ipsedixitisms are serious flaws for any philosophical position. Their very conspicuousness, however, makes them easily questionable. The situation is different with other, subtler defects. Among them are forms of inconsistency. The lower discernibility of inconsistencies, however, does not make them less serious faults. For it is clear that any position which implies mutually inconsistent claims, or is based on internally inconsistent arguments, is untenable.

And the history of discourse on nonhuman animals pullulates teems with inconsistencies. Quite apart from the recourse to appeals to authority, for example, Augustine’s treatment of the animal issue is characterized by a number of conflicting claims. On the one hand, commenting on the view that the killing of animals is wrong, Augustine maintains that “we see and appreciate from their cries that animals die with pain”.22 On the other, as we have seen,23 apropos of the problem represented in theodicy (the vindication of God’s justice in the face of the existence of evil) by the question of the suffering of the innocents, he grants animal pain a pedagogical value, insofar as, by commending the vigor of the animal soul, it points to the “ineffable unity of the Creator”. Then, he claims that, since a condemnation of the destruction of animals is the ridiculous outcome of a perception conditioned by our own mortality, we are commanded to make “an act of faith” rather than criticize the Creator’s masterpiece.24 Finally, with reference to the problem of the presence in animals of those labor pains he sees as the penalty for original sin, he observes that first, we don’t know what animals feel when they give birth – “do their sounds portend joyous song or grief?” – and second, that it is pointless to dwell on such a matter, for if animals don’t suffer labor pains, the problem doesn’t exist, and if they suffer them, the real punishment lies in the fact that humans must share with animals this condition, and such a punishment would be supremely unjust weren’t it caused by the original

sin.25 Thus, if one tries to recapitulate all this, one finds on the one hand that we see and appreciate that animals suffer, but also that we do not know whether their vocalizations portend pleasure or suffering; and on the other, that animal suffering is meant to make us aware of God's unity, but also that it can lead us astray, so that we must make an act of faith to avoid criticizing God's work. But this is not all. As it has been noticed,26 in the final discourse one can find something assimilable to the "kettle logic" recorded by Freud apropos of the man who, being charged with having damaged a borrowed kettle, retorted first, that he had given the kettle back undamaged, then, that the kettle was already defective; and finally, that he had never borrowed the kettle at all. To paraphrase Freud, so much the better: if only a single one of the different lines of defense were to be accepted, Augustine would feel safe.27

Another conspicuous example of inconsistency concerns a specific formulation of a deep-seated view about our treatment of animals which can be thus summarized: though animals, as mere means, are excluded from the moral community, there are limits to what can be done to them – limits that are dictated by the fact that our behavior towards animals can rebound upon our behavior towards the only true objects of moral concern, that is, other human beings. The most famous formulation is the one offered by Immanuel Kant, the primary proponent of deontological ethics**,** against the background of his ends/means doctrine – a doctrine whose general justification will not be challenged in this context,28 where the focus is only on its local application and internal coherence. In the *Lectures on Ethics*,29 Kant states:

"[S]o far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man. We can ask, 'Why do animals exist?' But to ask, 'Why does man exist?' is a meaningless question. Our duties toward animals are merely indirect duties toward humanity. Animal nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing our duties to animals in respect of manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity. Thus, if a dog has served his master long and faithfully, his service, on the analogy of human service, deserves reward, and when the dog has grown too old to serve, his master ought to keep him until he dies. Such action helps to support us in our duties towards human beings, where they are bounden duties".

If, with some effort, we forget about the irritating dogmatism of the claim that "to ask, 'Why does man exist?' is a meaningless question", what we are left with is: a) animals are mere means; b) accordingly, we have no direct duties towards them; c) however, animal nature has analogies to human nature; d) accordingly, we have duties towards animals that are in fact indirect duties towards humanity. But the question is: is the sense in which animal nature has analogies to human nature a morally relevant sense or not? If not, there is no ground for the fear that a certain kind of behavior could rebound upon the behavior towards the only beings that matter morally, namely, human beings. If, however, the answer is yes, then the risk of passing from cruelty towards nonhumans to cruelty towards humans arises from the fact that in the former case as well we violate direct duties. Kant, instead, contradictorily maintains that the analogies aren't morally relevant and that we must anyway fear a negative impact on our duties towards humanity.

Traditional ends/means doctrines of Kantian ascent are (in)famously discriminatory towards nonhuman beings. The contrary holds in the case of a different strand in moral philosophy – that is, utilitarianism. Starting at least from Jeremy Bentham, utilitarian philosophers have shown a strong tendency to grant moral consideration to animals, and John Stuart Mill is no exception. Indeed, he is even willing to employ the attitude towards animals as a test of the soundness of his doctrine: "Granted that any practice causes more pain to animals than it gives pleasure to man; is that practice moral or immoral? And if, exactly in proportion as human beings raise their heads out of the slough of selfishness, they do not with one voice answer 'immoral', let the morality of the principle of utility be forever condemned".30 And yet, the tendency to neglect the members of other species is so deep-rooted that, apropos of the issue, even Mill incurs inconsistency – in this case, inconsistency in the application of his own stated principles. In *On Liberty*, while discussing liberty in the religious sphere, Mill considers the possible objections to an extension of the prohibition against eating pork in force among Moslems to non-Moslems living in Islamic countries. After excluding the possibility of criticizing such extension as religious persecution, since "nobody's religion makes it a duty to eat pork", he states that the only tenable ground of condemnation would be "that with the personal tastes and self-regarding concerns of individuals the public has no business to interfere". This is a curious reply. For Mill seems not to notice that what he is considering is a situation covered by his harm principle – "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his [sic] will, is to prevent harm to others" – insofar as it inherently revolves around the violation of some interests, namely, the interests of the pig (or "pork"). How, then, can he imply that we are merely dealing with the "personal tastes and self-regarding concerns of the individuals"? Clearly, he can do so only because, in patent contradiction with his so powerfully avowed stance, he does not really rank nonhuman beings among the "others" with whose protection the public as the right to interfere.31

Muddling Things up

Because the validity of deductive arguments depends on their form, formal fallacies – deductive arguments that have an invalid form – are fallacies par excellence. There are, however, modes of reasoning whose flaw is not in the form of the argument – modes that have been classified as informal fallacies. Since Aristotle, informal fallacies have been ranked in several categories. Prominent among them are the fallacies ensuing from ambiguities. An ambiguity results when the same term is employed with different meanings – for instance when, in a syllogism, the middle term is used in one sense in the major and in another in the minor premise, so that in fact there are not three, but four terms ("All heavy things have a great mass; This is heavy fog; therefore this fog has a great mass").

A flagrant example of this fallacy can be seen in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles*.32 Aquinas is rejecting the view that "dumb animals" have an immortal soul, and, after alleging that in animal souls "we find no activity higher than the activities of the sentient part", he states:

“Every form separated from matter is actually understood. Thus the active intellect makes impressions actually understood, inasmuch as it abstracts them. But if the soul of a dumb animal remains after the body is gone, it will be a form separated from matter. Therefore it will be form actually understood. But ‘in things separated from matter understanding and understood are the same’ (*De Anima*, III, iv, 13). Therefore the soul of a dumb animal will have understanding, which is impossible”.

According to a famous list of stratagems, this line of reasoning could be classified as a the trick “to extend a proposition to something which has little or nothing in common with the matter in question but the similarity of the word; then to refute it triumphantly”.33 Actually, what is here used in two senses is not a word, but a phrase, “separated from matter”, but the result is the same, so much so that even the nineteenth century Jesuit Joseph Rickaby, a resolute opponent of the idea of animal rights, cannot fail to notice the fallacy. We can give the floor to him: “The term ‘separated from matter’ is here used in two senses — (a) of a logical separation by abstraction, *logô*; (b) of a real separation in nature, *phusei*. Aristotle’s saying means that the universal, as such, exists only in mind. But the departed soul of a bear, if it be at all, is not a universal”.34 In other words, Aquinas reaches the desired conclusion only by taking profit of an homonymy, that is, by making recourse to two notions that are covered by the same word.

And, regrettably enough, one might say the same of a crucial passage in the very David Hume who, from an empiricist standpoint, so emphatically defended the idea that nonhumans are “endow’d with thought and reason as well as men”. In his seminal *Inquiry into the Principles of Morals*, Hume, after claiming that justice is an “artificial virtue”, envisages the circumstances of justice, that is, those conditions in whose absence justice would be useless. John Rawls, who accepts Hume’s characterization of such circumstances, summarizes them under three headings: moderate scarcity, moderate selfishness, and relative equality. As for the first two, Hume’s argument is plain enough: if there was a superabundance of resources, or unlimited altruism, then there would be no need for rules of justice, since there would be no threat of justice. What interests us here, however, is the third circumstance. Hume illustrates it in this way:

“Were there a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment… [o]ur intercourse with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality; but absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other… And as no inconvenience ever results from the exercise of a power, so firmly established in nature, the restraints of justice and property, being totally *useless*, would never have place in so unequal a confederacy”.35

Immediately after, Hume adds: “This is plainly the situation of men, with regard to animals”. But something seems to have gone wrong here. For though Hume states that the absence of *any* of the three circumstances of justice would make justice “useless”, it is evident that the meaning of the term is not the same in all instances. In fact, if in the case of the first two

conditions (moderate scarcity and moderate selfishness) “useless” means something like “pointless”, in the case of the third condition the situation is very different. Here, the absence of relative equality would not remove the threat of injustice – on the contrary, the threat of injustice if anything would be exacerbated in situations of gross inequality of power. Hence the claim that justice would be “useless” in this context turns out to be a claim about the difficulty of ensuring compliance with justice: the real problem is that in the absence of relative equality, respecting the rules of justice provides no advantage to the stronger party, who can act unjustly with impunity, so that pronouncing principles of justice is likely to be in vain. So, thanks to ambiguity in the use of a term – “useless” – the sinister idea that justice ceases to be relevant just in those conditions of extreme inequality in power which make it especially significant can surreptitiously be introduced eluding critical analysis.36 In fact, Hume himself seems embarrassed by the implications of his argument’s contractarian overtones, since, after excluding on the basis of it nonhuman beings from the sphere of justice, he hastens to clarify that the same does not hold in the case of human beings: for on the one hand, the great superiority of Europeans above native peoples merely “tempted us to imagine ourselves on the same footing with regard to them”, and on the other, women, though in many nations reduced to semi-slavery, are “commonly able to break the confederacy [of men], and share with the other sex in all the rights and privileges of society”. Indeed, fallacies can be sneaky, but, like the repressed, they often obliquely resurface.

And, apropos of trickiness, there is a peculiar subform of ambiguity that is worth considering before leaving the realm of these fallacies –equivocation. An equivocation arises when things or facts of one kind are presented as if they belonged to another, and often takes the form of a category mistake, or of the confusion between different realms.

We mentioned before that Aquinas’ attempt to exclude nonhuman animals from the prohibition of killing is not based only on appeals to authority, but also recurs to purportedly rational discourse. It is just in this context that the medieval theologian offers a significant instance of equivocation:

“I answer that, There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. Now the order of things is such that the imperfect are for the perfect, even as in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection. Hence it is that just as in the generation of a man there is first a living thing, then an animal, and lastly a man, so too things, like the plants, which merely have life, are all alike for animals, and all animals are for man. Wherefore it is not unlawful if man use plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man…”.37

What is the argument here? Apparently, what Aquinas says is the following: a) it is not wrong to use a thing for the purpose for which it is; b) in the “order of things” the imperfect are for the perfect; c) this is shown by the process of generation, which proceeds from imperfection to perfection- e.g., in the generation of humans there is first a living thing, then an animal, and lastly a human being; d) analogously, plants, which merely have life, are for animals, and animals are for humans; e) accordingly, it is not wrong for humans to use plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of humans. Quite apart from any consideration about the

teleological and hierarchical metaphysical framework, it is clear that the argument does not stand up to scrutiny. For Aquinas makes a parallel between two strings located at two different levels: one that is made up of different phases undergone by the same substrate – namely, an individual being; and another that is composed of different kinds of beings. This implies that no straightforward transition such as the one required by the argument is possible between the strings. By equivocating between the two levels, however, Aquinas smuggles in the desired conclusion.

Stacking the Deck

If, as is the case here, what one is dealing with is the defense of a preconceived view, it is only to be expected that the more general bias gives rise to specific forms of partiality. And in fact, one-sided cases loom large in the literature. One-sided thinking tends to choose data favoring its pre-established conclusion, and to ignore or downplay the evidence against it. One-sidedness can obviously take various forms. Here, we shall consider the practice of slanting, that is, of ignoring the counterevidence and choosing examples that help ensuring the desired result; and the politics of oversimplification, that is, the tendency to cover up relevant complexities and making intricate issues appear to be simpler than they actually are.

Edmund Husserl, one of the founders of the phenomenological method, paid some attention to nonhuman beings. Since phenomenology is the study of the structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view, the question of the specific perspective of the members of other species – pace Descartes – naturally arises. And in fact, Husserl grants nonhumans a psyche – that is, a unity of sense, indicating itself through its features . However, he does not cross the Rubicon line that separates "nature" (i.e. animals) from "culture" (i.e. humans). On his view, as has been observed,38 the individuality of an animal is at best only a natural individuality, for the psychic character of an animal "is not an *individual* one in the strong sense of the word, because the psyche is constituted only through *typical* features and properties". Thus, we find Husserl claiming that each generation of animals reiterates what is typical of the species; that the know-how of animals is merely instinctive; that animals do not learn from experience; and that "their conscience does not achieve the knowledge of a world which includes things that subsist and persist in time".39 In this case as well, however, we shall avoid confronting such specific (and certainly not new!) claims in themselves, in order to focus on a more general aspect of Husserl's line of reasoning. For, apart from the theoretical framework, such claims have an empirical facet that needs support. And indeed, Husserl offers some such support. But what are the nonhuman beings to whom he points to? They are the bees: "A bee does not act", Husserl states. That is to say, the example he chooses comes from the realm of insects – a realm whose inhabitants are, from an evolutionary perspective, among the most removed from human beings. We are vertebrates, mammals and primates; bees are invertebrates, arthropods and hymenoptera. Whatever the cognitive skills of the hymenoptera might be, it is certainly a form of one-sidedness to compare them directly with human beings, in order to emphasize the higher worth of the latter. Insects have totally different brains, nervous systems, anatomies and forms of reproduction; they have different forms of life. Is it by chance that Husserl does not consider apes, or monkeys, or other mammals? Might not this be

because it would become much more difficult for him to claim that “animals” are not “*individual*s in the strong sense of the word”?

That the answer to the latter question might be positive is shown by another, closely connected, example. For, in the same period when Husserl made these observations, that is, around 1930, another German philosopher who had been Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger, was delivering a series of lectures on “The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics”. According to Heidegger, who vastly influenced twentieth century philosophy, Western philosophical tradition has been mistaken in defining human beings as “rational animals”, since this would suggest that between humans and nonhumans there are differences in degree, while these two “determinations of essence” are separated by “an abyss… which cannot be bridged by any mediation whatsoever”.40 And this is what Heidegger states to substantiate his claims:

“The bee, for example, has its [*sic* in translation] hive, its cells, the blossoms it seeks out, and the other bees of the swarm. The bee’s world is limited to a specific domain and is strictly circumscribed”.

And, though tentatively adding that “this is also true of the world of the frog, the world of the chaffinch and so on”, it is just on the bee that he expands:

“The worker bee is familiar with the blossoms it frequents… but it does not know the stamens of these blossoms *as* stamens, it knows nothing about the roots of the plant and it cannot know anything about the number of stamens or leaves, for example.41

For Heidegger, what is in question here is a structural inability: the animal (the bee) is “world-poor” because he does not even have the possibility of knowing such phenomena, while the human being is “world forming” insofar as it can not only know but also extend and penetrate “everything that he relates to”. In order to stress the absence in the bees of any recognition of both presence and absence, Heidegger mentions an experiment. He states that, after placing a bee before a bowl filled with honey, “it has been observed that if its abdomen is carefully cut away while it is sucking, [the] bee will simply carry on regardless even while the honey runs … from behind”.42 Such disquieting passage, by showing[how does it show this? not clear to me] that Heidegger had absolutely no interest in animals in and for themselves, points to the question of his real agenda in investigating them – an agenda he does not conceal, and even openly declares:

“Of all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures, because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely akin to us, and on the other they are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss”43.

Animals do represent a challenge for the preconceived view of the absolute uniqueness of human beings, and it is therefore advisable to selectively focus on bees and to ignore as far as possible such threatening beings as the apes – those very apes of whom, when forced to reckon with them, Heidegger will dogmatically,44 and once again absurdly, state that they “have organs that can grasp, but… do not have hands”.45

Yet, focusing on examples that favor the desired outcome and understating the contrary ones isn't the only available strategy in case of biased perspectives. There is also, as we mentioned, the possibility of oversimplifying. And it is just one of Heidegger's philosophical interlocutors, the French existentialist author Jean-Paul Sartre, who offers the best example of such policy. Sartre thus presents his view of humanism: "[I]f God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man."46 And how does Sartre illustrate his view? First, he states that, if one considers an article of manufacture as a paper-knife, one sees that it has been made by an artisan who had in mind a definite conception of it. Then he suggests that, according to traditional Western doctrine, either the conception of man (sic) in God's mind is comparable to that of the paper-knife in the artisan's mind, or, if God has been suppressed, each man is a particular example of a universal conception – the "conception of Man". Finally, he opposes to this perspective in which the essence of man precedes his historic existence the existentialist idea that "man" first of all exists, and only afterwards defines himself – that he is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. This is his conclusion: "But what do we mean to say by this, but that man is of a greater dignity than a stone or a table?". A paper-knife, a stone, a table… Even Mary Warnock, who devotes much attention to Sartre's thinking, cannot but observe that the example of the paper-knife "is in fact unfair", and that the mentioned contrast would be rather more difficult to draw if Sartre "took an animal instead of a paperknife as an example".47 Yet, the word "animal" nowhere appears in the text, and that uniqueness of human beings that directly turns to the detriment of nonhumans is built on a comparison with inanimate things.

Philosophy Gone Wild

Richard Sorabji notices that attempts to draw the human-nonhuman dividing line have included among others "debates over whether animals know God, have speech, laughter, foresight with an associated knowledge of causes, preparation, memory, emotion, universals, or concepts; and also over whether they can distinguish good and bad, just and unjust, expedient and inexpedient, can be happy, can achieve technical knowledge, are political, can count, do geometry, are born defenseless and naked, have a sense of rhythm, no shame, have a face, something which shows emotion and character, engage in sex at all seasons, with their own sex or with other species".48 Then, speaking of the Stoic doctrine, he summarizes in a single, withering sentence the shared and undeclared goal of this deluge of considerations: "They lack syntax, so we can eat them".49

Is this (enthymematic) syllogism absurd? It seems so. But what exactly do we mean by absurdity? This is a tricky matter. It is difficult not to be aware of the role that traditional cultural imprinting and prejudice can play in defining something as absurd. Indeed, just to give an example amongst many concerning the question of nonhuman beings, English writer Roger Scruton has stated that "it is absurd to assign rights to animals".50 In this light, any charge of absurdity would obviously stand in need of strong theory-based support. However, what shall be involved here is not purely theoretical absurdity, let alone existential absurdity, but rather that ordinary sense of "absurdity" which verges on "incongruity" and has to do with the

etymology of “absurd” (from Latin absurdus, discordant, out of tune), focusing on claims that appear particularly dissonant in their specific discursive context.

A good introduction is offered by the libertarian political philosopher Robert Nozick.51 Since Nozick’s aim is to refute the so-called “argument of marginal cases”, according to which equal ethical consideration is owed to nonhuman and human beings at the same mental level due to the moral irrelevancy of mere species membership, his starting point is the question: “How can someone’s merely being a member of the same species be a reason to treat him in certain ways when he [i.e., a severely intellectually disabled human] so patently lacks those very capacities?” Nozick admits that “this does present a puzzle”. However, he is not prepared to abandon the standard view that all members of our species morally matter more than all members of other species. Therefore, after reflection, he concludes that “[n]othing much… should be inferred from our not presently having a theory of the moral importance of species membership that no one has spent much time trying to formulate because the issue hasn’t seemed pressing”. Here, then, is a philosopher who, confronting an intellectual challenge, admits that he has no reply but claims that it doesn’t matter, since the reason is that nobody has tried hard enough to come up with such a reply. If one thinks that an essential feature of philosophy is the endeavor to offer rational answers to hard questions, Nozick’s way of proceeding sounds surprisingly incongruous.

More often, however, incongruity concerns content rather than procedure. Some absurd claims refer to animal “nature” and shape. The Hellenistic philosophical school of Stoicism, for example, is famous for its dismissal of animals. In the first century BCE, Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero52 puts into the mouth of the Stoic participant in a philosophical dialogue the claim that the necks of oxen “were naturally made for the yoke, and their strong broad shoulders to draw the plough”; and less than two centuries [later], Epictetus, a main representative of the last phase of the school, produces this variation on the theme: “For the ass, I suppose… [exists] because we had need of a back which is able to bear something; and in truth we had need also of his being able to walk..”.53 Even such claims, however, are nothing if compared to the opinion of Chrysippus, one of the founders of Stoicism, who, according to Porphyry, had asserted that the animate nature or soul of the pig functions like salt, preserving the tasty meat until it is ready to be eaten by humans.54

Less coarse, but equally striking, are some statements on animal life and animal death. Not surprisingly, in the wake of Descartes, the most incongruent claims about animal life can be found in French literature. Two examples can suffice. Towards the end of the Seventeenth century, Cartesian philosopher Nicolas Malebranche55 offers this description of nonhuman beings: “They eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing it; they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing; and if they act in a manner that demonstrates intelligence it is because God, having made them in order to preserve them, made their bodies in such a way that they mechanically avoid what is capable of destroying them.” And only sixty years ago French essayist Georges Bataille abandons mechanistic fixations only to lyrically state that “every animal is *in the world like water in water*.”56 adding that, when one animal eats another, there is “never anything between them except that quantitative difference. The lion is

not the king of the beasts: in the movement of the waters he is only a higher wave overturning the other, weaker ones".57

Curiously enough, on the other hand, it is instead to German authors that we owe the most paradoxical approach to nonhumans' death – that is, the idea that animals do not really die. What can it mean to say that a nonhuman being doesn't really die? There is, first, a commonsensical reading of the claim that is, obviously, the most improbable. Yet, there was at least one philosopher who propounded it – namely, Malebranche's contemporary Gottfried Leibniz. In a letter dating to 1678, Leibniz, having considered the possibility that there was "some incorporeal substance in beasts which is called a sentient soul", stated that in such a case not only should he provide for a place for these souls after death, but also, should condemn the eating of animals and "the tyranny which men exercise against them".58 Some years later, however, he had found a way out. This is the solution he advanced:

[All] this made me judge that there is only one reasonable view to take – namely, the conservation not only of the soul, but also of the animal itself and its organic machine… [N]o one can specify the true time of death, which for a long time may pass for a simple suspension of noticeable actions, and is basically never anything else in simple animals – witness the resuscitations of drowned flies buried under pulverized chalk…And since there is no first birth or entirely new generation of an animal, it follows that there will not be any final extinction.. Animals are not born and do not die.59

And two years before his death he confirmed and even expanded his thesis:

"Thus, abandoning their mask or their tattered dress, [animals] merely return to a smaller stage… [A]nimals cannot be generated and cannot perish. they are only unfolded, enfolded, reclothed, unclothed and transformed".60

Isn't such a perspective as harsh as the Cartesian doctrine? One element confirms the parallelism: as in Descartes' case, very sensible worries loom through the absurdity of the claims in question – worries that surface when, before exposing his solution, Leibniz emphatically dissociates himself from the view that animal souls "pass from body to body".61 For what does this evoke but the dreaded ghost of the heretical doctrine of metempsychosis, with its attending dreadful chastisements?62

On the other hand, there is the possibility of a more theoretical construal of the view that animals do not die. One example is offered by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the nineteenth century philosopher whose grand speculative synthesis is dominated by the ideal figure of a macrosubject – Spirit – which assumes the shape of human individuals. There has been some discussion about whether the notion of death is central to Hegel's philosophy, but, whatever the solution to this dispute, for Hegel the only death deserving the name is that of self-conscious beings, which he equates with human beings. For on the one hand human death is ascribed to the *spiritual* order, which has the "element of death in itself as belonging to its essence",63 by means of the idea that in self-consciousness fear of death is related to

universality via the experience of absolute negativity;64 and on the other, nonhuman "death" is ascribed to that *natural* order which is dominated by "the disparity between finitude and universality", and is therefore seen as nothing other than a "finishing", an "immediate passing away".65 Quite consistently with this, Hegel, while distinguishing the person ("the will which exists for itself") from mere living organisms also states: "[A]s a person…I have organs and life only so far as I will. The animal cannot mutilate or kill itself, but a human being can".66 It is apparent that what is at stake here is a stipulative notion of death. But can there be a stipulative notion of death? Admittedly, there are in the field of bioethics discussions about new criteria for death – e.g. criteria based on brain functions rather than on vital functions – but certainly they do not hinge on the incongruous possibility that the death of some individuals is less of a death than the one of other individuals.

Hegel, however, is not alone in defending such a view. Analogously stipulative is in fact the notion of death employed by Martin Heidegger, unsurprisingly the philosopher whose dismissal of animal death is most dramatic. Coherently with his view that an unbridgeable gulf separates humans and nonhumans, Heidegger draws a sharp distinction between biological death as a natural phenomenon that is appropriate to animals – beings that are "merely living" – and the "death proper" which pertains to Dasein, or "There-being", the term by which he denotes the human being. In fact, though the meaning of such term is meant to underline, contra the Cartesian tradition of the disembodied cogito, the intrinsic "being-in-the-world" of the human subject, what then prevails in Heidegger's portrayal of humans is the more conventional stress on cognitive abilities, in the form of a characterization of Dasein as an entity capable of an understanding of Being, and accordingly of experiencing beings "as such". All this while nonhumans, though not trivially seen as governed by mechanical behavior, are, as we already stressed, conventionally characterized as fully instinctual beings, forever lost in a "captivation" to which the access to the "as such" is barred.67 Thus, we read Heidegger stating, e.g., that"[t]o die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies. The animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it";68 and also that "Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so".69 Apropos of such claims – as well as of Hegel's ones – nothing seems more appropriate than a remark made by Elisabeth de Fontenay apropos of the refusal of death to animals: "*Et voilà*! The trick, if one can say so, is played: this huge metaphysical machinery… had the goal to grant human beings the power of life and death on animals… I can put the animal to death according to the whims of my needs and fancies, since he doesn't die, he can merely finish. It was essential to carry this bloody tautology speculatively to its term".70

The morals of the story

Having reached the end of this survey, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the faults of our behavior towards nonhuman animals have deeply affected, and infected, our capacity for moral reflection. There is, however, a conclusive oddity that deserves mention. Central to much Western thinking is the idea that the worth of human beings is connected with, in the words of a contemporary Kantian author,71 "the capacity for normative self-government", or the capacity to generate and follow moral norms. The view that only beings who are moral agents

are worthy of respect is in fact so pervasive as to be almost uncritically accepted. But, as it has been suggested, it suffices to make explicit the reasoning behind it to make evident its perverse character. For, in such context, the characteristic to be valued is a capacity to recognize that there are other points of view than ours, and the conclusion is that our interests should automatically override the demands of all other entities. In other words: “we are absolutely better than the animals because we are able to give their interests some consideration: so we won’t”.72 This paradox well recapitulates an entire, deplorable history of inane and self-serving ruses.

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20. René Descartes, "Discourse on Method", cit., part V, p. 36.

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23. Augustine, *On Free Will*, Book III, 3.23.

24. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XII, chapt. 4.

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Repression, Egypt-Style

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

February 18th marked a historic day for supporters of democratic reform in the Middle East. Egyptian democracy activist and reformist politician Ayman Nour, in prison since 2005 on flimsy charges of forging petition signatures to establish his *El Ghad* (Tomorrow) Party, was unexpectedly released. Citing health reasons, the Egyptian government gave no further explanation for Nour's sudden release, to the extent that Nour himself had no idea of his pardon until a car arrived at the prison to take him home. Nour's pardon may not be terribly meaningful politically, as he is now barred from running for political office given his incarceration. Still, Nour's release is a breath of fresh air given Egypt's current record.

To understand the true significance of Nour's release, though, one must first take a sober look at the Egyptian political landscape over the past several years. Sadly, it is anything but encouraging.

Bush's "Freedom Agenda" in the Middle East

For all the George W. Bush administration's mistakes in the Middle East, it did get one thing right in its declaration of a "freedom agenda" in the region, promising to retire the de rigueur US policy of supporting autocrats in the Middle East in the name of stability. As Condoleezza Rice declared in Cairo in 2005: "For 60 years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in the region, here in the Middle East and we achieved neither."[1] She added, "Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people,"[2] concluding that "it is time to abandon the excuses that are made to avoid the hard work of democracy."[3]

This simple speech—long overdue—demonstrated a serious show of political will by the United States, which in turn catalyzed a revival of political activism in Egypt. Talk of the "Arab spring" seemed to materialize in the form of the first ever multi-candidate presidential elections in Egypt. Indeed, democratic reform in Egypt seemed to be gaining momentum in both governmental and non-governmental circles, as Mubarak pledged to undertake measures to widen the space for political competition and embrace human rights in the form of eliminating the emergency law. There was much promise in the air.

Unfortunately, Arab democrats were let down after the US haphazardly did an about-face following regional elections in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq, which all indicated a significant level of popularity of Islamists; Islamist popularity in the region made rapid democratic reform too risky a proposition for the U.S. And so, Bush's commitment to freedom in the Middle East—ostensibly lukewarm in the first place—was functionally abandoned altogether, in the name of a myopic commitment to "stability." The Egyptian regime quickly capitalized on the shelving of Bush's freedom agenda, by amplifying its repressive agenda to unprecedented

levels.

New Levels of Repression

A brief overview of Egypt's human rights record this past year alone reveals regression on several fronts. The so-called Emergency Law that suspends several basic constitutional protections was again extended in May 2008 for another two years, despite promises made by Mubarak during his 2005 presidential campaign to repeal it. This year also witnessed heightened legislative efforts for media control and restriction as the Arab League, under the leadership of the Egyptian Minister of Information, promulgated a document "regulating" TV, radio, and satellite media. This charter is now accompanied by a parallel Egyptian draft law regulating audio, visual, and electronic media, the substance of which is reminiscent of an Orwellian novel.

Dozens of torture cases were documented in 2008, including several resulting in fatalities, particularly for those arrested in the aftermath of the April 6 national strike and the labor protest in the city of al Mahalla.[4] The picture on torture becomes even grimmer when one accounts for the fact that most torture cases go unreported and undetected and that torturers largely go unpunished except in a few noted highly publicized cases, thanks largely to the courage of individual bloggers who put their security on the line to expose these abuses.

Security abuses are on the rise and the independent media, previously a watchdog on many abuses, is coming under increasing attack, manifested in draconian, politically motivated prosecutions of independent journalists. Constitutional amendments in 2005 and 2007, putatively aimed at widening the political space, have in effect consolidated the reality of the one-party system while threatening the independence of the judiciary.

Recently, there have been trends undermining the independence of the judiciary, as emergency laws continue to undermine this historically respected institution notably through 3 disturbing trends: the imposition of "administrative" detention orders which supersede normal court decisions, politically motivated trials of civilians in military courts, and 'Hisba' lawsuits (historically traditional tools of Islamic jurisprudence meant to enhance civic participation), brought mostly by ruling NDP affiliates and abused to settle political scores against dissidents, writers and intellectuals.[5]

To use perhaps the most comical example of Hisba legislation, one only need look to the case of Ibrahim Eissa, editor of the independent Cairo newspaper *Al-Dustur*, who last year was sentenced to six months in prison for printing stories questioning the health of the Egyptian president. According to the Hisba lawsuit against him, his reporting could potentially destabilize the entire Egyptian economy, should anyone think that President Mubarak is feeble enough to have any health problems.[6] Eissa's case is particularly silly, but nonetheless wholly consistent with the Egyptian regime's insidious campaign to silence critics using ambiguous Hisba legislation, which was originally designed to encourage civic engagement in classical Islamic jurisprudence, but which has now enabled NDP loyalists—not elected officials,

but private citizens with a political axe to grind—to spearhead defamation lawsuits to stifle perfectly legitimate criticism of the Egyptian regime.

In this climate of political repression, it goes without saying that dissent in Egypt isn't taken particularly well. As such, brave Egyptians who dared to challenge the zeitgeist were generally disposed of in relatively short order.

Crackdown on Political Dissidents

Ayman Nour was not the sole target of Mubarak's repression campaign. Viable opposition to Mubarak's rule continues to be sequestered, most notably in the case of Egyptian democracy advocate Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim.[7] A long-time thorn in the side of the Egyptian regime, Dr. Ibrahim is no stranger to state persecution, having been incarcerated in 2000 for allegedly defaming Egypt through his contentious research. An international outcry in the aftermath of his trial finally led to the Egyptian regime's acquiescence, with the Egyptian High Court exonerating him of all charges in 2003. Unfortunately, this was not the end of Dr. Ibrahim's troubles. Following a July 2007 meeting with President Bush in Prague, in which Dr. Ibrahim rightfully urged the President to condition Egypt's immense aid package ($1.7 billion per year) on tangible democratic reforms, he reappeared on the NDP radar. In response to his August 2007 op-ed column in the Washington Post criticizing Egypt's unchecked repression,[8] Ibrahim was sentenced on August 2, 2008, in absentia, to two years hard labor for "harming Egypt's image abroad."[9] Ibrahim has been in exile from Egypt since 2007, fearing immediate incarceration should he return.

Dr. Ibrahim is perhaps the most celebrated Egyptian dissident, but otherwise benign protestors have equally faced the wrath of the Egyptian regime in recent months.

Open Season on Gaza Activists—Foreign or Domestic

In the aftermath of the Israeli assault on Gaza in January, the Egyptian regime has insisted on keeping the Rafah border crossing into Gaza closed, arguing that it would only open the border once an EU presence could help establish a buffer there, per a 2005 agreement with Israel. Consequently, medical supplies and other humanitarian necessities have been largely unable to make their way into Gaza, which in the eyes of many makes Egypt complicit in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians. Yet the Egyptian government unhesitatingly persisted in its decision to keep the border hermetically sealed, both to keep US military aid flowing and to avoid "insurrectionary spillover" – in other words, armed Palestinians organizing in Egypt. Keeping in mind that Hamas was originally a splinter group of the Egyptian *Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood), the Egyptian government is particularly wary of a Hamas influence in Egypt, as it could potentially stoke radical tendencies among the indigenous *Ikhwan*.

It should come as no surprise, then, that supporters of Gaza, furious with Israel's January raid, would make the Egyptian regime an object of their animosity. The case of Philip Rizk, a German-Egyptian filmmaker and Gaza activist, is a testament to that frustration, and conversely to Egypt's repressive campaign against political dissidents. After spending two

years living and working in Gaza, Philip produced a short documentary film titled “This Palestinian Life,”[10] which succinctly presented a lucid yet unexaggerated account of non-violent resistance by everyday Palestinians, and did the unthinkable by humanizing those embroiled in this contentious and hotly debated conflict. An avant-garde filmmaker, indeed, with a deeply personal stake in the situation in Gaza.

In response to Israeli military operations, Philip spearheaded a non-violent demonstration in support of Gaza on February 6. He, along with fourteen other activists, marched from Cairo to the neighboring governorate of Qalyubiyya draped in Palestinian flags. Photographs from the protest show Philip holding a sign reading, “Al-Kayl qad tafah, iftahu ma’bar Rafah!” which loosely translates as, “Enough is Enough! Open the Rafah border crossing!” Philip and his cadre must have figured that an utterly benign protest in a relatively obscure governorate wouldn’t be considered horribly contentious to the authorities. Sadly, they were sorely mistaken.

Following the march to Qalyubiyya, Egyptian state security personnel arrived on the scene and, after interrogating the protestors involved, haphazardly singled out Philip for questioning. Shortly thereafter, Philip was forcibly corralled into an unlicensed white Suzuki microbus and herded off to an undisclosed location, in what amounted to a bona fide state-administered kidnapping. For days, his whereabouts remained a mystery, without so much as a basic explanation from the Egyptian authorities for his abduction.[11]

Thankfully the international community quickly responded, and under the pressure of daily protests at the American University in Cairo and elsewhere, the Egyptian regime acquiesced and released him on February 11. Still, the fact remains that Philip was arbitrarily abducted, with no right to due process whatever, simply for demonstrating non-violent support for Gaza. His possession of an auxiliary passport (Philip carries dual German and Egyptian citizenship), normally considered a guarantee of immunity from the worst excesses of Egyptian police brutality, proved to be inadequate protection in this case.[12] Moreover, despite Philip’s release, several other supporters of Gaza remain in state custody. Shortly following Philip’s abduction, Egyptian authorities arrested an Egyptian blogger sympathetic to Palestinians, one Diaeddin Gad, who like Philip expressed indignation at Egypt’s policy towards the Rafah border. Gad’s whereabouts as of this writing remain unknown.[13]

Moreover, while activists like Gad continue to languish in prison, a stadium full of humanitarian and medical supplies in Egyptian custody donated from abroad for the people of Gaza are merely baking in the sun, of no use to anyone, by virtue of Egypt’s Rafah border policy. Consequently, undersupplied hospitals in Gaza struggling to care for dying patients, ill-prepared construction outfits lacking the concrete needed to repair damaged structures, and everyday Gazans unable to secure basic cooking gas, indeed have the Egyptian government to blame for their current predicament.

Egypt’s repression campaign, then, has victims extending beyond its own borders. Its policy towards Rafah—namely as it pertains to the passage of humanitarian aid—can and should be

viewed as an emanation of its authoritarian domestic policies.

Conclusion

Ayman Nour's release is certainly encouraging, but it is paramount to recognize that his incarceration was a microcosm of a much larger trend of repression by the Egyptian security apparatus. It seems that Nour's release was an act of goodwill by Cairo to placate the new Obama administration, but President Obama should not be appeased by this single token gesture. Before fully normalizing diplomatic relations with Egypt, and certainly before granting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak an audience in Washington, President Obama needs to fully exercise his diplomatic clout with Egypt, particularly when keeping in mind that the American aid package to Egypt is the largest US aid package to any country in the world, barring Israel.

Necessary prerequisites should include the acquittal of Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim from all charges, a guarantee of Dr. Ibrahim's safe return to Egypt, a repeal of the quarter-century-old Emergency Law, and an opening of the Rafah border to allow seamless transfer of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Washington currently has the upper hand, and it's incumbent on Obama to move beyond paying lip service to substantive democratic reform in the Middle East. In Egypt, he has the opportunity to proactively encourage meaningful democratic transition, but doing so requires playing hardball with Cairo. We can only hope he moves past the status quo ante paradigm of 'stability' and instead focuses on fostering a genuinely democratic Middle East.

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[1] https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4109902.stm

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Human Rights Watch explicitly urged the need for investigations of police brutality in the aftermath of the April 6th strikes in Mahalla. See https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2008/04/10/egypt-investigate-police-use-force-protests

[5] For a detailed analysis of Egypt's abuse of Hisba legislation, see Daanish Faruqi, "Egypt's

Repressive Hisba Lawsuits," *The Middle East Times* 28 August 2008. https://www.metimes.com/Opinion/2008/08/28/egypts_repressive_hisba_lawsuits/4699/

[6] Ibid.

[7] Dr. Ibrahim previously discussed the prospect for democracy in the Middle East during an interview with Logos: https://logosog.chrismordadev.com/issue_4.2/ibrahim_interview.htm

[8] For the full text, see Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Egypt's Unchecked Repression," *Washington Post*, 21 August 2007. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/20/AR2007082001500.html

[9] It is worth noting that Dr. Ibrahim was prosecuted under the auspices of Hisba legislation.

[10] See the film's homepage at https://thispalestinianlife.blogspot.com/

[11] For a more detailed analysis of Philip Rizk's abduction and its broader implications, see Daanish Faruqi, "Open Season on Gaza Activists in Egypt," *Common Dreams*, 15 February 2009. https://www.commondreams.org/view/2009/02/15-0

[12] Ibid.

[13] The cheery optimism following Ayman Nour's release was short-lived, and afterwards opposition groups shifted their attention to the continued incarceration of Diaeddin Gad. See Joseph Mayton, "Egyptian Opposition Turns Attention to Jailed Blogger," *The Middle East Times*, 25 February 2009. https://www.metimes.com/International/2009/02/25/egyptian_opposition_turns_attention_to_jailed_blogger/1325/

Obama's Challenges: How to Govern the U.S.

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

Two months after taking office—but after two years of campaigning—it is possible to begin to outline some elements of future policy by the new government. Perhaps the first thing to say is that it will indeed be a "government" rather than what Americans typically call the "administration" in Washington. Simple administration is all that is needed when the seas are calm and the ship of State runs on its own such that change, if it occurs, is incremental. Government, on the other hand, is a nautical term that refers to the rudder (*le gouvernail)* used by the ship's pilot when the vessel is threatened by unpredictable storms. Pragmatic and individualistic Americans, claiming to have inherited a pioneer spirit and naively confident that they can succeed by hard work alone, prefer a minimal, night-watchman State-administration. In their eyes, strong government, which they identify with "Europe," is a "nanny State" that treats the individual as a child.

Yet the downward economic spiral that already led the Bush administration to call for massive State action brings with it the potential for a change in attitude. The pressure has increased quickly. The 789 billion dollar rescue package proposed in February by Barack Obama promised to create ("or save") 3.5 million jobs. But updated economic reports issued in early March indicate that in fact more than 4.4 million jobs had been lost in the past 14 months, 2.6 million of which have disappeared in the preceding 4 months. February saw an increase of 600,000, with no respite in sight. These are indeed stormy seas; the ship's captain needs both a sturdy rudder and a sure sense of direction. They are also times of opportunity. As Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emmanuel, explained already in November of 2008, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste."

Before looking at the tools available to Barack Obama, it is necessary first to understand the changed political conditions brought about by his election. Once it is clear that Obama has indeed benefited from a rehabilitation of the idea of government, which has increased what can be called the "symbolic capital" available to him, I will look at some of the domestic political challenges facing him as he seeks remedies to the ever-changing—steadily worsening—socio-economic situation. Finally, I will turn to some of the options available to the new American government in the field of international relations, where Obama understands that the United States is only one of a plurality of legitimate actors, unable to pursue the unilateralist anti-politics of will typical of the Bush administration.

Rehabilitating the Political

Americans' anti-political attitudes are historically rooted in the 18th century anti-colonial

struggle against England that led to their independence. In reality, of course, there have been periods in which the State played a larger role than others. In general, however, the fear of *Big Brother* has been the dominant attitude, increasingly as the power and reach of the executive branch has grown. However, it is one thing to reject the interference of the State in my private affairs; it is a different matter when my personal security is threatened by a third party—such as a deregulated Wall Street derivatives market, an unscrupulous banker or a powerful pharmaceutical lobby. In that case, *Big Brother* becomes a trusted friend, and the self-interested *homme* becomes a *citoyen* concerned with the common good. And so, as the age of de-regulation moves toward its conclusion, the need for governmental regulation becomes increasingly apparent.

But the introduction or expansion of government regulation cannot be simply a pragmatic reaction to market failures (which can be treated as mere accidents rather than symptoms of a deeper illness). If government is to be more than a temporary expedient correcting minor inconveniences, it needs to have a political foundation. In this context, Barack Obama's personal contribution to the rehabilitation of the political responsibility of government is fundamental.[2]

Barack Obama burst onto the American political stage with a remarkable keynote address to the 2004 Democratic Convention in Boston. The speech was titled "The Audacity of Hope," which became the title of the best-selling book, published in 2006, launching his presidential campaign. One striking theme of Obama's speech recurred constantly during the campaign and continued to be sounded after he was elected. He repeatedly refers to his own personal history. In the 2004 address to the Democratic Convention that launched his national career, he alluded to the dreams that united his "improbable" family before affirming that "I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible." Similarly, he began his victory speech in Chicago in the early morning of November 5, 2008 by affirming that "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer." And, at the conclusion to his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2008, he recalled the American values that made it possible that "a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath," repeating again that his election shows "who we are and how far we have traveled."

What these, and countless other, similar, passages suggest is that a central pillar of Obama's political power is his ability to represent to Americans their ideal self, that which they would like to be, what the wish they were. His appeal is not simply to transcend racial differences; he evokes shared values that lie deep within the political history of the nation.[3] Obama's election and his rhetorical appeal recalls to Americans that they are not simply a mass of individuals each of whom uses the rights affirmed in the *Declaration of Independence* to "life, liberty and the pursuit of [private] happiness"; they are *citizens* who share a common dream and participate in a shared search for the public good. In his political speeches, Obama does not

justify his choices as dictated by the external constraints imposed by the economic crisis; his appeal is *political* in a stronger sense, addressing the conscience of the citizens and reminding them of their solidarity with other citizens. A philosopher might say that Obama's appeal is directed to the *volonté générale*… but of course Americans are not used to that kind of metaphysical argument. Nonetheless, the source of Obama's political strength is neither technical, pragmatic or even moral—although it is these as well—; his strength lies in his ability to revivify the national political narrative at a time of general uncertainty and anxiety.

This unexpected coincidence of the biography of a man with the self-image of a nation (which knows that it has been untrue to what Abraham Lincoln famously called its "better angels"[4]) lies at the basis of Obama's true political power. While some of the measures taken by his government in its first weeks have been justly criticized—for example, the lack of consistency in its policies with regard to "toxic assets" held by financial institutions, the timidity of his package of anti-crisis measures, and the apparent fear (despite the fact that former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan himself, among others, made the suggestion, and used the word) of the accusation of "nationalizing" bankrupt banks. But this deeply rooted political power will permit Obama to wait out his critics while his allies point out that the same inconsistency marked the experimental pragmatism of the New Deal, which is considered a model of anti-crisis politics. This is what makes it possible for Obama to govern the nation rather than simply administer the country.

This political power explains why a recent poll by the *Wall Street Journal* (March 4) finds that in spite of the fact that 70% of the population says that its economic conditions have worsened, two thirds of those polled say that they have high hopes for the future, and 50% of them are willing to give Obama at least two years to experiment with solutions to the crisis. But the willingness to risk serious political change says nothing about the kind of change thought to be desirable.

The Domestic Economic Challenge

Barack Obama's nationally televised February 24 speech to the two Houses of Congress admitted the seriousness of the challenge facing his government. Rejecting the usual incremental approach to administrative reform, he insisted that the four prongs of domestic reform on his agenda would be addressed simultaneously, creating a kind of synergy among them. The four basic areas of concern are: health care reform (insuring the 46 million uninsured and taking measures to reduce health-care costs that are the highest in the world even though they do not produce the most healthy population); educational reform (in a society where older jobs are fast disappearing and for the first time fewer youth are going on to post-secondary education); repair of basic infrastructure along with significant investment in new technologies (including broadband digital services and rapid inter-city train service); and investment in clean, green energy (freeing America from its dependence on foreign sources while combating global warming).

To finance the vast investments that are needed (and to reduce the deficit that will result from

the emergency package of anti-crisis measures), Obama proposes to alter the tax code in several fundamental aspects. Their common denominator calls for increased taxes on the wealthiest 5% of the population (and still more on the wealthiest 1%), while decreasing them for the remaining 95% of the population. In addition, the two massive tax cuts for the wealthy introduced during George Bush's first term will be left to expire in 2010. The estate tax (which the Bush administration sought to eliminate because it is a "death tax") will be fixed at 45%. Profits from hedge funds and other speculative ventures will be taxed as normal income (rather than at the present reduced "capital gains" level). And, of course, savings are expected from the end of the war in Iraq.

The justification for these policies is not only fiscal and technical but moral and political. Obama has decried repeatedly the gap between the wealthy and the rest of the population. Recent studies have shown, for example, that the gap between the top 10% of the population and the remainder has reached a level not seen since 1928—the eve of the great Wall Street crash. These top 10% account for 48.5% of the national wealth. Perhaps more shocking, the top 1%, as in 1928, account for some 21.8% of national wealth.[5] As Obama put it in his February 24 speech to Congress, "There is something wrong when we allow the playing field to be tilted so far in the favor of so few." Although he didn't stress the point, Obama's argument is that this is not only morally wrong but politically unjust and dangerous.

The question facing the government is: How can such inequalities (which are reflected not simply in dollars and cents but in the lives of real men and women who, for example, may lose a job, be unable to pay for needed medical care because they are uninsured, or lose their retirement savings either to a corrupt stock broker like Bernie Madoff, or simply to the falling market) be corrected?

Barack Obama first attempted to reach out to the Republican party, professing a willingness to negotiate and even accepting some tax-cutting proposals from that party as part of his anti-crisis package. The result was… nothing. His anti-crisis proposals met with unanimous opposition from Republicans in the House, while only three senators crossed party lines to support him. Obama replied in his weekly address on February 28 with what seemed to be a declaration of war against his critics who, he said, "are gearing up for a fight as we speak. " "My message to them," he went on, "is this: So am I. " And, continued Obama, "The system we have now might work for the powerful and well-connected interests that have run Washington for far too long, but I don't [i.e., I don't work for those special interests]." While this ringing call may have reminded some of Franklin Roosevelt's attack on the "economic royalists" who were blocking the New Deal, Obama has shown little willingness—for the moment—to go beyond rhetorical warnings. Yet history reminds us that great presidents like both Roosevelts, and Ronald Reagan, achieved greatness without the help of—and against—the opposing party.[6]

Some of those who criticize Obama from the left blame this timidity on the role of his more conservative advisors, many of whom are veterans of the Clinton administration who were strong supporters of economic deregulation and political caution. While there is probably some

truth to this criticism, it is worth noting that Larry Summers, who did serve Clinton (and Robert Rubin), seemed to have moved toward the left in his more recent articles in the *Financial Times*. More telling is the case of Timothy Geithner, the Secretary of Treasury who, as head of the New York Federal Reserve Bank was closely involved in the deregulated operations of Wall Street. But here too there is ambiguity. Geithner played a crucial role in resolving the 1997 Asian currency crisis, advocating what he called an economic version of the "Powell Doctrine" (applied in the first Gulf War), which insists that military intervention should take place only with massive force, clearly defined goals, and an exit strategy. Why, it may be asked, has Geithner not followed his own recommendations in 2009? The first answer is not doubt opposition from Congress and the weight of diverse lobbying interests. But the more important reason, it appears, is the one suggested by the above analysis of Obama's power, which permits him to wait out his opponents. Tactically, the Obama government may be waiting for the Republicans to condemn themselves in the eyes of the public before moving forward more radically on the four fronts described in the February 24th speech.

The Republicans' politics of the "no" is based on a populist appeal that asks why "we" should bail out bankers, financial speculators or auto manufacturers. Leaving aside the fact that "we" –i.e., "they" – were in power for the last eight years, the tactic behind this appeal is based on recent polls that suggest that only 39% of the population supports aid for the banking system, while a mere 22% support aid for Detroit. This populist appeal banks also on American anti-statist individualism, asking why "we" should help those (greedy or stupid people) who bought houses they could not afford, or took loans that they could not pay? More recently, the Republicans refused to support an annual budgetary law on the grounds that it contained too many "earmarks"—i.e., measures inserted into the law by individual members to support spending in their own district.[7] Yet despite—or perhaps because of – this populist rhetoric, recent polls indicate that the Democrats have increased their lead in popular support from the 3% level in 2004 to a 10% lead in the most recent polls, which show 38% favorable to the Democrats, 28% Republican and 29% independent (March 1 2009). Americans in 2009 are not so politically naïve that they can be mislead by demagogues.[8]

The Republicans' position is not wholly illogical. Their "no" is based on the traditional American fear that a growing budget deficit occasioned by the anti-crisis economic measures will lead to a growth in the size, reach and power of the State. Their policy since the time of Ronald Reagan has been to lower taxes in order not only to satisfy their wealthy constituents but also to starve the "nanny" State of revenues, forcing it to reduce its size, reach and power. Although in fact the State continued to grow during the period of Republican dominance, this ideology became a staple of its political appeal. But today, after the 2008 elections, the Republicans have become a largely regional party, barely present outside of the South and parts of the West. At least in the eyes of some of its strategists (such as former House Speaker, Newt Gingrich), the path back to power lies in following the model adopted after the defeat of Richard Nixon by John Kennedy in 1960: a long, but highly principled, path through the wilderness, producing a candidate who, like Barry Goldwater in 1964, will purge the pragmatic and the compromisers in order to return to basic principles… and eventually to produce a new Ronald Reagan. Whether this tactic is coherent, or promising, can be left to the party's leaders

who are responsible for their own choices. Suffice it to say here that history rarely repeats itself… and that the election of Barack Obama has—as I have suggested—opened a new phase in the American story.

Barack Obama faces criticism also from the left of his own party. It is not yet clear how he will use the extraordinary net-based resources that he developed during the campaign; nor has the relation between the "net roots" organizations that developed on the periphery of the electoral process and the Obama government been defined. After the failure of his bi-partisan offers to the Republicans, the president did what he knows best how to do: he went out to the country to campaign for his own propositions. He now says that he will make at least one appearance per week outside of Washington. This will certainly help him to put pressure on Congress members who hesitate to support him or whose support he needs further down the road. The question is: will he continue to mobilize wide-ranging popular support? Or will some of his own supporters discredit him by making his support for an activist government seem too far to the "left"? For example, those who press, for example, for the creation of a "Minister of Peace," or who demand the creation of a fully-funded, universal pre-kindergarten education, may do more harm than good to their own cause.[9] Moralism cannot replace political judgment.

The question of Obama's relation to his own, independent, supporters will be apparent first of all with respect to his foreign policy.[10] After all, at the outset of the primary elections, he was the leading opponent of the Iraq war. Indeed, this was his major difference from Hillary Clinton—who is now his Secretary of State[11]. He promised to withdraw the American military within 16 months of his election. In fact, he has recently announced a 19 month withdrawal program… which will leave behind some 50,000 so-called non-combatant forces, as well as an American embassy that is the largest in the world. And he has promised to transfer American attention, and military might, to Afghanistan (although he has recently qualified his belligerent stance by suggesting that it may be possible to negotiate with "moderate" factions of the Taliban, whoever that may be, and however "moderate" is defined).

Obama and the World

Obama recognizes that there is a "world" outside of the United States and its unilateral will, and distinct from the "global" universe of finance capital. During the campaign, he expressed a recognition of the need to listen toAmerica's allies and to talk with its enemies (a promise that he has kept by recently sending a delegation toSyria, one of the keys to an eventualMiddle Eastpolicy). He worried also about unequal development, global poverty and human rights abuses in cases like Darfur (and has named Susan Rice, a former Undersecretary of State for Africa, as his delegate to the United Nations, giving her cabinet rank). He has stressed the need forAmericanot only to sign theKyotoaccords but to move forward to more strict, and creative, measures to combat global warming. This is all to the good, but it is for the moment only a general outline. And it neglects key issues, most importantly the United States' relation (both economic and military) with China. It is not insignificant in this regard that Hillary Clinton's first trip abroad was not the traditional visit to Europe and the NATO allies, but to China (where, significantly, she did not make public criticism of that nation's human rights

record).

Aside from these general orientations, Obama has recently taken two significant initiatives, which are related to one another. The first concerns Russia, with which he plans to “reset” relations to a less confrontational pattern (addressing a private letter shortly after his inauguration to President Medvedev, rather than deal with Bush’s favorite, Prime Minister Putin). Obama has made it clear that he would not pursue NATO enlargement toward the former Soviet Union, that he needs Russian cooperation to transport supplies to American forces in Afghanistan, and that he wants to resume negotiations on the reduction of nuclear weapons. Further, he has suggested that he is willing to reconsider the Bush plan to install an anti-missile shield in Poland and the Czech republic. Since the need for this defensive weaponry was justified by the threat of Iranian missiles, Obama’s second step was to suggest that Russia take part in a multi-lateral conference on the future of Afghanistan along with its neighbor, Iran. This appears to be a clever way to begin a dialogue with Iran without waiting for (or interfering with) that country’s presidential elections in early summer. It is of course only a small first step, but it is a way to avoid directly challenging the role ofIranin theMiddle East(via Hezbollah and Hamas). At the same time, he named George Mitchell—a former Senate leader of partly Lebanese background—as special representative to the Mid-East, a sign perhaps that his policy toward Israel will not be so accommodating as that of past administrations.

Calling for a conference on Afghanistan could also be a way for Barack Obama to back down from the aggressive stance he has taken toward the Taliban’s role in that region. One practical reason for this new willingness to talk (also to some of the Taliban) could be the difficulties that Obama knows he will face on his early April visit when he tries to convince Europeans to increase their military commitment. A more general reason is the painful memory of the disastrous experience of the Democratic party under Lyndon Johnson when it found its grand goals for social reform (“The Great Society”) blocked and finally reduced to near nothingness because it was inextricably committed to the fight against what it saw as global communism inVietnam. But there is another, more specific reason for this change that is bound up with the unique political power of Barack Obama described at the outset of this analysis. Because of the depth of his political power, he has, once again, the ability to conceive of a strategy for governing in the long-term rather than lose himself in the tactical struggle for incremental victories.

American foreign policy in the wake of 9/11 —and in fact prior to that murderous day, if one considers the role of Vice-President Cheney and his *consigliore* in the planning for the invasion of Iraq— has been over-determined by the so-called “war against terrorism.” This is not the place to return to the questions provoked by this curious idea of a “war” against an indeterminable enemy. It is not necessary to do more than recall the egregious violations of American (and human) values and rights that it has entailed, nor to emphasize the cost to American influence and prestige that have resulted from the excesses this “war” has justified. The question for Barack Obama is how to extricate America from this unending secular battle without appearing to be complacent with regard to what is undoubtedly the terrorist intent of

many opponents of American actions in the world (who are not fighting simply against America's "ideals," as George Bush liked to claim).

In a recent essay published in *The Washington Post* (March 2, 2009), columnist E.J Dionne Jr. suggested an interesting analogy between the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower and the need for Barack Obama to avoid becoming a "war president." Eisenhower took office in 1953, shortly after the onset of the Cold War, and while a hot war had ground to a stalemate in Korea. The former leader of allied forces against Nazism set out immediately to extinguish the fires in Korea. But he did not opt to use over-whelming force by means of a "surge" in allied troops. Instead, he negotiated a truce, putting an end to active hostility without either side being able to claim a victory. This was part of a broader strategic vision on the part of Eisenhower. Despite his bellicose Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, whose talk of a "roll-back" of communism threatened to bring about a new hot war, the American president recognized that the communist enemy could be fought be other means—militarily by a policy of "containment" and ideologically by using what is today called the "soft power" of democratic values to dry up the well from which the enemy drew its sometimes fanatical supporters.

The analogy is suggestive, but it is of course only an analogy. Dionne himself does not follow its implications further.[12] From the point of view of Obama and his special political power, it seems like a plausible approach to the problem of how to deal with Islamic terrorism, which will not disappear simply on its own, and cannot be eliminated by sheer force of arms. To succeed, Eisenhower had to have the personal political credibility to face down the wrath of violent and paranoiac anti-communists led by Senator Joe McCarthy and his allies. Obama has a similar credibility. It remains to be seen how he uses it.

Notes

[1] This is a revised version of an essay whose original version, delivered in German at the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Berlin on March 17, 2009, appears in the journal *Kommune*; the original English appears in the on-line journal *Logos* (https://logosjournal.com).

[2] Obama recognizes that responsibility is a two-way street. At his urging, the House has voted to spend $6 billion over the next five years to increase the number of volunteers in the Americorps from 75,000 to 250,000, increasing their stipends as well. (*New York Times*, March 24, 2009)

[3] C.f., his remarkable, indeed historic, speech atPhiladelphia on March 18, 2008, "A More Perfect Union," in which he replied to accusations that his candidacy was based on race.

[4] The phrase, well-known to Americans, is found inLincoln's First Inaugural Address, delivered as the nation was about to embark on a bloody Civil War.

[5] These are figures for wealth. As far as income is concerned, between 1979 and 2003, the revenues of the top 1% went from 9.6% to 17.5% of total earnings while the gain of the top 0.25 percent went from 4.9% to 10.5%. (Source, Paul Krugman, NY Times, March 2009)

[6] It should be noted thatRoosevelt's attack on the "economic royalists" was delivered most famously in his 1936 Speech to the Democratic National Convention as he accepted the nomination for a second term. Will Obama have to wait so long?

[7] The 411 billion dollar measure contained some 8 billion dollars in earmarks, including 221 million for 459 projects from former members no longer in Congress. For examples of such "earmarks," cf. https://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/03/mccain-loses-fight-over-earmarks/?scp=1&sq=projects%20from%20people%20no%20longer%20in%20Congress&st=cse

[8] The *de facto* leader of the republican party at the moment is the talk show host, Rush Limbaugh, whose uncontrolled rhetoric remains popular. His demagogy reached new heights when he proclaimed the he would be quite happy if Obama's anti-crisis policies were to fail. It need not be added that wishing that your country suffer so that your party can gain power is dangerous, callous, and probably harmful to your own cause.

[9] *USA Today* (March 9) notes that the number of volunteers for public service work in the Peace Corps, Americorps and other community service organizations has tripled since Obama's election… and the economic crisis! Offering such opportunities is a political means to channel moral concerns.

[10] To my surprise, Obama's appeal to his supporters took place on the weekend of March 21, when he sent letters to an e-mail list of 14.3 million supporters, asking them to become active in their local district to gain support for his budgetary proposals. This has the effect of making use of a weapon—his supporters—that could have been better used as a deterrent, since its failure would rob it of all its political force. As of this date (March 24), it is not possible to evaluate the results.

[11] Many found this appointment surprising, by Obama and by Ms. Clinton. From his side, it eliminates a possible rival for power; from her side, it implies a recognition that she will never be president, but that she can indeed leave a "legacy" in the world. One can expect her to be an active diplomat—although Obama has surrounded her by "special envoys" to troubled regions (Pakistan/Afghanistan, Middle East…), leaving her apparently the Far East (China) and perhaps Europe and Russia.

[12] It should of course be pointed out that in that same year, 1953, Eisenhower gave permission for the CIA to overthrow the democratic government of Mossadegh inIran, and the next year he supported the overthrow of a democratic regime in Guatamala. Analogies, after all, point to similarities between things that are different from one another.

The Way We Wait Now

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

My first camera was a rectangular box you had to hold in front of you in order to see a reflection of the scene you wanted to shoot; occasionally, strange ghosts would appear in those photos. That was a long time ago, and I still don't know why the camera so often turned reality into a palimpsest. More perfect models soon replaced that old-fashioned camera – it vanished, along with its double exposures. But the fact that you could never really be sure what the finished photo would look like – that fact has only recently been eliminated by the digital camera.

But what happens when the time-span completely disappears during which the negative in the darkroom turns into a picture? When the unexpected, slumbering in the developing bath of our consciousness – like those ghosts in old photographs – simply no longer turns up? The incalculable threatens to disappear altogether – along with the element of uncertainty as such. The surprise of seeing something unexpected – a striking facial expression, an inexplicable emotion immobilized, a lopsided constellation – has no longer a chance against the beautifully arranged image. But the harder we work at avoiding accidents, the bigger becomes the swarm of ghosts we don't see.

Waiting is an imposition. And yet it is the only thing that makes us experience the relentless chipping-away of Time, as well as Time's promise. There are an infinite number of ways to be kept waiting: in love, in appointments with higher authorities, in traffic jams. We wait: for someone to show up, for an offer to be made, for "Mr. Right", for Godot; for a letter, for sport results, for a medical report; for a signal, for the second act, for laughter after we've told a joke. We wait for pain to stop and for sleep to find us, or for the wind to die down. Idleness, detours, boredom – in our appointment calendar waiting is the empty page that must be filled, and will reward us with freedom, if we are lucky.

Waiting also plays an important part in periods of growth, such as pregnancy or puberty; such as the concentration and hesitation required of creative work. Franz Kafka called it "the hesitation before giving birth". The one who waits anticipates something that is about to happen, often including the possibility of its not happening. In everyday life it is usually something that needs to be done, most often something dictated by commonplace expectations. Life's vicissitudes generally consist of a rhythmically irregular sequence of moments – and of those instances when the flow of foreseeable events is interrupted and suddenly everything comes to a halt.

Man is the waiting animal, capable of anticipating death. But, just as shrinking distances and shortened intervals attempt to eliminate the unforseeable, so have our partings adjusted to that incessant change that affects even the scenario of death. At one time, every farewell seemed

like a small death – or, at least the possibility that one might never see each other again. These days, technology having established the kind of permanent bond that keeps us firmly attached to the umbilical cord of the attainable, we have almost lost sight of the fact that there will come a time when we won't be around any longer. But waiting is a state in which time holds its breath so as to make us keep death in mind. Not *Carpe diem* but: *Warte nur, balde*. (As in Goethe's poem "Wanderers Nachtlied").

A Geniune Piece of Anxiety

Perhaps it is not altogether wrong to ascribe a physical sensation to the experience of waiting: something hurts when we wait. It is like having a cramp somewhere in our body, like standing in a draft between two doors some careless person has left open. Waiting produces a change in temperature. We wait with a freezing heart, with burning desire. But it is by no means easy to say exactly what it is that hurts, what inflames our spirit or coats it with ice. Waiting is always both real and imaginary: a fantasy based on an unknowable reality.

Waiting rises to the level of longing, sometimes of mania when we are waiting for someone we love. Yes, love provides waiting with a dynamic that reaches into the very depth of existence. "The pitiful identity of the lover is nothing else but this 'I am the one who waits'", says Roland Barthes in his "A Lover's Discourse; Fragments", an erotic alphabet in which waiting and love are almost identical.

Longing always arrives punctually; it is a sister of anxiety. The one who waits always subconsciously suffers the pangs of one who has been abandoned. While waiting, a lover re-experiences the primal scene – the first overwhelming absence of the mother. It is said that it is a mere fraction of an instant between the time when the small child thinks of his mother as absent and the moment when it believes she is dead. Every kind of waiting for a beloved person is somehow related to that experience. The act of waiting contains a menace, a curse that has its roots in childhood.

The Silence of the Sirens

Before portable telephones were invented, waiting for a telephone call was the quintessential image of being in love – most of the time: unhappily in love. Literature has mined that theme since the beginnings of telecommunications. Waiting is the imaginary side of love and longing the essence of imagination. From Jean Cocteau's one-act play "The Human Voice" to Nicholson Baker's novel "Vox" the modern Odysseus is tied to a telephone pole, exposed to the same "sad, powerful song" that Kafka heard, coming from a telephone receiver, in his dream.

Even the cell phone has not liberated us from the helplessness of waiting. True, you no longer have to circle around the telephone in a senseless ritual of incantation. Yet, even today, someone waiting intensely and vainly for the thing in his pocket to ring, seems to be running in circles, like a trained circus horse. Waiting, we revert to a childlike state in which things happen by magic: waiting first becomes incantation, then litany. In any case, we struggle against waiting with infantile means, perhaps that is why we so often become childish. "Please,

God, make him call" – Dorothy Parker has addressed that half tragic, half comical theme in her short story, *The Telephone Call* – a classic telephone monologue consisting almost entirely of a single phrase.

"PLEASE, God, let him telephone me now. Dear God, let him call me now. I won't ask anything else of you, truly I won't. It isn't very much to ask. It would be so little to You, God, such a little, little thing. Only let him telephone now. Please, God, Please, please, please.

If I didn't think about it, maybe the telephone might ring by that time. I'll count slowly. I won't cheat. And if it rings when I get to three hundred, I won't stop; I won't answer it until I get to five hundred. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-five, fifty… Oh, please ring. Please."

In the drama of waiting, the telephone is still the most frequently used prop. Because it brings the other's voice and breath so close, it creates an intimacy that seems to annihilate distance. Just like Freud's famous roll of yarn, which compensates the child for the Mother's absence, the telephone is a kind of umbilical cord, designed to prevent separation. Basically, he who waits keeps repeating the same prayer: let postponement not be the end.

Tomorrow is Christmas, My Children

"In my opinion, children are so good at waiting because they have not yet become suspicious (of the waiting process), because they need not judge it culturally worthless," says Wilhelm Genazino in his Essay "*The Extended Gaze*". But, even if children don't regard waiting as a waste of time, they do experience it mainly as a form of helplessness. After all, the first thing we are taught in life is to accept delay: we must follow an imposed timetable, regulate our physical functions, and accept the rhythm of day and night. The first power struggle in human life takes place in the area of waiting, when the body is encoded. In those very first moments of life, the body is turned into an instrument that obeys the clock. At the very start of this our earthly existence we undergo patience-training.

Having to deal with periods of waiting has always been one of the special aspects of childhood. Looking forward to our birthday, waiting for Santa Claus, the thrilling moment when the lights went on in the room where Christmas gifts had been laid out – we remember those moments as childhood idylls. Waiting and pleasurable anticipation, it seems, were still one and the same thing. But even in the case of pleasurable anticipation, waiting was never entirely without its educational side. The waiting room of childhood has always been an endangered idyll. Consider the advent calendar: it closely associates waiting with temptation and interdiction – and if temptation (to open all the little windows at once; to ransack the little packages) wins out, it teaches us the bitter lesson that those who can't wait, deprive themselves.

The Limbo of Waiting

To keep people waiting is a privilege of power. Those who keep us waiting, keep us in our place. To prohibit people from moving about freely has long been a patriarch's prerogative. It

was thus in paradise and the breaking of that commandment ended in expulsion. Someone – a person or an institution – makes us assume a tempo that is not our own. The most depressing thing about this is, that our emotional life is subordinated to a foreign regime. Waiting is impotence; and our inability to change that situation is humiliating, which makes us feel that the world is – for the moment – out of joint. This is why the one who waits so often feels he has been treated unfairly; he is being punished for something he didn't do. He sits in his waiting as if blows were raining down on him. It is this passive attitude, this feeling of having being judged, that the pain and shame of waiting imposes on us.

When waiting is in league with pain – for instance, in the emergency room of a hospital – its predatory nature is especially apparent. Nowhere else do we feel the power held over us by others more keenly than in the long moments during which we yearn for pain relief. If there were an angel of waiting, he would be an anesthesiologist. Afterwards, when anesthesia has sent us into oblivion, the pain of waiting assaults the others; now, they are waiting for us to wake up. Suddenly we have burdened them with a piece of our own life, which has continued without our conscious presence.

But when we come out of anesthesia, we realize, once again, that to live also means to wait for death. The exact opposite is equally true: a threatening diagnosis often motivates us to take more intense advantage of whatever time we still have left. We try to cram as much as possible into that remaining time span, first and foremost those things on which we have missed out, and which now can "no longer wait." As if they had always been there, ready and waiting for us. That this is not so becomes clear to anyone who has ever tried to grab Kairos by the forelock: where the lucky moment is grasped by force, it wears a wig. The things we have missed have had their own time-span, too.

In Dante's *Purgatory*, the slothful are condemned to broil in the Limbo of Waiting for as long as they have led their slothful lives on earth – unless some pious people redeem them from their torment. But every conspiracy, every act of vengeance requires a background of waiting. The god of anger has placed a period of hesitation between the paroxysm of hatred and hate-based action. Which also means: waiting makes guilty. The first step from flareup of affect to planned intention creates a drop in temperature – into the frosty realm of calculation- to the zero point where strategy and deception come together at the right moment.

The Hesitation before Birth

Since the dawn of postal service, waiting for a letter has represented the essence of unappeased longing. Writing a letter meant sending one's pages on a long journey, often by train or plane, towards their destination, where they would spend some additional time in a mailbox. The very physicality of a letter, the lines of penmanship or print, the envelope, which raised every telegram to the status of a secret message, – all those things were part of the trip through time and space. And to this day the recipient feels the concentrated promise in such sealed material – as if the letter had grown more compact in transit.

Online communications, amounting to near-simultaneity, have accelerated the pulse of our personal exchanges. Of course, that has not liberated us from the agony of waiting. On the contrary: the synchronicity of expectation and fulfilment has made us more impatient. Not only do we expect an immediate answer, we even resent the time it takes us to write an e-mail message.
What happens when our words are stripped of their travelling time, that period during which they acquire a meaning we may not even have thought of when we wrote the letter? Don't they also lose a whole lot of possible meanings? Sending a letter always meant a magical step into the future, and we usually anticipated the time lag in that sort of mail. As in a palimpsest, that time-span was there, underneath the actual message: all those surprising events that might have occurred while the letter was in transit; events, which we may actually have caused ourselves – as the butterfly in the Brasilian rain forest causes a hurricane at the other end of the world.

Time is money

The amount of time saved through modern communications technology thus presents itself as an unproductive waste of resources. And in this mobile society, more people are compelled to stand in line than ever before. At railroad stations and airports, in official reception rooms and at the receiving end of an e-mail message – the basic experience is that of time being wasted. "Please wait" is the mantra of appeasement that – with its relentless repetition – has raised patience to the cardinal virtue of our service society.

The jetsetter, for whom the globe has turned into a collection of airline routes and air terminal lounges, is today's prototype of the traveller. The distance from A to B is merely a dumb interval for him. Mobility is the magic word, which, in the name of work-force flexibility, has turned even wanderlust into a business proposition. But the traveller, who considers his time in transit an annoying interlude, denies himself the desire that lies at the heart of every journey: to return as a different person. Travelling is still one of the few modes of existence in which the travelled road is experienced as a goal in itself; and if the journey is unexciting, the arrival is often empty and stale as well. Eros is transitory. He comes to life in no-man's-land, in the vivid interference between departure and arrival.

Time off from our daily activity now takes place in fitness studios and spas, where "relaxation" is part of the feel-good package offered to the work force. Whereas the Protestant work ethic castigated idleness as a cardinal sin, Capitalism has discovered "downtime" as one of its genuine resources. But only when idleness truly becomes leisure is downtime more than a mere breathing space within (and therefore still part of) the work process; only then is it really free time, the best part of our existence.

Dreaming of castles in the air as we float downriver in a boat, rocked by the waves, gazing at clouds – suddenly, surprisingly we have reached the end of waiting. At its very core, waiting contains not only anxiety and deprivation: it also gives us those moments of elation when it cancels itself out – a presence without consciousness.

Let there be light, said God at the start of creation and behold! It happened without delay. Thus, instant gratification – fulfilment without delay – is our basic idea of happiness. With every instantly granted wish we put a toe back into paradise. But, since man is the creature – according to the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg – "whose desires are infinite in a finite lifetime", we never rise above the proliferation of our desires. Having to renounce the simultaneity of desire and gratification (if such a thing is even possible) is as much part of the human experience as the birth process: the navel through which milk and honey once flowed was permanently capped when man appeared on earth. And every time the wait between a wish and its fulfilment is reduced to a minimum or altogether eliminated, a vengeful god demands its price: he who has everything and always gets everything instantly, is cheated out of the joy of a wish coming true. Kairos, the moment of happiness, requires waiting: an often painful, sometimes joyfully squandered, always essential gift: the gift of Time.

Unjust and Illegal: The Israeli Attack on Gaza

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

The reports of statements from Israeli soldiers documenting their horrendous war crimes[1] have greatly discomforted those who engaged in cheerleading for the brutal Israeli assault on Gaza. It is hard to proclaim the "purity of arms" of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) when its members wear t-shirts showing the stomach of a pregnant Palestinian woman in a gun sight, above the caption "1 shot, 2 kills."[2]

But while these revelations may have welcome consequences, both on internal Israeli political discourse and on world public opinion, the new evidence was unnecessary for the legal or moral condemnation of Operation Cast Lead. It was possible to deliver such a verdict at the time of the attack, despite the IDF's closing of Gaza to the international press and human rights organizations, and despite a massive propaganda campaign by the Israeli government.

The conduct of Operation Cast Lead violated numerous principles of international humanitarian law and morality, but even had Israeli conduct complied perfectly with these principles, the attack was legally and morally unacceptable because the act of going to war itself was unjust. In the widely accepted moral schema of just war theory, a distinction is made between *jus ad bellum* (the justification for going to war) and *jus in bello* (the justness of the conduct of the war), and adherence to the latter does not mitigate violation of the former. Likewise, in international law, in the words of the Nuremberg judgment, "To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."[3]

Israel, of course, argues that its attack on Gaza was an instance of legitimate self-defense, a response to rocket attacks launched from Gaza by Palestinian militants. But any assessment of whether Israeli military actions constitute lawful self-defense has to take account of the context and the question of proportionality.

The Context of Operation Cast Lead

The broad context is that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is illegal and unjust and Israel cannot claim self-defense when Palestinians struggle by legitimate means to end the occupation. (In the same way, Japanese troops couldn't claim self-defense when they were attacked by guerrillas in occupied China or the occupied Philippines during World War II.)

The proper Israeli response to such Palestinian actions is not "self-defense," but full withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Israel preposterously claims that there neither is nor has been an occupation of the West Bank or Gaza.[4] Needless to say, no one takes this view seriously.[5] In what must be the most original use of the passive voice on record, the Israeli government claims that "Control over the West Bank and Gaza passed to Israel in 1967 in a war of self-defense." [6] In fact, the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza, as well as the Sinai and the Golan Heights were conquered by Israel during the June 1967 war, a war in which Israel attacked first. Israel's supporters argue that although Israel fired the first shots, this was a justified preventive war, given that Arab armies were mobilizing on Israel's borders, with murderous rhetoric. The rhetoric was indeed blood-curdling, and many people around the world worried for Israel's safety. But those who understood the military situation — in Tel Aviv and the Pentagon — knew quite well that even if the Arabs struck first, Israel would prevail in any war. Egypt's leader was looking for a way out and agreed to send his vice-president to Washington for negotiations. Before that could happen, Israel attacked, in part because it rejected negotiations and the prospect of any face-saving compromise for Egypt. Menachem Begin, who was an enthusiastic supporter of that (and other) Israeli wars was quite clear about the lack of necessity for launching an attack: In June 1967, he said, Israel "had a choice." Egyptian Army concentrations did not prove that Nasser was about to attack. "We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him."[7]

However, even if it were the case that the 1967 war was wholly defensive on Israel's part, this could not justify continued rule over Palestinians. A people do not lose their right to self-determination because the government of a neighboring state goes to war. Sure, punish Jordan and don't give it back the West Bank (to which it had no right in the first place, having joined with Israel in carving up the stillborn Palestinian state envisioned in the UN's 1947 partition plan). And don't return Gaza to Egyptian administrative control. But there is no basis for punishing the Palestinian population by forcing them to submit to foreign military occupation.

Israel immediately incorporated occupied East Jerusalem into Israel proper, announcing that Jerusalem was its united and eternal capital. It then began to establish settlements in the Occupied Territories in violation of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit a conquering power from settling its population on occupied territory. The Israeli government legal adviser at the time, the distinguished jurist Theodor Meron, privately warned that any settlements would be illegal,[8] but he was ignored.

And the International Court of Justice has ruled — in a portion of an opinion that had the unanimous support of all its judges, including the one from the United States — that all the settlements in the occupied territories are illegal.[9]

Now Israel did withdraw its troops and settlements from Gaza in 2005. Most international law experts deny that this has ended the occupation of that territory. As John Dugard, the UN's then special rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, noted in 2006:

Statements by the Government of Israel that the withdrawal ended the occupation of Gaza are grossly inaccurate. … Gaza remained under the effective control of Israel. This control was

manifested in a number of ways. Israel retained control of Gaza's air space, sea space and external borders. Although a special arrangement was made for the opening of the Rafah border crossing to Egypt, to be monitored by European Union personnel, all other crossings remained largely closed…. The actions of IDF [Israeli Defense Force] in respect of Gaza have clearly demonstrated that modern technology allows an occupying Power to effectively control a territory even without a military presence.[10]

On November 20, 2008, Human Rights Watch wrote to Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, stating, among other things,

"Even though Israel withdrew its permanent military forces and settlers in 2005, it remains an occupying power in Gaza under international law because it continues to exercise effective day-to-day control over key aspects of life in Gaza."[11]

If Israel had truly withdrawn from Gaza, then Israel could not prohibit Gaza from trading by sea or air with other nations, bar people from sailing or flying in to or out of Gaza, overfly Gazan airspace or patrol its coastal waters, or declare "no go zones" within Gaza. Israel also controls Gaza's Population Registry and collects import duties on any goods it allows into Gaza.[12]

To be sure, an occupation accomplished by surrounding a territory and cutting off all outside contact is not the same as one in which occupying troops are directly deployed in the territory.[13] (And that's why Gazans object when Israeli troops re-enter the Strip.) But whatever it's called, Israeli control over the lives of Palestinians, including those in Gaza, must end, and as long as Israel denies Palestinians the right of self-determination, its claim of self-defense rings hollow.

Israeli officials ask why they should be obligated to open borders with another territory. After all, countries don't have to trade with their neighbors if they don't want to. That might be true if Israel actually recognized the independence of Gaza. But in fact, Israel will not allow planes to fly into Gaza, and will not allow ships to dock in Gaza. So, yes, if Spain chose not to allow commerce across its borders with Portugal, it has the sovereign right to so decide — but not if it denied Portugal access to the sea and air, essentially cutting it off from all worldly contact. And not if over many long years of direct occupation, all the fuel and power lines and all the roads in Portugal were built precisely so as to enforce its dependence on Spain.

The Israeli government argues that ending the occupation will not end attacks on Israel because Hamas and some other Palestinian factions "repeatedly declare that even if Israel would fully withdraw from the territories they will continue their attacks, since they refute Israel's basic right to exist."[14]

In fact, however, whatever Hamas's many faults, in this regard it has repeatedly declared the opposite. That is, it has (1) declared its willingness to support a long term truce (for as long as fifty years, or even indefinitely) if Israel were to withdraw from the occupied territories;[15] and (2) it has indicated that if Israel withdrew and the Arab states then recognized Israel in

conformity with the Arab Peace Initiative, it would not oppose the settlement.[16] Hamas's position is not unlike that expressed by then-Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, when he addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 2006. He declared his continuing belief "in our people's eternal and historic right to this entire land."[17] Yet, he said, he understood the necessity of compromise. Hamas has taken a similar position: it considers Palestine in its entirety to be sacred Muslim land, it considers the state of Israel to be illegitimate, but yet it has made clear on numerous occasions that it is willing to compromise, and that it would accept a two-state solution on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, along with a long-term truce.

The fact that Israel's "disengagement" from Gaza did not put an end to all violence does not show that ending the occupation as a whole would not lead to peace. Under the "disengagement," Israeli settlers were removed from Gaza, but more new settlers moved to the West Bank in 2005 than left Gaza and more Palestinian land was taken over on the West Bank than was given up in Gaza.[18] As Ariel Sharon's chief aide, Dov Weisglass, told an interviewer for an Israeli newspaper: The significance of the disengagement plan "is the freezing of the political process. And when you freeze that process you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion about the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package that is called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed from our agenda indefinitely."[19]

It is not surprising that such a disengagement did not bring peace. As Jerome Slater has noted, "even if Israel had genuinely withdrawn from Gaza and also ended all its other means of repression of its people, that hardly would have met the need and the right of the Palestinians as a whole for a viable independent state of their own. The Palestinians living in Gaza are not a separate nation from those living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; to believe otherwise is the equivalent of believing that if in the 1770s the British had withdrawn from New Jersey but continued to occupy New York, the residents of New Jersey would no longer have the right to take up arms in support of American independence."[20]

Thus, in response to Israel's question, "what else could it do given the barrage of rockets that were being fired from Gaza?," the answer was clear: end the occupation. Thus, Operation Cast Lead was not a "last resort." Under just war theory, a war must be a last resort in order to meet the *jus ad bellum* criteria. And under international law, "necessity" is a legal requirement for war, a condition not met if there was an alternative that would have eliminated the claimed cause of the war.

But even short of ending the occupation, Operation Cast Lead was not a last resort. There had been a "lull" — a truce — between Hamas and the Israeli government that was supposed to run from mid-June 2008 until mid-December 2008 and the truce could have been extended. That it was not was largely Israel's fault.

The lull have gotten off to a rocky start. Islamic Jihad fired a few rockets from Gaza in response to the Israeli killing of one of their senior militants on the West Bank.[21] But Hamas was

generally able to convince the other Palestinian groups to respect the lull. In the five and half months before the lull there were 1,072 rockets fired from Gaza and 1,199 mortar shells. For the four and a half months from the start of the lull until November 4 there were 20 rockets and 18 mortar shells.[22] No Israeli was killed — by rocket, mortar, sniper, or improvised explosive device from Gaza from mid-June to November 4.[23]

Regarding the sporadic firings during this period, the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (an organization closely tied to the Israeli government) wrote:

"… Hamas was careful to maintain the ceasefire and its operatives were not involved in rocket attacks. At the same time, the movement tried to enforce the terms of the arrangement on the other terrorist organizations and to prevent them from violating it. Hamas took a number of steps against networks which violated the arrangement, but in a limited fashion and contenting itself with short-term detentions and confiscating weapons."[24]

Then, on the evening of November 4, 2008, Israel violated the ceasefire by sending troops into Gaza. As the *Guardian* reported,

"The Israeli military said the target of the raid was a tunnel that they said Hamas was planning to use to capture Israeli soldiers positioned on the border fence 250m away…. One Hamas gunman was killed and Palestinians launched a volley of mortars at the Israeli military. An Israeli air strike then killed five more Hamas fighters."[25]

Hamas responded with rocket fire, and the lull was then severely undermined. Both sides engaged in military actions from that point on, though not at the pre-lull level.

As the mid-December formal end of the lull approached, Hamas made clear that it was interested in extending the lull, but with a crucial condition. One of the initial terms — as reported in the press; there was no official written text — had been that Israel would lift the crushing blockade it had imposed on imports into and exports from Gaza.[26]

Israel did relieve the closures, but did not allow imports to return to anything approaching the levels of either December 2005 (before Hamas won the legislative council elections) or May 2007 (before Hamas took power in Gaza). During July 2008, the first full month of the lull, according to the UN, "the population of Gaza saw little tangible dividend from the truce implemented on 19 June, as the amount of commodities allowed into the Gaza Strip remained far below the actual needs."[27] Imports were less than half what they were in December 2005. This was nevertheless higher than in August, when imports dropped 30 percent, to a level about that of March 2008 — when aid agencies and human rights groups warned that the blocaked was causing a "humanitarian implosion."[28] In September there was a 15 percent increase, but in October there was another 30 percent decline. (See table.) Moreover, throughout the lull Israel continued to ban all exports from Gaza,[29] essentially rendering Gaza's economy non-functional. In October 2008, the World Bank reported that only about 2% of Gaza's industrial establishments were still functioning, industrial employment had dropped from 35,000 in 2005 to 840, and 40,000 jobs in agriculture were lost.[30]

Truckloads Per Month Entering Gaza[31]

Month	Truckloads
December 2005	13,430
May 2007	10,921
March 2008	3,399
April 2008	1,991
May 2008	1,821
June 2008	2,103
July 2008	5,028
August 2008	3,565
September 2008	4,069
October 2008	2,823
November 2008	579

Israel closed Gaza's borders allowing just 579 trucks into the territory for the entire month of November (see table above) — this to support 1.5 million people. Furthermore, noted the UN,

"Staff and assistance from international NGOs were prevented from entering Gaza throughout the month. Additionally, the intensified closure forced UNRWA to suspend food distribution for five days during the month, along with its cash assistance programme, as a result of restrictions on cash shipments to Gaza."[32]

According to UNICEF, lack of fuel, electricity, and spare parts interrupted Gaza's water supply. In Gaza City 50% of the population had access to water only several hours a week; 30% had access every four days and 20% every three days. Other areas of Gaza received water on average every other day.[33]

It was obvious that Hamas could never agree to an extension of a truce while this sort of crippling economic blockade was in place. But, as Hamas leader Khalid Mish'al explained, "When this broken truce neared its end, we expressed our readiness for a new comprehensive truce in return for lifting the blockade and opening all Gaza border crossings, including Rafah. Our calls fell on deaf ears." Numerous statements before the expiration of the cease-fire made clear that this was Hamas's position.[34] Jimmy Carter described his efforts at mediation:

"It was clear that the preeminent issue was opening the crossings into Gaza. Representatives from the Carter Center visited Jerusalem, met with Israeli officials and asked if this was possible in exchange for a cessation of rocket fire. The Israeli government informally proposed that 15 percent of normal supplies might be possible if Hamas first stopped all rocket fire for 48 hours. This was unacceptable to Hamas, and hostilities erupted."[35]

Fifteen percent of normal supplies was less than the inadequate July level.[36] It is thus not at all surprising that Hamas rejected such an agreement.

Thus, the second answer to the Israeli question, "what else could it do given the barrage of rockets that were being fired from Gaza?," was clear: lift the blockade — which it ought to have done on humanitarian grounds in any case — and then a truce would be possible, and there would be no need for war to end rocket attacks.

Hamas foolishly and immorally decided that renewed rocket attacks would make Israel more accommodating. Immorally, because Israel's punishment of innocent Palestinians does not justify punishment of innocent Israelis. Foolishly, because it played right into the hands of those Israeli leaders who wanted a war to redeem themselves and Israel's military reputation after the debacle of the 2006 war with Lebanon. But this Hamas policy doesn't alter the fact that Israel could have ended rocket attacks without the need for resort to war.

Now it might be argued that a truce was too dangerous for Israel because Hamas could not be trusted to keep its word. In fact, however, just as it was Israel, not Hamas, that broke the 2008 truce, so Hamas's record for maintaining truces was better than that of Israel. Sherifa Zuhur, a leading U.S. authority on Hamas, wrote in a study recently published by the U.S. Army War College that truces with Hamas in 2002 and 2003 "were broken when Israelis assassinated HAMAS leaders."[37] A former senior European security official interviewed by the International Crisis Group pointed to:

"continued Israeli assassinations and killings that completely undermined genuine attempts at de-escalation. Israel's response created a self-fulfilling prophecy. They had the expectation of failure and in effect guaranteed it. . . .[T]here were continued provocations, a dismissive attitude, no confidence-building measures, and unhelpful statements. Israel's Minister of Defence would publicly claim that Hamas is re-grouping and that [the] IDF must prepare for a massive attack. Hamas begins to prepare for this eventuality. To Israel this is proof of its original thesis, a *casus belli*. It attacks, Hamas responds, the IDF feels vindicated and the *hudna* [truce] is history."[38]

And Nancy Kanwisher and her associates did a quantitative study showing that whenever there was a pause in the killing, Israel was much more likely to break it than was Hamas, and the longer the pause, the more likely that it was Israel that broke it.[39]

There is thus no justification for Israel to have refused to pursue a continuation of the lull, and thus no necessity for having gone to war.

Proportionality

A country that has just cause to go to war must still act proportionately. Israel did not have just cause to go to war — given the fact that it is an occupying power, trying to maintain its occupation, and given the fact that the rocket fire could have been ended by agreeing to extend the truce with a lifting of the blockade. Therefore, regardless of *how* Israel conducted itself, its war would have been unjust.

But for those who believe (wrongly) that Israel *did* have just cause, the war would still not be

just if it were not carried out in conformity with the principle of proportionality.

Under both international law and just war theory, the principle of proportionality prohibits attacking a military objective if doing so will result in a loss of civilian life or damage to civilian property or the natural environment that outweighs the value of the objective. The weighing here obviously includes a subjective component — exactly how many civilians might one kill in order to destroy a military objective which in turn may cause harm to one's own population. But the subjectivity is not unlimited. Surely to destroy the capability to launch weapons that had caused 22 deaths over 7 years (and none since June 5, 2008),[40] it cannot be proportionate to kill hundreds of civilians. This though is exactly what Israel did in Operation Cast Lead: some 1,400 Palestinians were killed, at the very least half of them civilians.[41] Thirteen Israelis were also killed, of whom three were civilians.

Michael Walzer argues, correctly, that proportionality is forward-looking, not backward looking: that is, that the harm caused by one's attack should be weighed against the likely future harm from not attacking rather than against the harm caused previously.[42] But since the future harm to Israel from not attacking was likely zero *if Israel had seriously pursued a truce with Hamas, let alone if it had moved to end the occupation*, the proportionality principle would ban any attack at all.

Did Israel really think what it did in Gaza was proportionate? It is doubtful. In fact, its officials and think-tank analysts explicitly advocated acting *disproportionately*.[43] When one's approach to dealing with Palestinians — and Arabs more generally — is to intimidate and bully rather than to seek some sort of diplomatic solution, it is no surprise that the chief concern will be the strength of one's deterrent, which means that ferocity, not proportionality, will be what is valued.

Israel maintains that any civilians killed were unintended and regretted accidents and that it was Hamas that bears responsibility for any Palestinian civilian casualties because it intermingled its military assets with civilians. Neither of these are convincing claims.

It is hard to claim that deaths were unintended when a member of the IDF General Staff told a journalist before the Operation took place that 600-800 civilian deaths were expected.[44] Or when a senior IDF officer declared that "When we suspect that a Palestinian fighter is hiding in a house, we shoot it with a missile and then with two tank shells, and then a bulldozer hits the wall. It causes damage but it prevents the loss of life among soldiers."[45] Or when the IDF approach was, in the words of an Israeli commander, "We are very violent. We do not balk at any means to protect the lives of our soldiers."[46] Or when the weapons used in one of the most densely populated areas in the world were those that cannot possibly discriminate between combatants and noncombatants, such as white phosphorus,[47] flechettes,[48] and 155 mm. artillery shells.[49] And when it was known beforehand that, "Unlike in Lebanon, the civilians in Gaza won't have many places to escape to," in the words of the IDF Chief of Staff[50] — precisely because Israel prohibited Gazans from seeking refuge. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees put it, Gaza was "the only conflict in the world in

which people are not even allowed to flee."[51]

Moreover, apart from the permissive rules of engagement recently documented,[52] we know that the IDF *did* intentionally strike certain civilian targets: civilian police, and government buildings for which no claim was made that they were being improperly used for military purposes.

Now it might be argued that police are armed and hence legitimate targets, but international law is quite explicit that police are presumptively civilians unless they are taking part in hostilities.[53] A territory of one and a half million people needs police — to direct traffic, prevent crime, and so on — this doesn't make them combatants. The police attacked by Israel were not engaged in hostilities: many of them were police cadets at a graduation ceremony. In its opening salvo, Israel bombed (in the words of the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem) "the main police building in Gaza and killed, according to reports, forty-two Palestinians who were in a training course and were standing in formation at the time of the bombing. Participants in the course study first-aid, handling of public disturbances, human rights, public-safety exercises, and so forth. Following the course, the police officers are assigned to various arms of the police force in Gaza responsible for maintaining public order."[54]

It is true, of course, that these police trainees might have become Hamas fighters at a later point in time. But it is also true that attacks on many Israeli civilian targets kill those who — given widespread membership in the reserves — might later be called to military duty. It would be grotesque to justify the suicide bombing of a bus by pointing to the reserve status of the victims. It is no less grotesque to justify the slaughter of these police cadets. And think what we would say if Osama bin Laden declared that many of the casualties on 9-11 were legitimate military targets because they were New York City police.

Israel has also targeted government buildings and anyone connected to Hamas, regardless of their war role, and Israeli officials have acknowledged that these attacks were intentional and have felt no need to show that the building or person in question had a military connection. A senior Israeli military official told the *Washington Post*, "There are many aspects of Hamas, and we are trying to hit the whole spectrum, because everything is connected and everything supports terrorism against Israel." Major Avital Leibovitch, an IDF spokeswoman, said, "Anything affiliated with Hamas is a legitimate target."[55] Brigadier General Dan Harel declared:

"We are hitting not only terrorists and launchers, but also the whole Hamas government and all its wings.… We are hitting government buildings.… After this operation there will not be one Hamas building left standing in Gaza.…"[56]

"'Hamas's civilian infrastructure is a very, very sensitive target. If you want to put pressure on them, this is how,' said Matti Steinberg, a former top adviser to Israel's domestic security service and an expert on Islamist organizations."[57] On January 13, the *New York Times*

reported that Israeli intelligence officials said that although the military wing of Hamas remained substantially intact, (in the *Times's* words) "greater damage has been done to Hamas's capacity to run the Gaza strip, with a large number of government buildings destroyed over the course of the operation."[58]

Israel also intentionally bombed civilian money exchange shops on the grounds that this was a way to harm Hamas financially.[59] Again, what would we think of an argument by bin Laden that striking the World Trade Center was a legitimate military target because this was a way to harm the U.S. government financially?

Israel is quite right that international humanitarian law prohibits placing military assets in civilian areas. Nevertheless, this doesn't give an attacker unlimited right to then strike these assets. The attacker must still weigh the harm to civilians against the military benefit. As Human Rights Watch explains:

"…the attacking party is not relieved from its obligation to take into account the risk to civilians simply because it considers the defending party responsible for having located legitimate military targets within or near populated areas. That is, the presence of a Hamas commander or military facility in a populated area would not justify attacking the area without regard to the threatened civilian population."[60]

In addition, since Israel's target list included the homes of Hamas leaders, there is no way that Hamas could have avoided intermingling civilians with military targets.

The comments of a former U.S. Marine are relevant here. One can question his account of what actual U.S. policy was in Iraq, but his remarks are telling nonetheless:

"I recently retired from the US Marine Corps, but I saw service in Iraq. I do know something of military matters that are relevant to the situation now in Gaza.

"I am dismayed by the rhetoric from US politicians and pundits to the effect that 'if the US were under rocket attack from Mexico or Canada, we would respond like the Israelis'. This a gross insult to US servicemen; I can assure you that we would NOT respond like the Israelis. In fact, US armed forces and adjunct civilians are under attack constantly in Iraq and Afghanistan by people who are much better armed, much better trained and far deadlier than Hamas…. Israel has indeed taken a small number of casualties from Hamas rocket fire (about 20 killed since 2001), but we have taken thousands of casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan, including many civilian personnel. Hundreds of American casualties have occurred due to indirect fire, often from mortars. This is particularly true in or near the Green Zone in Baghdad. This fire often originates from densely populated urban areas.

"Americans do not, I repeat DO NOT, respond to that fire indiscriminately. When I say 'indiscriminately', I mean that even if we can precisely identify the source of the fire (which can be very difficult), we do not respond if we know we will cause civilian casualties. We always evaluate the threat to civilians before responding, and in an urban area the threat to

civilians is extremely high. If US servicemen violate those rules of engagement and harm civilians, I assure you we do our best to investigate — and mete out punishment if warranted."[61]

Two further points should be noted.

First, the IDF has also used Palestinian civilians as human shields. According to Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Program, "Our sources in Gaza report that Israeli soldiers have entered and taken up positions in a number of Palestinian homes, forcing families to stay in a ground floor room while they use the rest of their house as a military base and sniper position." This, said Smart, "clearly increases the risk to the Palestinian families concerned and means they are effectively being used as human shields."[62]

Second, the IDF also intermingles it forces with Israeli civilians. Consider this report from the Israeli-government linked think tank:

"January 8: A rocket barrage was fired at an Israel village in the northwestern Negev. Seven IDF soldiers were wounded, one critically, one seriously, and five sustained minor injuries."[63]

Hamas, of course, was guilty of war crimes of its own: firing rockets at civilians and apparently killing some of its political opponents.[64] Whether Hamas used human shields is not yet clear: Israel makes this claim, but kept independent human rights observers out of Gaza during the fighting and for much time afterwards.[65] When Human Rights Watch was able to examine similar Israeli claims in the 2006 Lebanon war, they found the claims to be false.[66]

Israel's crimes — though on a vastly larger scale than those of Hamas as measured by civilian casualties — do not justify what Hamas did. Nor does the fact that Israel violated *jus ad bellum* make permissible violations of *jus in bello* by Hamas. However, there is one connection between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* that should be noted. If a country engages in an unjust war, then not only are the civilian deaths unjustified killing, but so too are the combatant deaths. This doesn't necessarily mean that the individual soldiers doing the killing are the equivalent of murderers, and certainly not that they should be punished as such. But a state launching an unjustified war — which, I have argued here, Israel did — has blood on its hands not just for the civilians killed, but for the soldiers as well. The responsible officials should be brought to account.

Operation Cast Lead was a massively disproportionate assault on a imprisoned population. Even if Israel had just cause to go to war, its conduct was morally and legally grotesque. But Israel did not have just cause to go to war: the threat posed by Palestinians rockets could have been nullified by ending the four-decade long occupation or even by simply lifting the blockade of Gaza, a blockade that was in any event a morally unacceptable form of collective punishment.

Jimmy Carter was exactly right when he called this "the unnecessary war."[67] And an

unnecessary war is *necessarily* an unjust and illegal war.

Notes

[1] Amos Harel, "IDF in Gaza: Killing civilians, vandalism, and lax rules of engagement," *Haaretz*, Mar. 19, 2009; Amos Harel, "'Shooting and crying'," *Haaretz*, Mar. 20, 2009; Amos Harel, "Testimonies on IDF misconduct in Gaza keep rolling in," *Haaretz*, Mar. 22, 2009.

[2] Uri Blau, "Dead Palestinian babies and bombed mosques – IDF fashion 2009," *Haaretz*, Mar. 20, 2009.

[3] "Judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Trial of German Major War Criminals," *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, 14 November 1945 – 1 October 1946* ("The Nazi Regime in Germany: The Common Plan or Conspiracy and Aggressive War").

[4] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "What is the status of the territories?" *Israel, the Conflict and Peace: Answers to frequently asked questions*, Nov. 2007.

[5] Even the US government doesn't accept this view. See the CIA World Factbook which states: "West Bank and Gaza Strip are Israeli-occupied with current status subject to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement – permanent status to be determined through further negotiation." Accessed 3/23/09.

[6] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "What is the status of the territories?" *Israel, the Conflict and Peace: Answers to frequently asked questions*, Nov. 2007.

[7] "Excerpts from Begin Speech at National Defense College," *New York Times*, Aug. 21, 1982.

[8] Donald Macintyre, "Secret memo shows Israel knew Six Day War was illegal," *The Independent,* May 26, 2007.

[9] International Court of Justice, *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, Advisory Opinion, July 9, 2004; Declaration of Judge Buergenthal (agreeing that the Israeli settlements violate Article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention and thus violate international humanitarian law).

[10] John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, report transmitted by the Secretary General, "Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967," UN General Assembly doc. A/61/470, Sept. 27, 2006.

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[36] Converting monthly to daily figures is not so simple because sometimes daily figures are the monthly figures divided by the number of days the crossings were potentially open — that is, excluding the Sabbath and holidays. But in any event, Carter refers to the first period of the lull reaching only 20 percent of the normal level, so 15 percent would be lower than even the highest month of the lull.

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[39] Nancy Kanwisher, Johannes Haushofer, and Anat Biletzki**, "**Reigniting Violence: How Do Ceasefires End?," *Huffington Post*, Jan. 6, 2009.

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[43] Reuters, "Israel warns Hezbollah war would invite destruction," Oct. 3, 2008; Gabriel Siboni, "Disproportionate Force: Israel's Concept of Response in Light of the Second Lebanon War," *INSS Insight* No. 74, Oct. 2, 2008. During the 2006 Lebanon war, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations responded to charges that Israel was using disproportionate force, saying "You're damn right we are." (Steven Erlanger, "With Israeli Use of Force, Debate Over Proportion," *New York Times*, July 19, 2006.) See also Ben White, "Israel: Wedded to War?" *Guardian*, Oct. 7, 2008.

[44] Amos Harel, "Cast Lead expose / What did the IDF think would happen in Gaza?" *Haaretz*, Mar. 28, 2009.

[45] Amos Harel, "IDF officer: 'It will take many years to restore' bomb-wracked Gaza," *Haaretz*, Jan. 7, 2009.

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[51] Quoted in Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Richard Falk, A/HRC/10/20, Mar. 17, 2009, paragraph 18.

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Gaza On My Mind: Old Hopes, Mistaken Assumptions, and New Ideas on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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At the point of departure they left me with thorns of remembrance and never returned.

—Mahmoud Darwish

Hopes for peace were soaring in 2004 when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel began evacuating 8000 Israeli settlers from Gaza. As Western newspapers depicted wailing Israeli settlers, bemoaning their betrayal while waiting for government checks to soften their move from Gaza, the evacuation was accompanied by nearly universal acclamation. It seemed like the first step in the creation of a Palestinian State. Only a year later, however, those hopes have vanished. Control was kept by Israel over the roads, air-space, electricity, and borders of Gaza. With the approval of the United States, 12,000 more Israelis settled on the West Bank thus effectively freezing the political process that would lead to the creation of an independent Palestine. The Palestinians were not fooled: the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was not the prelude to a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority but to further Zionist expansion and redrawing the borders of a "Greater Israel."

Peace now looks even further away than ever. Western media has embraced the Israeli version of events: that it had no choice but to invade Gaza in response to consistent violations of a cease-fire by Hamas, a cease-fire that this "terrorist" organization refused to extend, and that it was acting in the name of an international assault against terrorism. But the deal was that, if Hamas ceased its rocket fire, Israel would ease its embargo: Hamas did radically reduce its attacks and Israel only strengthened its blockage; Hamas declared itself willing to rekindle negotiations; Israel closed the door. Hamas may have acted less out of calculation than bravado, and crude organizational self-interest, but Israeli leaders were motivated far less by international concerns with opposing terror in order to further the pursuit of peace than gaining ground against their right-wing rivals in the February elections. [1]

With the Israeli aerial assault on Gaza in December of 2008, following the closing of its borders, a humanitarian crisis has occurred that many feel has eradicated the possibility of a "two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. 1,300 Gazans have been killed including well over 200 children as against 13 Israelis and 3 civilians. 1.5 million Gazans are now cramped into a coastal strip of 140 square miles of land that is bereft of resources and infrastructure. 49% of Gazan citizens are unemployed; the World Food Program estimates that 35-60% of Gazan agriculture has been destroyed; 80% earn less than $2 per day; 100,000 have

abandoned their homes; 22,000 buildings have been destroyed, and the damages according to UNICEF now amount to roughly $2 billion. Electricity food, fuel, water, medical supplies, and sanitation services have been dramatically reduced. Gaza is in ruins and its citizens are living in what is tantamount to an outdoor prison. [2]

There is no need to stoke the flames with misplaced historical analogies that compare what is happening in Gaza with the "holocaust." Things are bad enough and many Gazans are undoubtedly feeling a sense of déjà vu. Most of them are descended from those who experienced the catastrophic expulsion (*nachba*) from Israel in 1947-8. That was the first time Israel invaded Gaza; it happened again in 1956 and 1967 and, most recently, in 2006. But today is not yesterday. Palestine is now both geographically and ideologically divided. Elections that had been called by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Mahmoud Abbas, whose Fatah party controlled the West Bank, wound up giving Hamas power in over the Palestinian National Authority Legislature with 43% of the vote. In March 2007, Hamas and Fatah formed a national unity government that was ready to negotiate a long-term ceasefire with Israel. But the Gazans had apparently voted the wrong way. Israel and the "quartet" of allegedly concerned peacemakers – the European Union, United Nations, Russia, and the United States – refused to recognize or engage in negotiations with a government that included a "terrorist" organization. Attempts to form a unity government between these two branches of the Palestinian Authority collapsed amid fighting in the streets between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia termed "more dangerous than Israeli aggression."[3] Fatah is notorious for its corruption and Hamas has taken toward assassinating "collaborators" in Gaza. Conflict between the two organizations has raged over the interminable character and negligible results of negotiations with Israel, and – perhaps most importantly — a profound division concerning the future of Palestine. Hamas was not invited to the Annapolis Conference that President George W. Bush put together in 2008 to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[4] Suspicion concerning the quartet's commitment to peace was only compounded by its tacit endorsement of Israel's blockade that gradually tightened after a truce was established in June of 2008 that was accompanied by a suspension of suicide bombings, and even rocket fire into Israel.

The cease-fire failed. Desperate to assert its organizational interests as the representative of the Palestinians, provoked by the killing of its partisans and the mass arrests of its supporters in the West Bank, Hamas once again began its rocket-fire on Ashkelon, Beer Sheva, and Siderot. More is involved than the military ineffectiveness of the strategy. This problematic decision on the part of Hamas and its allies like Islamic Jihad demonstrates how the current *Palestinian state in waiting* lacks the most essential element of any modern state: a single set of institutions that retains what Max Weber termed a "legitimate monopoly over the means of coercion." Three states – not two – define the current crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations –thereby dramatically complicating the pursuit of a just peace and a "two-state solution." Israel could have renegotiated the truce by opening the borders of Gaza to humanitarian aid and the basic necessities of life. But its decision on Gaza was shaped by its broader tactic of stalling and delaying negotiations with Fatah on the fate of the West Bank and a Palestinian state. These deadening peace negotiations with Fatah enervated the peace movement. With elections

in February of 2009 coming up, the trio running the present government – Ehud Barak of the Labor Party and Tzipi Livni and Ehud Olmert of the centrist Kadema Pary—knew its primary threat was Binjimin Netanyahu of the staunchly anti-concession and militarist Likud Party. This trio of leaders saw an opportunity and took it. Responding to the rocket fire of Hamas seemed a way for Labor and Kadima to undercut their right-wing rival. They had little to lose in mounting an attack. To be sure: the United States and the rest of the Quartet publicly chastised Israel for expanding its settlements and publicly praised Fatah for its "moderation." But the Israel government knew that it would suffer no practical curtailment of economic or military aid. Its leaders also knew that an invasion would secure the division of Gaza from the West Bank, compromise the character of the existing Palestinian state in waiting, and shatter the (always fragile) unity of the Palestinian enterprise for national self-determination. Perhaps they even anticipated the added benefit: preoccupation with the savagery of the assault and the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza would actually deflect concern with the creation of an independent Palestine.[5]

Israel cannot be simultaneously treated as having lost a battle and decimated its enemy or the infrastructure of its enemy: moralism doesn't help in making sense of the conflict and numbers don't lie when it comes to determining the "loser." Abolishing Hamas was, I think, never a serious objective. But Israel did wish to weaken the military power of Hamas—and that it did. Israeli losses were insignificant, by contrast, both in terms of casualties and infrastructure. Some have suggested that Israeli actions have imperiled its most basic strategic needs: the protection of its citizens, its deterrent power, its international support, and the prospect of peace. But this is rather naïve – and it certainly doesn't take into account the assumptions of right-wing Zionists and their allies. Israeli citizens are protected at least relative to the Palestinians. And, even should Hamas rockets strike deeper into Israel, this will only build national resolve and unity. Outbreaks of genuine anti-Semitism like the arson attack against the main synagogue in Caracas, meanwhile, are grist for the propaganda mill of reactionary Jewish organizations. As for deterrence: Israel has always relied on its ability to launch pre-emptive strikes and military interventions– and, concerns over international support notwithstanding, there is no reason to assume that its behavior will change given what has occurred in Gaza. Saudi Arabia has refused attempts to place an embargo on Israel and, in spite of the turbulence, relations with Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey remain firm. These countries may have balked in response to pressures from their citizenry, but they have grown remarkably quiet. That Qatar and Mauritania have suspended relations will surely not produce sleepless nights in Israel. If it were the United States, of course, that would be another matter entirely—and there is finally some debate over the level of spending for Israel. But the Obama Administration will surely not cut off aid, the various boycotts are more symbolic than real in their impact, and Israel has already been the subject of countless resolutions by the United Nations. With respect to international support, moreover, right-wing Zionists have always assumed that the *goyim* are untrustworthy (if not latent anti-Semites) and that the creation of an independent Palestine will burden Israel with an enduring security problem. This kind of thinking simply takes the Israeli establishment at its word—and ignores the obvious reality: its political mainstream has no real interest in an equitable peace with the Palestinians.

Everything becomes clear once the image of Israel as the nation intent upon securing peace is called into question –and Hamas is seen as (for its own purposes) playing into the hands of the imperialist enemy. Saudi Arabia put forward a plan that would have given formal recognition from all members of the Arab League in exchange for withdrawal to its pre-1967 borders, a partition of Jerusalem, a halt in settlement construction, and recognition of the "right of return" by Palestinians living in exile.[6] Virtually every activist and scholar concerned with establishing a two-state solution knows that these are the parameters in which it will take place. The basis for any future "security" of Israel lies in the formal recognition of the country; Jerusalem is already partitioned *de* facto and its religious diversity requires formal expression and guarantees;[7] land swaps with relatively tiny amounts of territory involved can deal with current settlements but, obviously, the possibility of bringing about a sovereign Palestine must preclude further settlements; and, as for the contentious "right of return," plans could bad developed that would exchange monetary compensation for making the choice not to return. The point is that the basic issues underpinning a settlement have already been articulated both specifically and in an integrated fashion. But Israel refused even to discuss, let alone endorse, the Saudi proposal. The Israeli right has no wish to see a Palestinian state: Zionist settlements are viewed as steps toward building a "greater Israel" and supporters of this vision often threaten armed violence against the state in the face of demands for expelling settlers and transferring territory to the Arabs. But this "greater Israel" lies far in the future. Thus, the only tactic for the Israeli right in the present is to delay all progress in reaching an agreement with the Palestinians

Exploding the possibility of peace is the real motive behind the Gazan invasion – and Israel is the primary culprit for what transpired. Its callous disregard of international law, its imperialist arrogance, and its disproportionate use of violence in seeking "security" are undeniable. It is Israel that began the attack; it is Israel that has engaged in what the late Baruch Kimmerling has termed "sociocide;" and it is Israel that must bear responsibility for its actions. There is a legitimate case to be made that those who authorized the outrages in Gaza should be forced to stand trial for crimes against humanity. Legitimate fear that the Saudi proposal has no chance of success combined with genuine outrage over the ferocious assault on Gaza has, perhaps predictably, produced a swing in world opinion to Hamas along with more than a bit of exaggeration and posturing by those concerned with the plight of Palestinians. Too many well meaning people have begun to praise Hamas as the vanguard of the "resistance;" condemn moderation as "treason;" and treat the "two state solution" as an anachronism. Hamas was also undoubtedly the recipient of popular support among Gazans disgusted with Fatah and policies of the Bush Administration that crudely intervened in the electoral process, tacitly endorsed an expansion of Israeli settlements, imposed sanctions on Syria, discouraged negotiations, and essentially proved complicit in the embargo of Gaza.[8] Having said that, however, does not justify romantic nonsense about the "resistance" – especially by those safely at a distance from the action — or the usual claims that Hamas is at least "doing something."

The question remains: what is Hamas actually doing? It has indeed provided social services for the residents of Gaza—that have now been obliterated by the invasion. It has represented the spirit of Palestinian resistance – that has been undermined by its internecine warfare with

Fatah. It appears as the principled opponent of an imperialism –but its vacillation on recognizing Israel and its ambivalence on the two state solution, coupled with its moral justification of violence and anti-Semitic rhetoric, has fostered the kind of distrust and uncertainty that legitimates the Israeli right. Hamas has strengthened its hand in the Palestinian Authority as surely as the Israeli right has secured control over its country's political landscape. Both dance around the need to recognize the other and the "two state solution" by essentially claiming that they will come on board if the majority of the citizenry endorses it – even as each does everything possible to undermine the possibility of achieving that consensus. Hamas is objectively playing into the hands of the Israeli right. If the Israeli government has shown itself as composed of unprincipled imperialists impervious to the suffering of Gazan citizens, however, then Hamas has acted like a shyster lawyer grabbing the limelight while his increasingly impoverished client is made to bear the costs of a seemingly endless trial. Its policy of launching rockets into Israel as a symbolic continuation of the "resistance" not only undermined Fatah, and provided its enemy with a pretext for military action, but also disrupted the formation of a Palestinian state in waiting and any latent prospect of peace.

Since it was formed in 1987, the identity of Hamas has rested on its Islamic convictions and its opposition to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has refused to recognize the existence of Israel; explicitly embraced violence as a morally justifiable tactic and — more important– denied the legitimacy of all precedents for settling the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict (including United Nations Security Council Resolution #242). Neither Israel nor the United States, it is perhaps worth noting, should be giving lectures on the dangers of missionary zeal, violence, or the sanctity of UN resolutions. Hamas is not monolithic and there are clear openings for negotiations. Hamas has never tried to impose Sharia law; it has (in fact) often negotiated with Israel in the past; it is willing to consider a ceasefire of up to 50 years with Israel; and its leadership has openly stated that a two-state solution is acceptable should the majority of Palestinians agree in a free vote. Hints that project a new and more pragmatic attitude, however, are always balanced by outbursts of the more old-fashioned rhetoric. Should Hamas supplant Fatah, (which is entirely possible), the new outlook might take hold. Until then, however, Hamas has its identity to protect; its fight with Fatah to win; and its own interest in delaying any resolution to the conflict. What Hamas now seeks could have been gained without a rocket being launched against Israel or a bomb being dropped on Gaza. Were there something more to the policy of Hamas than organizational self-interest, indeed, it would not now be willing to re-engage Fatah and cease its rocket-fire in exchange for a partial opening of the Gazan borders and a withdrawal of Israeli troops – or, to put it more simply, re-establish the status quo ante.[9]

Many analysts have noted that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: but what if delaying a solution is itself seen as the solution? That is the strategy of both the Israeli right and Hamas – and Gaza has made abundantly clear how they reinforce and legitimate one another. Each is defined by what it opposes. Each also pursues its organizational interest with self-righteous zealotry and without the slightest regard either for its own base or the broader Palestinian constituency. Each has contributed to creating the roadblock that

undermines the possibility of peace beyond the stated desires of majorities in both Israel and Palestine that seek an end to the conflict and the creation of two sovereign states. It is as if radicals unwilling or unable to articulate a strategy linking means and ends somehow had a veto over the will of the majority and a meaningful policy.

Neither the Israeli right nor Hamas, however, is going away. The roadblock that they constitute calls not merely for a new intervention by the United States, but a re-evaluation of mistaken assumptions and failed policies. Such a rethinking is required both for the pursuit of peace and for the regional interests of the United States. As things now stand, though the United States has publicly expressed support for a Palestinian state, Mousa Abu Marzook – a high-ranking official of Hamas—put it well when he wrote that …"when Palestinians see an F-16 with the Star of David painted on its tail, they see America."

Kant once wrote that: "who wills the end necessarily wills the means thereto." If the creation of a Palestinian state is truly the strategic goal of the United States then it must employ tactics that will further its creation – or, at least, buttress the Palestinian state in waiting. Two implications derive from this: 1) American foreign policy must envision a Palestinian state, which involves fostering cooperation between Hamas and Fatah, and 2) American foreign policy must insist not merely upon the security of Israel, but of Palestine as well. Drawing these implications would mark a dramatic shift in outlook: Hamas has traditionally been branded as a terrorist organization, and excluded from all negotiations sponsored by the Quartet, while preserving the security of Israel has been used to justify its military control over Palestine and its interventions that take place with regularity and impunity.

Commitment to these two aforementioned goals rests on the willingness by the United States to articulate economic incentives for Hamas and sanctions on Israel. Only in this way is it possible to think about altering political behavior that has become entrenched and that undermines the prospect of peace. So far, however, American policy in the Middle East has rested on the opposite set of assumptions: placing economic sanctions on Hamas and giving economic incentives for Israel. Such an approach only fortifies the existing imbalance of power between Israel and Palestine –and, just as important, the most reactionary tendencies within the two camps. These same consequences – ironically — are generated by the calls of numerous non-governmental actors on the international scene for boycotting Israel, engaging in solidarity with Hamas, and withdrawing recognition of Israel. Threatening a boycott confirms right-wing Zionist beliefs that Israel is being singled out and that it is a nation under siege; insisting upon uncritical solidarity with Hamas simply endorses its behavior relative to both Israel and Fatah; while withdrawing recognition of Israel undercuts a two-state solution and the Saudi plan that, for better or worse, is the only meaningful proposal on the table.

None of these proposals offer positive incentives for changing behavior with an eye toward securing peace and a Palestinian state. Better to focus on foreign aid as providing incentives for political change among the combatants in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A new aid policy can obviously be pursued in connection with new diplomatic initiatives by the United States toward establishing better relations with Iran and Syria. Support for Hamas is provided by both

these nations. But their control over their ally is as indirect as the control exercised by the United States. Economic and military aid is a specific tool for exerting influence and influence and, to that extent, rethinking the conditions for its employment becomes important for establishing new connections between American strategy and tactics in the region. According to the Congressional Research Service's 2007 report "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel," $6.8 million dollars per day is being spent on military aid to Israel – not to mention another $1.4 billion yearly in guaranteed loans. A 12% increase in aid to Israel was demanded by the Bush Administration in 2008. As for Palestine (or, better, Fatah), by contrast, it received $ 3 million. Worth considering is that Israel essentially was given this aid without any preconditions whereas adherence to non-violence, the recognition of Israel, and the "two-state solution" was demanded of Fatah. It is also worth considering that Egypt received roughly $2 billion in military-economic aid while Jordan was given about $500,000,000. Both Egypt and Jordan have negotiated separate peace treaties with Israel, refused to support an oil embargo on Israel, and have been complicit in isolating Gaza.

Would Israeli behavior change if American aid were tied to achieving certain benchmarks in securing peace and the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestine? Perhaps, or perhaps not, but the likelihood is far better than if Israel is simply given carte blanche by the United States to act as it wishes. The same question can be asked with respect to Hamas. Would its behavior change if it were offered economic aid and integrated into the peace process undertaken by the Palestinian state in waiting? Perhaps, or perhaps not, but the likelihood is far better than if Hamas is treated as it has been by the United States. Some believe that the United States should simply cut aid to Israel or –without simply referencing Israel – refuse to provide aid for any nation or movement whose actions contradict international law. There is a certain moral power to these last two arguments. That is also the case with the decision by the Obama Administration to provide $300 million in humanitarian aid for non-governmental organizations working in Gaza– should Israel choose to open the border – and another $600 million to the Palestinian Authority.[10] All these proposals, however, leave Hamas out of the mix and without a material reason to alter its outlook and behavior. Far worse are suggestions to give scuttle the two state solution by giving Egypt and Jordan authority over Gaza and the West Bank. This would create the seeds for conflict within these states, effectively abolish the only workable plan on the table, and render utopian any hope for achieving peace in the foreseeable future. But, still, there are now three actors not two – Israel, Fatah, and Hamas – that will determine the fate of Israeli-Palestinian relations. The United States and the Quartet need to recognize this reality. They will have to shape their policies with an eye not merely on the "security" of Israel but that of Gaza and the West Bank. Perhaps negotiations in the future will involve three "states" rather than two. Rethinking the use of foreign aid in the region by making it available to all the major regional actors, and linking aid to specific and achievable benchmarks in pursuit of peace, is one way of addressing this issue. It bridges the chasm separating strategy from tactics and ends from means in American foreign policy.

How realistic is any of this? Determining the benchmarks is nothing more than a technical matter if the Saudi plan is used as an objective point of reference. Also, there has already been

a marked change in the relatively unqualified support that Israel has received from the United States since 1967. Criticism of Israel has increased along with awareness of the terrible plight experienced by the Palestinians. In spite of powerful lobbying organizations like AIPAC, and the uncritical support offered Israel by politicians in both parties, Democratic voters overwhelmingly oppose the Israeli invasion of Gaza (31-55%) though Republican oveters support it (62-27%).[11] Public opinion is clearly shifting on the Middle East, but the current debate in the United States is still focused more on Israeli than on American interests. Articulating those interests offers an opportunity for progressives in the political establishment. Something more is needed, however, than sending yet another special envoy to the region or a congressional delegation to Gaza. President Barack Obama might take a page from the book of President George W. Bush: create a Palestine Study Group headed by someone like former Secretary of State James Baker but comprised of intellectuals with views different from those that have failed so miserably over the years. There is a need for new ideas –and initially, for better or worse, these ideas can only take speculative form.

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[1]Note the excellent discussion by Henry Siegman, “Israel’s Lies” in London Review of Books 1/28/09.

[2] Note my essay, originally published in 2005, included in Stephen Eric Bronner, “Withdrawal Pains: Gaza, Peace, and the Future of Palestine” in Peace Out of Reach: Middle Eastern Travels and the Search for Reconcilation (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), pg. 75ff.

[3] *The Economist* (January 24, 2009), pg. 51.

[4] Stephen Eric Bronner, “Who Are the Palestinians Today?” in Logos: A Journal of Modern Society and Culture Vol. 7 No. 1 (2008) www.logosjournal.com.

[5]Avi Shlaim, “How Israel brought Gaza to the Brink of Humanitarian Catastrophe” in *The Guardian* 7 January 2009.

[6] Note the discussion in Stephen Eric Bronner, “States of Despair: History, Politics, and the Struggle for Palestine” in *Blood in the Sand: Imperial Fantasies, Right-Wing Ambitions, and the Erosion of American Democracy* (Lexington: University press of Kentucky, 2005), pgs. 60ff.

[7] Menachem Klein, *Jerusalem: The Contested City* (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

[8] Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, "How Not to Make Peace in the Middle East" in *The New York Review of Books* (January 15, 2009), pg. 42.

[9] *The New York Times* (February 14, 2009).

[10] *The New York Times* (February 24, 2009).

[11] Glenn Greenwald, "More oddities in the U.S. 'Debate' Over Israel/Gaza" in *Salon* (January 2, 2009).

Gaza 2009: Hit by an Iron Wall

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The Iron Wall in Theory

The conceptual origins of the 2009 Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip, so appropriately designated Operation Cast Lead, as well as its numerous predecessors,[1] can be traced back to November 4, 1923. On that date Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, the founding father of right wing Zionist thinking, published an article in Russian (subsequently translated into English in 1937) entitled "The Iron Wall (We and the Arabs)."[2] In this piece Jabotinsky lays out what he felt to be a "realist" position. He readily admitted that there are "two nations" in Palestine–the Jews and the Arab Palestinians. In this he was far more factual than, say, Golda Meir who, on June 15, 1969, rather stupidly told the Sunday Times that "there is no such thing as a Palestinian people." Jabotinsky's recognition of the existence of the Palestinian branch of the Arab nation was just the beginning. He went on to "swear, for us and our descendants, that we will never…attempt to expel or oppress the Arabs." Alas, for both the Israeli Right and Left, this pledge has obviously gone extinct. Nonetheless, if he had stopped there he may well have been a posthumous candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. But, as it turned out, there was a very big catch. In order to qualify for Jobatinsky's "completely peaceful" offer the Palestinians had to allow the Zionists to achieve their aims of majority status in the "Land of Israel" without putting up any resistance.

Jabotinsky did not believe this was possible. And, not because the Palestinians are barbarians, cockroaches, terrorists or any of the other epithets cast upon them by subsequent, far cruder, Israeli leaders. Indeed, he asserts that the Palestinian Arabs are "not a rabble but a nation." Rather, it was because "every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement." Jabotinsky posits this as a sort of law of human nature. He tells us it is "in the nature of things." And, to change that nature is impossible. Therefore, Palestinian resistance is inevitable and natural as long as there is "a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of 'Palestine' into 'the Land of Israel.'"

The strategy of conquest Jabotinsky goes on to propose flows logically from this alleged aspect of human nature. Colonization, he insists, must be pursued in a manner that results in an "iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is, in toto, our policy towards the Arabs." What does Jabotinsky mean by an "iron wall?" For him it is not just a defensive concept. It is primarily an offensive one. For Jabotinsky, the Zionist policy should be one that forces the Palestinians to concede that there is no hope for them to be able to displace the Zionists and establish their own country. Only at that point is agreement between Zionists and Palestinian Arabs possible–wholly on Zionist terms. "Only when not a single breach is visible in

the iron wall, only when the extreme groups lose their sway, and influence transfers to moderate groups," only then will the Palestinians accept their fate. Israeli governments, admittedly under an ever adaptive propaganda cover, have been following the Iron Wall policy for the last 61 years.

The Iron Wall in Practice

_If you want the history of the application of the Iron Wall strategy I refer you to the literally hundreds of reports of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, various UN Rapporteurs, Israel's B'tselem, Physician's for Human Rights, and even the US State Department's country reports for Israel and the Occupied Territories. What you will find is that there has never been an independent human rights organization that has investigated the Israeli conduct towards the Palestinians that has not pointed to Israel's consistent violations of human rights. Making life dangerous and miserable for the Palestinians is the strategy of the Iron Wall.

Remember, the Israeli leaders who adhere to the Iron Wall strategy expect the Palestinians to resist. Indeed, at least in the short run, they want the Palestinians to resist because the more they resist the quicker they can shut down every "breach visible in the iron wall" and force the Palestinians to simply give up. Sometimes this sentiment is publically expressed by Israeli spokesmen, though usually with a propaganda twist that ironically makes it appear that the Israelis are the victims of Palestinian violence. For instance in 2002 Moshe Yaalon, who was then the Israeli military Chief of Staff , said that there needs to be "a very deep internalization by the Palestinians that terrorism and violence will not defeat us."[2] As we will see, by 2002 there can be little doubt that increasing numbers of Palestinians were having it "burned into their consciousness" (another Yaalon phrase that now has great popularity in Israel) that diplomacy and negotiation would not force the Israelis to accept any sort of reasonable compromise. Thus, if diplomacy and negotiation would not work and violent resistance would not work, what would? The Israeli answer is that nothing would work to get the Palestinians what they want. This was Yaalon's rather piecemeal way of expounding the Iron Wall approach.

The confrontation between Zionists and Palestinians has been going on ever since the British took hold of Palestine during World War I and began to facilitate European Jewish immigration into that land. Soon after the establishment of the State of Israel , the Palestinian fedayeen (all of whom were displaced refugees–victims of the Nakba) began making largely ineffectual raids into Israel. Israel's response to these were out of all proportion to the damage done by the Fedayeen and aimed largely at the Jordanian, Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese governments which allowed the Palestinian refugee fighters to cross their borders. Soon the leaders of these countries, understanding that they were no match for the Israeli war machine (allied as it was first to France and then the United States), called a halt to most fedayeen activity. A breach in the Iron Wall was thus closed. Under these conditions Yasir Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) eventually gave up the armed struggle (this happened in 1988) and shifted the fight to the diplomatic front. However, the Zionists were certainly not going to

diplomatically concede to the Palestinians a national status they could not achieve militarily. For them Palestinian diplomacy was just another attempt to break through the Iron Wall. So they stalled, rejected (as with the two state solution offered by Arafat at Camp David II), and in the end simply broke whatever agreements they did make with the PLO (as in the case of the Oslo Accords). The Palestinians were soon as frustrated on the diplomatic front as on the military one. I am not sure if the Palestinians understood what was happening here. That it was all the strategy of the Iron Wall for the Israeli leadership. That from the Zionist perspective their could be no compromises with the Palestinians–at least not until they surrendered.

Frustration did not mean that all Palestinians abandoned armed resistance. Indeed, by the end of the 1980s conditions were ripe for popular uprisings known as Intifadas. These would soon break out and proceed along an ascending curb of violence. With the first Intifada, which broke out in 1987, the PLO leadership under Arafat (then in exile in Tunis) began to lose control of the Palestinian people who took to the streets in a spontaneous act of revolt against Israel. It is in the ensuing chaos that groups like Hamas stepped into a military resistance leadership role. The first Intifada was mostly stone throwing and the occasional Molotov cocktail. Although the Israelis responded with their standard tactic of disproportionate force, the revolt lasted six years. It was brought to an end only by the Oslo Accords (September 1993) which brought Arafat back from exile and presented the Palestinians with the illusion of a process leading to a state of their own. However, what the Israelis wanted from Arafat and the PLO was that they should act as surrogate police and control the Palestinians for the occupiers. Co-opting the PLO leadership would be a big step in solidifying the Iron Wall. But as long as he was alive Arafat would not play the expected role. For their part, the Israelis broke the Oslo Accords almost as soon as they signed them and the colonization process went on apace. Arafat ended up besieged by the Israelis in his half destroyed headquarters in Ramallah. He died in November 2004, perhaps poisoned by an Israeli operative.

It is probably the case that the Jewish population of Israel is no more aware of the Iron Wall strategy of their leaders than are the Palestinian people. And this is necessarily so. For it turns out that to put the Iron Wall strategy into practice takes a high degree of brutality. After all, the offensive aspect of the strategy requires Israel to beat on the Palestinians repeatedly in order to make them give up all hope in their own liberation. If they fail to do so you have to beat on them some more, and then more and more and more…… Jabotinsky handled this ethical dilemma by simply declaring Zionist ends inherently moral and then asserted that since the end is moral so is the means. He put it this way, "we hold that Zionism is moral and just. And since it is moral and just, justice must be done, no matter whether…Achmet agree[s] with it or not." But this is just words. Normal human beings are not going to engage in 61 years of battering their neighbors unless they are led to believe that their enemy is barbaric and there is no other way to fight him. So the average Israeli has been brought up in a war oriented culture that teaches him or her that Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular are just incurable anti-Semites, indeed just latter day Nazis, who want to "kick the Israelis into the sea." Therefore Israel's actions against the Palestinians are always defensive. Here is how the Israeli journalist Amira Hass (who is aware of Israel's strategy and able to properly

contextualize it) puts it, "…the Israeli public relations machinery has exaggerated the danger of the military threat that the Palestinians pose to us. When they moved from stones to rifles and from Molotov cocktails to suicide bombings, from roadside bombs to Qassams and from Qassams to Grads, and from PLO to Hamas, we said with a whoop of victory, "We told you. They're anti-Semites." And therefore, we have the right to go on a rampage."[3]

"Rampage" is just another word for the Jabotinsky's Iron Wall strategy.

The Problem of Gaza

With the death of Arafat in 2004, Israel's Iron Wall closed a very big breach. Arafat was the heart and soul of Palestinian secular resistance and when he left the scene there was no comparable leader to take his place. This led to a rapid deterioration within the PLO and the Palestinian Authority (PA) that Arafat had set up. Indeed, under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, the PA started to resemble the collaborationist Palestinian government the Zionists had been looking for since the Oslo debacle.

At first it seemed that Arafat's death and his replacement with Abbas might have put the Israelis into a more compromising frame of mind. After all, in September 2005 they unilaterally pulled their 8,000 colonists out of Gaza. It was true that the Gaza settlements were in an exposed position, sitting in the midst of one and a half million Palestinians many of whom were loyal to the militant Islamic resistance organization Hamas. Hamas is a religiously motivated group best known in the West for launching suicide bomb attacks against Israel. Though they had suspended such attacks several years ago, they still represented the most dedicated source of resistance Israel has to face. But Israel had defended the Gaza settlers for 38 years so why pull them out now? As it turned out it was not due to any retreat from the strategy of the Iron Wall. On the contrary, it was a tactical maneuver to achieve a free hand against Hamas in Gaza.[4]

Thus, Hamas's militancy contrasted sharply with Fatah following Arafat's demise. All the more so after it defeated Fatah in internationally supervised democratic elections held in January 2006. Fatah lost the elections not only because Abbas and his compatriots had got nowhere in negotiations with Israel (why should Israel give anything substantial to a group that was approaching proxy status?) but also because Fatah's bureaucracy had become corrupt. For the Palestinians Fatah was bankrupt. Hamas might be an Islamic movement, but its leaders are honest and had always seen to the needs of ordinary, now mostly impoverished, Palestinians and still actively resisted the Israeli occupation. Hamas had now became the democratically elected government of Palestine. For the Israelis this made Hamas the biggest, and perhaps the last, breach in the Iron Wall. For the Fatah leadership also it made Hamas, and not the Israeli occupiers, their number one enemy.

A sure sign of this mutual perception of Hamas came in September 2008. In that month a meeting took place outside of Ramallah between the West Bank militia leaders of Fatah and Israeli military commanders. According to reports in the Israeli paper Ydiot Ahronot the

meeting was to arrange Israeli acceptance for the deployment of more Fatah policemen in the city of Jenin. But it went further and included reaching a common agreement on the destruction of Hamas prior to the end of Mahmoud Abbas's presidential term of office on January 9th. The Fatah militia leaders described Hamas as a common enemy of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The two would now work together to destroy this enemy.[5] Israel would destroy Hamas in Gaza and Fattah would assist in its destruction on the West Bank.

Rampage 2009

Even before the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon (the man who oversaw the Sabra and Chatila massacres) pulled its settlers from Gaza in 2005 it was clear that the impediments to normal life for the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank would be getting worse and not better. This is attested to by James Wolfensohn, a Orthodox Jew who, up until he resigned in April 2006, was the Quartet representative for the Middle East. He, along with then Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, had worked out an agreement in the Summer of 2005 between Israel and the Abbas run Palestinian Authority to clear away much of the impediments to economic revival for the Palestinians. Supposedly, this was to be Israel's reward for Mahmoud Abbas's cooperative demeanor. The number of roadblocks (then numbering about 500) that restricted Palestinian movement were to be reduced and a corridor between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which the Israelis had originally agreed to as part of the Oslo Accords, was to be finally allowed. According to Wolfensohn, "in the months that followed, every aspect of the agreement was abrogated" by Israel with no apparent objection from the United States.[6] When the Israelis withdrew from Gaza a few months later, a slow strangulation of the Gaza through a gradual tightening up of the borders began. One favorite Israeli trick at this point was the instituting of long delays for the export of Palestinian produce. Palestinian farm products were allowed to rot at the border crossings.[7]

Israel's actions were the diplomatic equivalent of spitting in the face of Mahmoud Abbas, Fatah and the PA and contributed to their resounding lost to Hamas in the national elections in January 2006. After Hamas won the election they offered Israel a ten year truce which was rejected out of hand. Instead the victory was seized upon by both Israel and the Bush administration to further strangle Gaza and its one and a half million residents. Draconian sanctions were applied, unemployment shot up, vital medicines became harder to import, periodically the Israelis would cut off the water supply and stop fuel shipments to the power plants. The utter maliciousness of it all was best symbolized by the tactic of Israeli jets breaking the sound barrier over Gaza City at all hours of the day and night. Of course, all these actions were claimed to be taken in response to Hamas violence. However Hamas violence could be uniformly traced to Israeli provocations. What the Israelis, and their accomplice in the White House, were about was the purposeful collapse of the Gaza economy. Dove Weisglass, a high ranking adviser to Sharon as well as his successor Ehud Olmert, made Israeli aims quite clear in July 2006. The Palestinians were being put on a diet, he said, "the will get a lot thinner, but won't die."[8] Weisglass was wrong as far as death was concerned. A growing number of Gazan children were already malnourished. A further "diet" was bound to kill some of them. The purposeful starvation of a civilian population is a war crime under the

Geneva Conventions, but Weisglass paid no notice to international law. The Israeli and American actions, carried out with the cooperation of the European Union, was clearly an act of collective punishment of the Palestinians for having the audacity of electing Hamas. It was also the institution of a siege, and a siege is an act of war.

The rocket attacks that came out of Gaza were a response to Israel's long standing war posture, to say nothing of Israel's routine violent provocations.[9] They were also a response to the Israel's out of hand rejection of Hamas's signals that it was willing to accept a two state solution to the conflict (signals never reported in the US media). The subsequent assertion from Israel that they have a right to defend their citizens is simple hypocrisy in the absence of the same right given to the Palestinians. The hypocrisy was indulged in not only by Israelis, but also United States political leaders and journalists. The former asked the American people what they would do if rockets were fired from such places as Tijuana or Saskatoon? Alas, these politicians did not give the American people any context for understanding their question. In fact the proper question to be asked is what would the American people do if, as Professor Howard Schweber put it, "a foreign power…had cut off all access to your country and was slowly starving your population in order to compel you to get rid of your elected government?"[10] The latter, the journalists, were best represented by the New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman, who insisted that Israel was faced with nonstate "Arab foes" who are "implacably hostile" and "nested among civilians." Thus its "logical" and self-defense oriented "counterstrategy" had to include "inflict[ing] substantial property damage and collateral casualties" on the enemy. This is what Israel had done in Lebanon in 2006 and what they did in Gaza in 2009. In this way Friedman tells us, Israel is perhaps "trying to 'educate' Hamas." This sounds very much like the Iron Wall strategy, Thomas Friedman style.[11]

Confined to a ghetto and abandoned by most of the world, the democratically elected government headed by Hamas eventually negotiated a renewable six month *hudna* or truce with Israel through the good offices of the Egyptian government. It came into effect on June 19, 2008 and was due for renewal in mid December. Under the conditions of the truce Israel was to lift its blockade of Gaza and Hamas was to stop its missile attacks. While the truce brought a fragile quiet to Gaza (Israeli troops only killed 14 Gaza Palestinians in this period) and southern Israel for six months, the Israelis typically reneged on their part of the bargain. They kept up the siege pressure on Gaza's borders. It took 450 truck loads of supplies per day just to maintain the Gazans at a subsistence level. During the truce Israel allowed in no more than 80 per day on average. During this period at least 260 Gazans died because the Israelis refused them access to medical care in Israel. Thus, the only thing the Gazans got out of the truce was a delay in Israel's eventual invasion. It is also during this period that the fateful meeting mentioned above–the one between Fatah and Israeli military commanders–occurred outside of Ramallah.

It would appear that on the Israeli side the cease fire was another political ploy. The government wanted to relieve some of the pressure on its southern cities–the ones within rocket range of Gaza, as well as put itself in a posture, in the eyes of the international community, of allegedly doing what it could for the cause of peace. Simultaneously, The Israeli

army was training for the invasion of the Gaza Strip. Indeed, according to the IDF spokesman Brigadier General Avi Benayahou the Israelis had built an mock up of parts of Gaza City at the Tsehilim army base in the Negev desert and began, 18 months earlier (that means sometime around mid 2007) training for the invasion.[12] As a consequence "our soldiers know all the back streets were their targets are" he told Israeli public television."[13] Parallel to this training the Israeli government created a new information directorate to put together a propaganda campaign for the up coming invasion. Again, the pre-planning was readily admitted by Israeli spokesmen–this time ex Ambassador to the UN Dan Gillerman–who in a matter of fact manner told reporters that "this was something that was planned long ahead." The core messages for the campaign were "Israel has no choice but to attack in response to the barrage of Hamas rockets;" that the coming attack would be on "'the infrastructure of terror"and that "civilians would die only because Hamas hides its fighters and weapons factories among ordinary people."[14] Overall, the idea here was to convince the Western populations that such an invasion was not connected to on-going Israeli occupation but rather was part of the West's war on terror.

Of course, with the June 2008 cease fire there were no Hamas rockets flying except early on in the truce when Israel launched major attacks on the West Bank. Otherwise, Hamas was scrupulous, even in the face of Israel's bad faith, about maintaining the truce. In an unguarded moment Israel's official government spokesmen Mark Ragev admitted as much.[15] The Israelis did not seem to be too worried about this, they had great confidence that, when the time was right, they could provoke Hamas into firing their rockets. Their spin doctors would provide cover for the provocation and the invasion could go ahead.

And so it was. On November 6, 2008 Israel purposely broke the truce by crossing the Gaza border on the pretext of destroying a tunnel which they said was to be used to kidnap Israeli soldiers. In the action they killed 6 Palestinians. The application of common sense demonstrates that their cover story was not a believable tale. The tunnel certainly existed, but it did not cross the border into Israel. The Israelis, obviously knowing about the tunnel, could have simply waited to see if the tunnel came into Israeli territory and then destroy it. If this happened they would have a strong case for their actions and the truce would most likely have survived. But there was no proof that Hamas was intent on using the tunnel to attack Israeli troops as long as there was a truce. Israel knew that Hamas would retaliate for its attack on the tunnel within Gaza territory. And the chances of the truce crumbling in the face of Israeli aggression on top of a tightening of the borders that had by that time produced widespread misery was predictably high. This scenario was produced by Israel so as to give them an excuse to invade.

The rest, as they say, is history: Palestinian deaths due to the subsequent invasion stood, as of January 20, 2009, at 1,086 and the number of wounded at about 4900. Some of these were victims of weapons banned under international law such as "white phosphorus" bombs and shells. The death toll was bound to rise as the Palestinians started to clear the rubble from destroyed schools, mosques, office buildings and apartment blocks. A striking number of the Palestinian dead were women and children. As Juan Cole notes, among the dead were 280

Palestinian children and minors, as well as 111 women. However, according to the Palestine Center for Human Rights, only 223 confirmed Palestinian fighters. Therefore, if these numbers are accurate, "the Israelis managed to kill more children than real militants."[16] Israel admitted to a dozen dead soldiers of its own but this was almost certainly an artificially low figure. The physical destruction on the Palestinian side was wide spread with large parts of Gaza City destroyed. According to Richard Falk, the UN Rapporteur for human rights in the Israeli Occupied Territories, Israel's actions in Gaza "evokes the worst kind of international memories of the Warsaw Ghetto."[17]

The Israelis finally proclaimed a unilateral cease fire on January 17 after beating on the Palestinians of Gaza for 22 days. They had publically stated two main aims for their invasion. One was to destroy Hamas's ability to launch rockets into Israel. Within hours of the Israeli cease fire Hamas and other resistance groups fired 17 rockets into Israel and then declared their own cease fire. Obviously objective number one had failed. The second objective was to assure that Hamas could not rearm across the Gaza and Egypt frontier. Yet Hamas spokesman were not too put off by this goal. Questioned about international monitors, they responded that they would not have them on the Palestinian side of the border, but the Egyptians could do as they pleased on their side. Thus objective number two is in doubt. In any case Hamas says their can be no long term truce unless the siege is lifted on Gaza and the borders are opened

In the end the invasion of Gaza with all its death and destruction was not about missiles fired into Israel. These could have been easily avoided by negotiating with Hamas for a long term truce and dealing humanely with the needs of the Palestinian people for mobility and economic progress. In addition, Israel's pre-planning suggests that the invasion was not primarily about that country's February 2009 elections.[18] No, the Israelis created the conditions for the invasion over an 18 month period in a conscious, pre-meditated way. Having sealed the breach in the Iron Wall on the West Bank with the co-option of Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah militia commanders, the only breach left appeared to be Hamas. And, faithful to the teaching of Vladmir Jabotinsky, they knew what had to be done. The Gazans had to be brought to the same state of mind as Abbas and his cohort. The Israeli journalist and historian Tom Segev, who knows all about the Iron Wall, put it this way in Haaretz on December 29, 2008, "Israel is striking at the Palestinians to 'teach them a lesson.' That is a basic assumption that has accompanied the Zionist enterprise since its inception." The lesson would allegedly "liquidate the Hamas regime," or as Jabotinsky had said, "cause the extreme groups to lose their sway" and "transfer influence to the moderates." In this way, Segev tells us, the Israeli government believed that the Palestinians could be brought to "rebel against their national leaders…and…abandon their national aspirations."

Conclusion

Israel's victims are not the only ones who might draw lessons from this latest effort to enforce the Iron Wall. The rest of the world can learn something too. And that is that Israel's leaders have no intention of making peace with their unfortunate neighbors except on their own terms. The Palestinians have two choices: go on resisting or give up. The only wild card in this deck

is the international community. How much of Israel's barbarity are the other countries of the world willing to witness without raising a finger? It used to be that governments and their peoples were largely pro-Israel. That is rapidly changing. Today, more and more ordinary citizens are turning away from Israel in disgust. However, their governments, particularly in the West, still seem to be stuck in a bloody rut–mesmerized by the Zionist lobbies. However, that creates an anomaly within democratic political structures that is unlikely to go on forever.

As put forth by Jabotinsky, the Iron wall was a bilateral concept. It referred only to the Zionists on one side and the Palestinian Arabs on the other. But other Zionists, such as Theodor Herzl, always knew that their movement needs a patron. That turns out to be an unexpected weak point in the Iron Wall. The neoconservative age is in eclipse and this writer is willing to chance a prediction. Israel simply cannot go on like it has without almost guaranteeing its own eventual isolation. The ghost of apartheid South Africa dogs its steps more closely than anyone in Jerusalem imagines. Against this backdrop. Israel's invasion of Gaza was ultimately a failure. It failed to close the Hamas breach in the Iron Wall. And, perhaps more importantly, it opened up new breachs. It raised up a host of new enemies among the world's peoples. And, in the West at least, where they go their governments will one day have to well follow.

Endnotes

1. Such as the blitzkrieg that occurred in 2006. See my Logos article issue 5.2 Spring/Summer 2006.

2. The translation used here can be found at https://www.marxists.de/middleast/ironwall/ironwall.htm

2. Commentarymagazine.com, January 9, 2002.

3. Amira Hass, "History did not begin with the Qassams" in Haaretz, January 14, 2009.

Http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1055241.html

4. It is not only hindsight that allows us to come to this conclusion. On July 15, 2005 Uri Davis, Ilan Pappe and Tamar Yaron published a piece in *Counterpunch* that warned, "We believe that one primary, unstated motive for the determination of the government of the State of Israel to get Jewish setters…out of Gaza may be to keep them out of harm's way when the Israeli government and military possibly trigger an intensified mass attack on the…Palestinians of the Gaza Strip."

Http://www.counterpunch.org/davis07162005.html

5. The reporter was Khaled Amayreh and the report was dated September 24, 2008. See

https://www.dissidentvoice.org/2008/09/journalist-discloses-details-of-israeli-pa-security-meeting/

6. See Haaretz, August 19, 2007.

7. The Israelis also fired about 16,000 artillery rounds into Gaza in the two year period following their withdrawal. One of the consequences of the 2008-2009 Israeli invasion of Gaza and the war crimes that followed was that Jordan and many Scandanavian countries cancelled orders for Israeli fruits, which ended up rotting in Israeli wharehouses.

8. Http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/684030.html

9. In truth these attacks had always been largely ineffectual – 13 Israelis had been killed by Qassam rockets between October 2001 and November 2008 while in the same period some 5000 Palestinians had been killed by Israel.

10. Http://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-schweber/israel-in-gaza-three-wron_b_156801.html

11. Thomas L. Friedman "Israel's Goals in Gaza?" NYT, January 14, 2009.

12. This prolonged preparation time calls into question the popular assumption that the Olmert government initiated the invasion to better position the Kadima party for Israel's February 2009 elections. No doubt the timing was convenient for Labour and Kadima, but the elections were not the real reason for the invasion of Gaza.

13. Reported by Press TV January 6, 2009.

14. The Observer, January 4, 2009.

15. See the interview with Ragev at https://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=SILJxPTqjAM

16. Juan Cole, Informed Comment, January 24, 2009, www.juancole.com

17. Quoted in Haaretz, "UN human rights official: Gaza evokes memories of Warsaw Ghetto," January 23, 2009

18. See endnote 12 above.

Jack Hirschman Poetry

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The House of the Setting Sun

“Become a rag again and the poorest may wave you”

—Pier Paolo Pasolini: To the Red Flag

I put my mouth to your misery, New Orleans,

inundated and soaking with death.

Here lies: war lies piled so high, this floating

prison of a cemetery cries out of rage

at the end of its breath. Here, in the last delta,

Desire lies on its side, is rolled, and rolled

over upon by its own government, and crushed.

Summertime is over and the livin’ is dead,

and ’round midnight all hopes are looted.

No one will come clean of the Katrina

of New Orleans in this sinking

house of the setting sun.

Bodies so Black and so blue from loving

what wouldn’t spit on their shoes if they

needed a shine. Let alone a dime. Or water.

America, you were always scorched earth

in our mouths, always a baptism of crap,

always a rain of disaster streaming

down the panes of our broken eyes.

Now our rags are the most torn,

our jazz the most blue, our poor the poorest

that can be worn in the soul's thrift-shop.

Now that all is lost and there's only nothing

to lose…"Long live the courage

and the sorrow and the innocence of the poor!"

The real flag's in tatters. Begin to wave it.

Caffé Trieste

This central public place of my life for 34 years,

give or take journeys to Europe and Venezuela,

is where I've written hundreds of poems,

translated hundreds more from many languages,

where I wrote my first poems in Russian.

More than a café making terrific double espressos

it's a cultural center in the heart of old town San

Francisco that still shows a neon and glitzy world

what deep old brew really means. How so many

continue to meet here, fall in love, be the daily

chronicle and times to each other and where,

for 26 years, this just about oldest newsboy in town
has been selling the People's Tribune and Rally Comrades,
table after table, and don't forget, in the 80's, in the same
manner, Compages, that revolutionary international
magazine of translations of poetry from all over the world.

I don't forget Anna Magnani, seconda, beloved Yolanda,
now in Monfalcone, Italy but ever remembered as muse and
momma to a whole generation here, And Yolanda's Francesco,
and Leopoldo Fiorenzato, sensitive and tragic, and Taura and
Walker—workers through the years, gone elsewhere, to heaven
or Mexico, and yet here's Paul and Rabba and Hakim with his
newborn Adam, and roast-master Paul and Nathan and Sean
and Ernie and Ida—she who makes sure the people get their dose
of Italian poetry bilingually, along with the other languages
flying around, i.e, French, Algerian and Arabic—workers
close to the heart and the joys and the sorrows of this corner.

And let's not forget drop-ins like Allen Ginsberg a couple times
a year. And the local radiances like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Bobby
Kaufman, Neeli Cherkovski, the poems flying amid the jukebox
music, the olding Beats and the Baby Beats and the commies,
the surrealists, the anarchists, the socialists, the jazzmen, the ultra
screwballs, the walk-in weirdoes, the beautiful women begun and

developed here, and the tots, those fooblezeegs, always so welcome
and alive at this street-level (not the United States of a dead mall but
the other America), of embodied old wood and deep flavor, with an
extended Italian family whose hands come out of their mouths
as well as arias and popular songs, and who know how, even with
the remembered loss of their and our prince of the human voice,
continuare, continuare, above all, singing because, with this room,—
in its every corner, and along the outside tables as well—, there's song.
Rilke was correct: *Gesang ist Dasein*—-Song is Existence. That's
the real logos of this place; for wherever you travel, whether
to other states or foreign places, whether on the Vino Express
or the Shmoogadoo Limited, with the Caffé Trieste you'll always
have a direction home.

Jack Hirschman has published more than 100 books and chapbooks of poetry and essays, half of which are translations of poets from nine different languages. He is an associate editor of Left Curve magazine and editor of the volume, Art on the Line: Essays by Artists about the Point Where Their Art and Activism Intersect (Curbstone Press, 2002, www.curbstone.org). His book of selected poems, Front Lines, was published by City Lights in 2002, and he is poet laureate of the city of San Francisco. The two poems included here originally appeared in his newest collection, All That's Left (City Lights, 2008, www.citylights.com), and are reprinted here by permission of the author and City Lights Books.

Mary Shanley Poetry

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

Hands

She was an apparition.

One of the infinite sorrows,

dropped out of eternity

and onto a bench

in Washington Square Park.

Where she sat, gray of hair.

Her delicate, wisp of a body

enwrapped in a

black lace shawl.

She buried her face

in deeply wrinkled,

heavily veined hands.

I bowed my head as I

passed by, in deference

to her privacy,

in reverence

to her solitude…

as if she were one

of the “hallowed” ones

who had seen enough,

and it was now time

for her to close her eyes

and let the rest of us

look upon what this world

has wrought.

A poem not dedicated to henry kissinger

I was listening to this

smoking saxophone solo

in a little club uptown.

It was around two in the

morning when Henry Kissinger

waltzed in with this doll on his arm.

They sat at the table directly

in front of the stage.

Nobody seemed to recognize him.

Probably thought he was

just another whitey,

come uptown to

improve his soul some…

However, I found his presence

highly disturbing

and was getting up to leave,

when the waiter

came over and told me

the gentleman in the

pinstriped suit,

with the attaché case

handcuffed to his wrist,

would like me

to come over and join

he and his date.

Oh Come On!

This can’t be happening!

The sickest bastard on the planet

wants me to join him?

And I can’t

refuse, knowing Henry is a trigger

happy madman.

So, I go over and join them,

just as the band is taking five.

Henry introduces himself as Johnnie Taylor

and the doll is Miss Ginger Spice.

I told them I was Mary Shanley,

too nervous to lie.

They were ordering a late night snack

and asked if I wanted to order anything.

I asked for a small bowl of chili.

Oh No! Chile!

Why did I have to mention Chile

in front of Henry Kissinger!

Now he probably thinks

I'm one of the Allende sympathizers

that his death squads missed.

I break into a sweat. The band

is back. They're playing Stormy Monday.

Shit. That sax player is hot!

Ginger gets up to use the bathroom

and Henry starts rubbing my leg…

I'm in shock!

Now he's whispering German

in my ear.

I start giggling,

cause that's what I do when

I get nervous.

I ask Henry, "Why Johnnie, where did you

ever learn to speak German like that?"

"Channel 13," he replies,

nibbling on my neck.

"How come you wanted me to join

you Johnnie, you already have

a date."

"Because I just adore Irish women!

They are so feisty!”

So I tell him that my father is black

and my mother is KGB.

He lets out a shriek,

and his glasses

slide off his nose

and into his glass of vodka.

Ginger Spice returns in a cloud

of cheap perfume to find Henry

muttering, “But how can it be?

She is so fair?”

“Come on Johnnie! Let’s dance!”

And Ginger pulls Henry up

by his free hand. And with

his other hand still handcuffed

to the attaché case,

they make their way

onto the dance floor.

Now’s my chance.

I make a beeline to the door,

race down the street,

hop a cab on the corner

telling the driver,

“Step on it!”

Phew!

I’m never going back to that joint

again. I don’t care how hot

the sax player is.

Mary Shanley is a poet and activist who lives in New York City. She has been publishing poetry since 1984. The two poems included here originally appeared in her new book, Hobo Code Poems (Vox Pop, 2008, www.myspace.com/maryshanley), and are reprinted here by permission of the author.

The Importance of Being Earnest: Documenting Experiments in Anti-Systemic Lifestyles

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

Barbara Kingsolver *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (HarperCollins, 2007).

Alisa Smith and J.B. Mackinnon, *Plenty: Eating Locally on the 100 Mile Diet* (Three Rivers Press, 2007).

Sara Bongiorni, *A Year Without "Made in China": Our Family's True Life Adventure in the Global Economy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007

Colin Beavan, *No Impact Man* (noimpactman.typepad.com)

A world-renown novelist moves her family from Tucson to Southern Appalachia to farm and eat locally for one harvest cycle, following in the footsteps of a couple who has limited their diet to food from a 100-mile radius of their Vancouver apartment. Around the same time, a Louisiana woman boycotts Chinese products for 365 days, and a New York City man attempts to net zero impact on the environment for one full year. It is not just the overlapping themes, but also the purpose, strategy, and form that connect these projects. Each is a year-long experiment in lifestyle undertaken as a mode of action against a central aspect of the world (food/trade/energy) system, and each is the subject of a recent or forthcoming book. (Beavan's book and movie are due out in 2009.) Mock or idolize these experimenters as you may, there is no denying that their books, websites, and blogs are the testaments, if not quite the bibles, of the "new earnestness" that has taken hold amongst many in the global north who want to live rather than just spout their progressive politics.[1] These books, promise the editorial reviews featured on their front and back covers, will "change your life" and "the way you experience the world."[2]

The concerns of the newly earnest are indeed overarching. On their own and as a group, these projects portray a *status quo* in which the food we eat, the goods we buy, and the energy we use comprise a mutually reinforcing web of destructive forces that are eroding the health and wellbeing of our planet and its inhabitants. The implicit goal of these one-year projects is to help establish an alternative system, one that does not conform to the destructive logic of the transnational corporation.

While the sentiment is undoubtedly left-leaning, the strategy is decidedly decentralized and

markedly dissociated from anything like state-sponsored socialism. There is no room for a Stalin or even an FDR in these one-year plans. The emphasis on individual lifestyle choices over legislative change emanates in part from a sense of frustration with the pace of politics with a capital "p." "The way I see it," writes Beavan, "waiting for the senators and the CEOs to change the way we treat the world is taking too long." The question Beavan asked himself is the question that seems to motivate all of these projects: "What would it be like if I took the situation (or at least my tiny part of it) into my own hands?"

The individual can-do-ism and pioneer spirit that characterizes this statement and the one-year experiments more generally is undoubtedly "American," central to the oratory and narrative that helped shape the nation's self-image. "Build, therefore, your own world," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. "As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions."[3] As in the writings of many transcendentalists, in these works, taking the situation into one's own hands manifests not as the attempt to achieve the proverbial version of the American dream but rather as a temporary opting out of that dream in order to recover a more pristine version of it. Whether they involve foregoing the luxuries of mangoes and pop-tarts, plastic children's toys and coffeemakers, or running water and electricity, these projects belong to the larger attempt to "get off the grid" or "unplug from the matrix," in the lingo of the no-impact movement.

Ostensibly, the main draw of these part memoir, part journalism narratives is the question of whether such lifestyle changes can actually impact the system. "Will our single-family decision to step off the nonsustainable food grid give a black eye to that petroleum-hungry behemoth?" asks Kingsolver early on in her book (21). Kingsolver and the others provide the answers to such large-order questions almost as soon as they ask them. On the whole, those whose experiments focus on local eating (Kingsolver, Smith, and Mackinnon) are modestly optimistic, seeing themselves as part of a larger movement that has grown as a result of others making choices similar to theirs. Beavan strikes a more agnostic note, preferring not to make any predictions, while Bongiorni outright admits that her boycott will probably do little if anything to reduce the ever-growing number of Chinese imports into the U.S. Such sober conclusions counter the obvious criticism that these individuals are merely utopian idealists. At the same time, they also threaten to deflate the importance of the projects in the first place and make the hundreds of pages that follow seemingly unnecessary.

As it turns out, the value of these experiments does not depend on whether or not they actually change the world system in a year or even in a hundred years. Rather, like many a pioneer narrative, whether or not you attain your ultimate dream matters less than the experiences you have and the things you learn along the way. The words "adventure," "journey," and "discovery" pervade the back covers and pages of each of these books, but not in the stereotypical "action story" sense. Instead of life-and-death trials, the bulk of the narrative is devoted to the highs and lows of everyday life "off-the-grid"—waiting for the asparagus to be harvested, raising and killing your own chickens, traversing the hundred-mile circumference around Vancouver in search of local protein, and scouring the malls of the Gulf Coast for children's sneakers that are not manufactured in China. These and similar experiences are

portrayed as sometimes enjoyable and sometimes harrowing, but always in some sense more than quotidian.

The value of such moments, we come to see, lies largely in relationships, specifically, the recovery and cultivation of lost, stagnant, or non-existent connections. The most central relationship is that of the nuclear family. In each of the projects, the family embarks on the experiment collectively and in both local eating experiments, the family members write the book collaboratively. (Kingsolver's narrative is punctuated by pithy sidebars written by her husband, Stephen Hopp, and stories of family traditions and recipes written by her teenage daughter. Smith and Mackinnon alternate authorship in each chapter of their book.) The family-oriented nature of these experiments lends a certain hearth-like quality to the genre, in which quality time with spouse and kids—cooking, eating, reading—supplants the time otherwise given over to the television, computer, and other fossil-fuel guzzling, small-business-destroying devices. No doubt, the challenge of the experiment puts a degree of strain on the household. To varying degrees, such stressors are more or less present and serious. While the domestic squabbles are relatively absent in *Animal, Vegetable, and Miracle*, in both *Made in China* and *Plenty*, the difficulties of married life are exacerbated by the self-imposed rules of the experiment. Periodically, one spouse "cheats" on both the experiment and his or her partner by openly or secretly abandoning the rules—buying a Chinese garden tool and peeling off the label or eating a TV dinner while away on vacation. There are long stretches of time in which the Vancouver couple hardly speaks to one another. These lows however serve only as preludes to the new highs that bring the family not only back together but closer than ever before, whether over a homemade fish soup or a pair of Italian sunglasses.

In addition to bringing the family closer to itself, the experiment also brings the family into contact with others who share their lifestyle and the values associated with it. It allows them to be part of a community—of locavores (the self-ascribed moniker of the local eaters), of carbon-imprint counters, and of fellow China boycotters. The idea of community is most concrete and affirming in the local eating projects, in which face-to-face interactions with one's neighbors, small-scale farmers, milliners, and artisanal cheese makers are central to the lifestyle. The colorful agrarians and craftspeople profiled in *Animal* and *Plenty* include a Twain-quoting dairy farmer in Pennsylvania who was born in the same house as his grandfather, drives a horse and buggy, and daily communes with the birds and insects that pollinate his crops and a vagrant named Roy who lives in a tent in the British Columbia "bush," cans freshly-caught salmon, and makes moonshine from potatoes. As with the evolving dynamic of the nuclear family, the friendship that Kingsolver, Smith, and Mackinnon have with these individuals is, shall we say, vintage. Lemonade (for Kingsolver) and moonshine (for Smith and Mackinnon) over a leisurely afternoon of storytelling. These "old school" and "down home" friendships are portrayed as nourishing the soul as well as the body, fostering connections that might not have been recognized otherwise. Kingsolver, in particular, frames her friendships with small farmers as evidence that cosmopolitan urbanites and progressives agrarians have more in common than the socio-political divide between urban and rural suggests.

Community in the other experiments is more abstract and sometimes less affirming. Bongiorni certainly wants to be part of a group of people who are serious about creating a genuine movement against buying Chinese products. But, in her search for compatriots, she discovers that, for the most part, the only other people who are as serious as her about such an effort are racist xenophobes who refer to the Chinese as "scum" and spread alarmist rumors of China's attempt to annex the U.S. (42). In contrast to the old-fashioned interactions that are central to the locavore movement, the comments posted on Beavan's daily blog reflect the drawbacks as well as benefits of community-building in the digital age. While some of Beavan's readers engage in genuine conversation, others shower Beavan with the extreme praise that tends to preempt conversation, and a few lambast Beavan in terms they would probably be embarrassed or ashamed to use in person. Notably, the most hostile comments on the blog come from anti-urban readers who see the No Impact Man project as the brainchild of "Elitist Leftist nuts," and tell Beavan to "find out how real people live. Beyond that land of lunacy known as Manhattan."[4]

In different ways and to varying extents, these experimenters also aspire to revitalize a community that is both broader than the local and narrower than the global. Namely, the nation. The national scope is obvious in *Made in China*, the book that is not only the most overtly patriotic but also the most vulnerable to accusations of nationalism in the pejorative sense. Despite her caveats to the contrary, when Bongiorni claims that "China is taking over" her living room (5) and decides to "stop bringing China through the front door," (6) she perpetuates the racism and xenophobia that has historically characterized the "Buy American" movement.[5] The inherently limited geographical range of the other projects would seem to leave the national community beyond their scope. It is true that there is a strong sense of regionalism amongst locavores, inherent in the very name they have given themselves. Both Kingsolver and Mackinnon are most lyrical when they nostalgically describe Appalachia and the Pacific Northwest respectively. Importantly, however, these moments are not just odes to a specific region, however, but also examples of American national bounty, the bounty that sustained the farmers and hunters of the New World long before the industrial revolution. (In these reflections on America, the U.S.-Canada border becomes rather irrelevant.) Such descriptions serve as points of departure for discussions of American food culture or lack thereof. The idea that knowledge of when, where, and how food grows "has vanished from our culture" (Kingsolver, 9) has become a common theme in the local food movement.[6] "We're a nation with an eating disorder, and we know it," writes Kingsolver (18). Detailing their experiences of local eating in America for an audience of American readers, the local eating memoirs see value in attempting to "find a real American culture of food" (Kingsolver, 20).

At every register of relationship in these books—the family, the local community, the nation—the domestic (in the double-sense of the word) imagery and tone are so prevalent that it becomes easy to overlook the arguments that these writers offer on behalf of a more global community.

At times, the desire for global human justice and planetary sustainability in these projects is muted by the fact that such concepts tend to be invoked in a somewhat fleeting and superficial

manner, one that does not seem to allow time for insight and reflection. Bongiorni, for example, periodically frames her project as a response to exploited labor in China and a way of giving other countries a chance to export their goods to the U.S. Before she can reflect on the complicated and problematic relationship of her project to laborers in China and elsewhere, however, she shifts her attention to the relatively trivial challenges of her boycott—what to buy for children's birthday parties and for Christmas, which Bongiorni starts obsessing over in September. Kingsolver and Hopp have a more refined sense of global social consciousness. The plight of the small farmer in developing countries is, they suggest, inextricably linked to that of small farmers in the U.S. The answer to this problem, argues Hopp in one of his sidebars, is to help small farmers sell their food locally. Kingsolver insists that this approach is not "provincial," but global. In contrast to the ruminating quality of the book overall, however, the relation detailed between local and global action has a harried, even peremptory feel. Like Bongiorni, Kingsolver and Hopp do not seem as willing to reflect on the many facets of the global dilemma as they are on the more local aspects of their experiments. How these particular anti-systemic projects stand to both benefit and harm the workers of the global south is largely left for the reader to contemplate herself.

If these experimenters are somewhat less than interested in reflecting on the human workers of the world *per se*, they are quite invested in thinking about the relationship between first world consumers and the non-human and inanimate goods we buy from around the world. Ostensibly, this preoccupation with the *thing* rather than the laborers who make it reflects the "fetish of the commodity" that Marx so famously critiqued.[7] Upon closer inspection, this fixation on the commodity serves as a path to insights that tap into Marxist themes, but in a way that is palatable for a popular American audience.

"Distance is the enemy of awareness," argue Smith and Mackinnon in underscoring the fact that Americans are not conscious of the origins and treatment of the food they eat (63). The distance they refer to is not only physical (food travels an average of 1,500 miles on its way to the supermarket), but also psychological. We are so estranged from our food that, for the most, we don't even bother to think about such questions as where, when, and how it grows, or for that matter, who grows it. "All is hidden and anonymous," they observe (33). If there is a veiled echo of Marx's critique of the commodity fetish here, then Kingsolver, in discussing the same problem, offers a more stark adaptation of a central Marxist concept. Just as the labor of the worker becomes alien to him in Marx's framework, suggests Kingsolver, so has food become alien to the American consumer in this framework. Americans, she writes, suffer from "alimentary alienation" (131).

"Discovery," in this context, means becoming conscious of the process through which food and other commodities are produced and exchanged. Seen in this light, Bongiorni's trips to the mall are not simply acts of fetishism, but also attempts to defetishize the commodities she is buying by dwelling on aspects of the production and exchange process. There are a few instances, albeit brief and rather directionless, in which her obsessive checking of labels becomes the catalyst for reflections on where, how, and by whom things are produced. This uncovering of "hidden" knowledge is central to the local eating projects. Smith and Mackinnon

introduce the concept of “traceability” to underscore this importance of tracking down the sources of one’s food in their experiment (54). Along the same lines, Kingsolver describes her family’s project as “a year in which we made every attempt to feed ourselves animals and vegetables whose provenance we really knew” (9-10). The documentation of the process by which the family uncovers the source of their commodities allows the reader to experience “traceability” vicariously. On the one hand, we feel enraged when we discover that the salmon in a river near Vancouver were poisoned by toxic waste and disturbed when we learn that industrial poultry are no longer genetically capable of natural reproduction. On the other hand, we also feel excited when Kingsolver harvests the asparagus (the first spring vegetable and the one with the shortest growing season) and when Mackinnon happens upon wild flowers he can use for the evening’s soup.

As long as we are considering the more subtle links between these local experiments and their global philosophical counterparts, it may be worth noting that Marx himself understood the importance of sustainable agriculture, which sometimes led him to see the land itself as an exploited worker: “All progress in capitalistic agriculture,” wrote Marx, “is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil” (416-417). It is in this vein of understated connections with more theoretical critiques of the system that these projects’ emphasis on “quality” time with their friends and family also becomes more salient. The newly earnest are not just rebelling against the harried schedule of contemporary life, but also becoming more aware of how this schedule is itself a key aspect of production and consumption in the global capitalist system.

The discovery of more theoretically developed anti-systemic critiques within these deliberately anti-theoretical projects does not erase the contradictions and tensions I have highlighted. Rather, it allows us to reflect on these contradictions and tensions as part of even the most theoretically sophisticated critiques of the global system. In this sense, the uneasy relationship between localism and internationalism in these texts is not just a symptom of stubborn or lazy thinking. Rather, it suggests the presence of a similar uneasiness in Marxist-oriented anti-systemic thought. Advocates of social progressivism have long struggled with the problem of how to enact global change in a world where power is sought and wielded primarily at the level of the state.[8] Several other issues in the books of the newly earnest become more salient when they are juxtaposed with the broader genre of anti-systemic thought. For example, the urban-rural divide that so clearly characterizes the comments on Beavan’s blog, and which Kingsolver takes great pains to overcome, has long been a sticking point in theories of progressive social change. Are Christian fundamentalist farmers living in upstate New York and gay consumers of local food living in New York City really on the same side? This difficult question is not entirely divorced from Marx’s concern that the peasantry could never really be part of the revolutionary class (482). Even the nostalgia for the America of yesteryear can be seen as part of a larger tension between new and old, development, and anti-development, that animates anti-systemic thought. Because he had a faith in the future inevitability of communism, Marx saw capitalist development as progress, so much so that it justified the British colonization of India (658). Without such a sense of the future’s inevitable benevolence, however, self-ascribed progressives are more tempted to idealize a mythically benevolent past,

one seemingly devoid of the ominous problems we confront today. The definition of progress in anti-systemic politics as yet remains unclear.[9]

The provocative overlaps between these decentralized anti-theoretical, experiments and their more globally-minded theoretical counterparts tend to becomes less pronounced toward the end of the books, as the newly earnest attempt to take stock of the meaning and importance of their respective experiments. At this point, they once again narrow their focus to themselves and their families. At the end of the 365 days, each of the families is happy to discover that they have internalized the habits they practiced and the experiences they had over the course of the year. What began as a temporary change has become, with slight modifications, a permanent way of life. Looking back, they see how this lifestyle has contributed to their individual character and outlook more than anything else. They are not only more disciplined and socially conscious, but also more content with small victories. Kingsolver's victory at the end of the year is her successful natural breeding of heirloom turkeys. For Smith and Mackinnon, it is a trip to the ocean to gather seawater for salt, and for Bongiorni, it is the purchase of a watch battery that is actually made in the U.S.A.

Settling for personal victories over the system, the newly earnest avoid the problem of addressing systemic problems at a systemic level. The regulation of food, energy, and trade by national and international law is amongst the most important of the elements that tend to get lost in such a localized politics. Until the regulations of the World Trade Organization change, farmers in developing countries will continue to compete with highly subsidized agribusinesses in the U.S. and Europe for a share of their local markets. Until car companies are forced to implement greener practices the way they were once forced to put seatbelts in cars, the pace of change will be slower than the need for change. And until multinational corporations are forced to observe labor standards worldwide the way U.S. employers were forced to observe child labor laws, workers in developing countries will continue to be exploited.

Kingsolver rightfully predicts that "cynics" will "ridicule" the sorts of personal victories she and others have experienced by branding them "small gestures," too self-absorbed to be really socially significant. We cynics ought not to lose sight of the need for victories that go beyond individual lifestyle. At the same time, we might do well to recognize the flirtatious and potentially productive, if also sometimes fleeting and abortive, connection between the small gesture and the grand one.

Notes

[1] The phrase "new earnestness" has been cropping up in many recent discussions of political action, particularly those with a global scope. See for example "Renewing a Call to Act Against Climate Change," *New York Times*, March 14, 2007.

[2] These claims appear respectively on the front cover of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and the

back cover of *Plenty.*

[3] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836; repr. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 94.

[4] Comment posted to "What You Need to Know" section of Beavan's website:

https://noimpactman.typepad.com/blog/2007/02/what_you_need_t.html

[5] See Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

[6] This theme is central in Michael Pollan's best-selling book on American food culture and history, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Penguin, 2006).

[7] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One* in ed. Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 321.

[8] Giovanni Arrighi, Terrence Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein focus on this problem in their contemporary classic, *Antisystemic Movements* (New York: Verso, 1989).

[9] For an anti-systemic critique of the liberal development paradigm, see for example, Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

John le Carré, The Mission Song

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

Reviewed by Emad El-Din Aysha

The swan song of the literary missionary!

While not the best of John le Carré's novels, *The Mission Song* is certainly far ahead of his previous symbolic disaster, *Absolute Friends*, and once again proves that he is the master of the post-Cold War political thriller and factually way ahead of the pack.

Shadow of the Zebra-crossing

The story is narrated by one Bruno Salvador, quite literally the bastard child of imperialism and civil war. Salvador's father –predictably for le Carré – was an Irish Catholic missionary who got involved with a Congolese women, the daughter of a village big man, during the civil war there in the idealist old days of Patrice Lumumba.

'Salvo' (his militaristic nickname) is white with African features, both devoutly British – has great faith in what England can and should do in the world – while pinning for Africa it in his heart of hearts. As a consequence, Salvador has conflicting loyalties. His fake marriage is an example of this, ritually bedding his two-timing Tabloid journalist wife Penelope, who only married him to get on her stuck-up parents' nerves. His language skills (again predictably), though, pit him on a collision course with the British imperial heritage that has yet to be buried in the past.

He's a high profile interpreter for big time corporations but also does top secret translation work for British intelligence nabbing arms dealers and terrorists in the new era. On one of his overt jobs he bumps into a fellow (if full-blooded) Congolese women, nurse Hannah – he's called in to interpret for a dying patient, a Congolese warlord who massacred Hannah's people. Her commitment to preserving life and healing old wounds steady's her through the ordeal, which impresses him all the more. You can imagine what they get up to on her lunch break!

Then he gets a call, before second helpings, to show up for work. He's whisked away – after agreeing to the job – to an unnamed island in the North Sea where he has to interpret for a bunch of mysterious characters – businessmen, mercenaries, politicians, lawyers, African warlords – planning a coup meant to save the Congo from itself, at the paltry price of handing over all its mineral rights to the consortium funding the operation. At the centre of the plot is the prospective future president, a former Lumumba loyalist know as the Mwangaza – the 'enlightened one' (Hannah filled Salvo in on him) – and a surprisingly principled Congolese warlord (interestingly) named Haj.

It is Haj who christens Salvo the 'Zebra' on account of his African features and simultaneous white skin, and Haj also that inspires him through example, since Haj tries to rat out the meeting to a rival American syndicate and save the Congo yet more hardships.

Stickler for research that he is, what le Carré has done here is independently recreate Dietrich Jung 'statist' thesis, spelled out in his brilliant book, *Shadow Globalization, Ethnic Conflicts and New Wars: A Political Economy of Intra-State War*, (2003). As a German, Weberian residing in Denmark Jung argues and documents how the civil wars in the 'Zones of Turmoil' of the South fund themselves through trading in slaves, drugs, diamonds and other raw materials with the 'Zones of Peace' up North. Hence, globalization has a dark, unseen side that brings peace and prosperity to one corner of the globe and misery and strife to another.

In the process, the already wobbly nation-state order in the South – same goes for Afghanistan – is further weakened, from within and without. So much for the new neo-conservative mission to rescue and rebuild 'failed states.' (Did I mention that the rival syndicate Haj goes to is peopled by CEOs who are former White House neo-cons!)

The lawyer's botanical garden

This is an older problem for Africa specifically than we suspect, as le Carré exemplifies by the contrasting duo of Haj (means pilgrimage in Arabic) and Felix Tabizi, a Lebanese middleman and Hamas-associate who 'converted' to Christianity. I *suppose* what le Carré is trying to say here is that Africa is a continent that has been much abused by the Arabs – something mentioned in the novel – under the guise of Islam, whilst African Muslims themselves have been some of the most loyal to the religion's cause. Tabizi himself is nicknamed Tabby, a Western sounding name, intercepts Haj and takes great pleasure in torturing him afterwards and forcing him to sign the agreement, with the enthusiastic help of British intelligence.

Le Carré, moreover, tackles the much ignored legal dimension to the failed states phenomenon, through the character of Monsieur Jasper, the lawyer hired to draw up the contract the assembled warlords will quite literally sign with the European consortium. The lawyer describes the peculiar contract as 'hypothetical' (only coming into effect if certain unmentioned events take place under the instigation of certain unnamed parties) and 'agricultural'. That is, people are referred to as 'cows', property to be bought and sold, with the resulting profits being divided unevenly between the consortium and the Mwangaza (indirectly referred to as the 'agriculturalist')!

This may sound ridiculous to us but believe you me, it isn't in the slightest. Anthony Anghie, a Sri Lankan legal scholar in the States, has been busily cataloguing the imperialist history of international (i.e. European) law, since the perennial concern of the expanding colonial powers was to insure that the rights of all Europeans were guaranteed in the conquered domains.[1] There's also an agricultural element to international law many of us don't know about, namely, that the chief legal tinkerer of *decolonization* – American jurist Roscoe Pound (1870–1964), who drew up the laws of the Mandate System under the League of Nations[2] – didn't have a

degree in law to begin with. He was actually a botanist[3] by education!

My suspicion is that, as a consequence, he thought of history in biological developmental terms as following a set plan (genetic code/blueprint), and thus that the West was the natural end stat of human history and the Africans had to be prepared for this eventuality. You may not know this but much of the terminology of development we have comes from sociology, specifically the French functionalism of Comte and Durkheim, and they got their organic analogy of society (like a body, with parts that serve certain harmonious specialised 'functions') from botany and cell biology too.[4]

This ossified, teleological mentality contributed to the very undoing of the Mandate System's noble intentions because the legalists in charge didn't realise just how different these colonised peoples were from their European contemporaries. Pound wanted to help these peoples out by preparing them for independence, both politically and 'economically', by focusing on these countries comparative advantage in raw materials and mineral wealth. As Anghie explains:

The Mandate System… proceeded to establish an intricate and far-reaching network of economic relationships that connected native labor in a mandate territory to a much broader network of economic activities which extended from the native's village to the territory as a whole, to the metropolis and finally, to the international economy.[5]

Thus were the foundations of dependency laid, but in a far more chaotic and corrosive way than in other quarters of the Third World. Here the state was circumvented and the nation atomised n a legally binding way, with tribes and armed groups taking the pace of market agents and governments. Jung's shadow globalization is just the latest phase of this and le Carré, in his intuitive genius has stitched together these disparate lines of analysis in graphic and emotionally harrowing form.

The prince of tidal waves

There are problems, mind you. It's not as witty as it should be and involves a lot of recycling. One mainstay of le Carré novels are bad meals. In *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* George Smiley is forced to ensure a meal of undercooked sausage and overcooked tomato, and here you have Salvo forced to eat 'recycled' Cannelloni and wash it down with 'weapons-grade' Chianti. 'The Mikado' pops up again too, from *Absolute Friends*, that ancient Phoenician text about the Noble Lie; hence the role of the media in perpetuating governmental rationalizations of inhumane policies. There's the comparison of the secret service to the priesthood, that you got in *A Perfect Spy*. One of the Congolese warlords is a huge man with a scare across his face and who walks with a limp – the classic crippled giant motif, which we get in *Tinker Tailor*, *The Russia House*, *Our Game*, *Absolute Friends*, *Call for the Dead*, etc. etc. etc. There's also the matter of 'dolphins', a term batted around in many of his novels but a le Carré code I haven't quite cracked, yet!

Trouble is, told from the narrator's rather humourless perspective, it sounds a bit forced and gets repeated over and over again in the novel. First person narratives are not le Carré strong

suit, ironic for such a subjective, psychological writer, someone who's been compared to Joseph Conrad.[6] His portrayal of the cloistered life of British suburbia is also a bit tacky and overly familiar. I'm also afraid he's running out of ideas and literary techniques. Still, I shouldn't grumble. This novel, unlike most of his others, actually has a happy ending, of sorts. Salvo tries to convince his superiors to abort the operation or else he'll leak the story – he stole his translation tapes and notes – to no avail and in the process gets imprisoned in a British equivalent of Guantanomo, designed for illegal aliens, after being humiliatingly stripped of his British passport.

In the meantime Haj takes steps when back in the Congo to capture the would-be coup plotters. The uplifting part is that Salvo'll eventually be sent 'back' to Africa, as a Congoleeze citizen, to meet up with the equally deported Hannah, and their future son Noah, to whom Salvo is addressing his story. That's where le Carré really belongs, in Africa. You could tell he liked it in *The Constant Gardener* and after this novel, I'm pretty sure it'll like him. After all, Joseph Conrad did his best work there!

Notes

[1] Anthony Anghie, "The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 5, (2006), pp. 739 – 753.

[2] Tony Anghie, "Globalization and its Discontents: International Institutions and the Colonial Origins of Law and Development", *International Law and Politics*, Vol. 32, (2005), pp. 1-24, https://www1.law.nyu.edu/journals/jilp/issues/32/pdf/32d.pdf.

[3] *The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition Copyright© 2004, https://www.questia.com/library/encyclopedia/pound_roscoe.jsp.

[4] B. Smith, *Understanding Third World Politics* (Indiana University Press, 1996), Chapter 2.

[5] Anghie, "Globalization and its Discontents", pp. 19-20.

[6] The great Sudanese writer Tayeb Saleh, author of *Season of Migration to the North*, made this comparison during a lecture aptly titled "Intellectuals Between East and West: A Personal Narrative", delivered at the American University in Cairo on 26th of February 2002.

The Letters and Life of Graham Greene

By | 2009: Vol. 8, Issue 1 – 2

Review of *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*, edited by Richard Greene, W.W. Norton & Company, 2008

Graham Greene's life was not half over when he summed it up as "useless and sometimes miserable, but bizarre and on the whole not boring." As an officer in the British Secret Intelligence Service, he offered that account of himself in a letter to his mother from Sierra Leone. The unrelated Richard Greene in *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters* compiles such letters – to relatives and mistresses, to friends and politicians (categories that at times overlap) and to fellow writers – and crafts a narrative of that event-filled, peripatetic existence led by a man of irreconcilable contradictions and undeniable verve.

Richard Greene presents the selection as an alternative to the massive, multipart biography by Norman Sherry, whose methods he regards with distaste and whose integrity he doubts. Sherry promised Greene that he would not dwell at length on the writer's sex life. However, he devoted a large portion of his first installment to Greene's courtship of Vivienne Dayrell-Browning. Although its subject expressed displeasure with the very personal content in *The Life of Graham Greene: Volume I: 1904 – 1939*, after the novelist's death, Sherry "stooped to the keyhole again in volumes two and three," according to Richard Greene. Of course, he, too, includes a sampling of love letters that the author wrote to his future wife and other women, but then the editor never pledged that he would discretely eschew such intimate material. These sometimes pleading letters reveal a vulnerability not usually put on display with the cocksure, worldly persona Greene assumes in others. They add shading and color to the epistolary portrait. Sherry promised to "focus on Greene's writings in the context of his travels," writes Richard Greene, who aims to do precisely that by artfully arranging the writer's own words.

Though not limited to professional matters, the novelist's letters do contain a good amount of shoptalk. Greene makes aphorisms about writing. "That is one of the sadnesses of writing isn't it?" he reflects to a reviewer concerning church services for pets. "One can't go too far. Life always goes further." Commenting on Michael Herr's "excitable" voice in the Vietnam War chronicle *Dispatches,* he tells an editor, "I think when one is dealing with horrors one should write very coldly." Such horrors spurred Greene in 1970 to write a chilly, business-like letter of resignation as an honorary foreign member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters because of the organization's failure "to take any position at all in relation to the undeclared war in Vietnam."

In letters to and about other writers, Greene offers opinions on his peers. He corresponded frequently with both Evelyn Waugh and his son Auberon Waugh, often complimenting their

work. He encourages and lauds the novelists Muriel Spark and R.K. Narayan, both of whom he championed early in their careers. James Joyce's masterwork *Ulysses* does not impress him. Of George Orwell, with whom he also exchanged letters, he says, "The only book of his I've really liked is *Animal Farm*." Greene, whom Richard Greene calls "a hard man simply to agree with," also finds "deplorable" some of what Orwell wrote in posthumously published letters. To the compiler of a bibliography of Arthur Conan Doyle's work Greene reports that he can happily return to the Sherlock Holmes and other stories but finds himself "unable to reread Virginia Woolf and Forster" because he simply is "not a literary man."

While he was in fact very much a literary man, the writer of screenplays and movie reviews as well as novels and autobiographies also remarks on his life in cinema. Greene eventually abandoned his self-applied distinction between lowly "entertainments" and more serious novels, at least in part because of *Brighton Rock.* He started that novel as a thriller but it became something else in the process of writing. He explains the conflicting moral perspectives he sees pulsating at the core of the novel in a letter to the director of its film incarnation. In a letter to one lover, he name drops not only Orson Welles, Alexander Korda and Carol Reed – the star, producer and director, respectively, of *The Third Man,* which Greene wrote – but also Charlie Chaplin and Marlene Dietrich. In another, he describes meeting with the director François Truffaut, who (without knowing Greene's actual identity at the time) put Greene in one of his films and who recommended an agent for another sexual partner's daughter, an aspiring actress. He comments on what he sees in movie theaters, telling one friend that he found Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* "repulsive and frightening but excellent" and reporting to another that Akira Kurosawa's *Kagemusha*, "beautiful though it was visually," bored him. To his brother he calls Shirley Temple a "little bitch" after her managers sued a magazine for which he reviewed one of her films. The editor Greene, in the minimally intrusive connective material he supplies between certain letters to provide context or clarity, suggest that the episode could have contributed to creation of "the whisky priest's sexually precocious daughter" in Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory.*

The novel also bears traces of time Greene spent in Mexico, as Greene's imagination required him to move. The letters simultaneously document his many travels and demonstrate their contribution to his writing. They supply plenty of the biographical background material, both trivial and substantive, that informed Greene's work. For instance, he tells a reader of the real-life models for the multiple dentists appearing in his stories. More significantly, the collection includes letters relating to the novelist's several excursions to Panama, where he became close with its military leader, Omar Torrijos, and his bodyguard, both of whom he wrote about in the memoir *Getting to Know the General*. Greene's time as an intelligence agent in Africa, where he composed *The Ministry of Fear,* contributed to novels such as *The Heart of the Matter.* When he returned to London, Greene worked with double agent Kim Philby, with whom he remained friends and corresponded even after Philby defected to the Soviet Union. In a letter to a journalist he wrote near the end of his life describing his lengthy relationship with Philby and visits he made to Russia soon before the spy's death in Moscow, Greene offers his personal credo: "I never believed in the prime importance of loyalty to one's country. Loyalty to individuals seems to me to be far more important." Such a political outlook gives him a certain

flexibility, permitting him have friendly meetings with Fidel Castro, whom Greene admired, even as he complained to the dictator, by mail, about Cuba's treatment of detained writers.

Greene also allowed himself some wiggle room within the moral strictures of Catholicism. He converted while wooing the devout Catholic he married and he "kept one foot in" the church throughout his many extramarital affairs. He judged one of the other women in his life a better Catholic than himself, and explored his thinking about such issues in *The End of the Affair*. Late in life he described himself as "at the worst a Catholic agnostic." While he could not convince himself of the infallibility of the pope, he did enjoy recounting having met Pope Paul, who praised *The Power and the Glory.* When Greene mentioned that the Holy Office had previously condemned the novel, the pontiff replied, "Part of your books will always offend some Catholics and you shouldn't pay any attention to that."

In his correspondence with his unlikely friend Evelyn Waugh, many of Greene's interests and concerns intersect. Orwell called Greene mildly leftist with Communist tendencies, which Richard Greene deems an accurate description of a political position that contrasts starkly with Waugh's reactionary views. However, Greene respected Waugh almost to the point of feeling intimidated by him, and he hungrily sought Waugh's approval. Indeed, with their earnest professions of affection, Greene's letters to Waugh at times resemble his letters to his female companions. "The sweetest form of praise comes from those one admires," Greene confesses to Waugh in one letter. In another, Greene describes his reluctance to open a new Waugh book "sitting there in mint condition waiting to give pleasure – like a love affair when one was young which hadn't begun yet." Greene wrote to Waugh about (ultimately unrealized) plans to adapt *Brideshead Revisited,* which Greene judged Waugh's best novel, for the screen. The fellow Catholic Waugh was one critic whose views Greene did closely attend to, and Greene was aggrieved when Waugh chided him for the religious doubt he gave expression to in some novels. Even with his uncertainties, or perhaps because of them, Greene continued to pray throughout his life.

With his elastic principles Greene managed both to object to the *fatwa* issued calling for the death of Salman Rushdie and to write a letter of encouragement to a man who organized a public burning of *The Satanic Verses*, a novel Greene says he never bothered to read. This missive, along with many others chosen by Richard Greene, confirms Graham Greene's mid-life self-assessment. He was an odd man, but never a dull one.

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Charles Bock, Beautiful Children

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The publication history of *Beautiful Children* makes for what is now an old story, but still a telling one. Charles Bock, its author, comes from the provinces (Nevada) and an unconventional upbringing (son of Las Vegas pawnbrokers). He struggles through school and college until he discovers the "second wave" of American postmodernist writers, a nearly all-male group who rose to prominence in the mid to late '90s: David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, William T. Vollman, A.M. Homes, Mary Gaitskill, et al. A stint on the shopfloor of the fiction factory (a summer writing program at Bennington) introduces him to Susan Choi, to Rick Moody, who find him untutored but promising. In New York, Bock spends eleven years writing his novel in a garret off Gramercy Park and making friends who will publicize it. Its arrival is overburdened by fevered expectation; *The New York Times* runs a profile of Bock—which, typical for the genre, is itself not so much a profile of the person, as it is of the process just described.

It is, of course, not the first half of the story that matters—Bock's somewhat curious background—but the second. For *Beautiful Children*, it turns out, is a thoroughly conventional novel that bears all the marks of his generation's literature machine: a jacket packaged with breathless quotations by writers, such as Sean Wilsey and Jonathan Safran Foer, who went through much the same experience; an appendix weighted by an effusive, overlong list of acknowledgments with signs of being assembled in some haste ("Of course my wife…is the greatest fucking thing that ever happened to me"); and a narrative obsessed by comic books, pornography, and the "fragility" of childhood. It is particularly the *fixation* with childhood that makes it a characteristic product of the current literary environment (riddled as it is with pained memoirs of growing up). *Beautiful Children*'s thematic interest—what happens to "lost" children in the fringes of an urban setting like Las Vegas—corresponds to a childlike intellectual perspective, in which teenage interests like pornography and gentleman's clubs are treated as exciting, lurid, and emotional. Bock's prose—a relentless, heady effluvium of sensory impressions—has little capacity to distinguish or discern, whether it is describing a marriage or a rock festival, such that over the course of its 400-odd pages, *Beautiful Children* begins to *feel* like Las Vegas. It is overwhelmingly fascinated by the grotesque. Bock does not flinch in attempting to expose the details of homelessness, crack and gambling addictions, the pornographic film industry, but one wishes that he did. The feeling that Bock is trying to evoke is pity, pity for the real outcasts that inform his aimless characters, but the only way he knows how to express this empathy is sheer voyeurism. We do not get inside his characters' heads so much as observe them closely, as if by hidden camera.

As a result, Bock forces on us more than we really need to know. Consider Bock's description of the Las Vegas Strip:

“The neon. The halogen. The viscous liquid light. Thousands of millions of watts, flowing through letters of looping cursive and semi-cursive, filling then emptying, then starting over again. Waves of electricity, emanating from pop art facades, actually transforming the nature of the atmosphere, creating a mutation of night, a night that is not night—*daytime at night*. The twenty-four-hour bacchanal. The party without limits. The crown jewel of a country that has institutionalized indulgence.” (98)

What does Bock add here that the endlessly reproduced photographs do not already confirm? The problem is not that Bock is too mimetic. In fact, he desires so greatly to exceed mere mimesis—to have the description stand in for the image itself—that his tone and range of discourse become deeply unstable. “Viscous” connotes “liquid”; it adds nothing to employ both of them describe the light. Nor does it add anything to add “thousands” to “millions” of watts, since “millions” is already mentally ungraspable. Italicizing the phrase “*daytime at night*” gives it the quality of a revelation, but the idea is a discovery only to Bock. Any editor should have struck through the line, “the party without limits,” as pure tourist ad material and should have queried the last line as needlessly and emptily moralizing. After this description, Bock immediately lets us know that “[n]othing matches the spectacle of the four-point-six mile stretch known as the Las Vegas Strip”—and it is unclear to whom this would constitute information. Bock does not know when to withhold or to elide: he may be fromLas Vegas, but he writes about the city with the excitement of any tourist who mistakes himself for an anthropologist.

Accordingly, the plot of the novel—such as it is—loosely strings together characters that serve Bock’s enthusiasms for describing low-life. In its most linear mode, with chapter headings that remind us the time of day (e.g. Chapter 5 takes place at “12:30 a.m.ish”), *Beautiful Children* tells us the story of Kenny, a budding artist and closeted homosexual, who takes the hyperactive 12-year old Newell Ewing out for a night on the town that increasingly becomes a nightmarish picaresque among the city’s outcasts. But the novel’s opening finds Newell’s parents, Lincoln and Lorraine, in mourning for their missing son, the ache that simultaneously unravels and reaffirms their marriage. The only motivating interest of the plot, then, is to discover how the novel’s linear present arrives at its future—that is, how does Newell disappear? A few other plot strands cross the main narrative. One involves an exotic dancer named Cheri Blossom, who constantly abstracts from her successful career to imagine herself as a movie heroine escaping the constraints of her Catholic girlhood, while her boyfriend, Ponyboy, a heavily tattooed thug constantly knocking over tourists on the streets, attempts to get her involved in amateur pornography. Another plotline follows a character we know only at the Girl with the Shaven Head, whose youthful enthusiasm for progressive causes (animal rights, anti-sweatshop rhetoric) doesn’t stop her from doing crack with a homeless pregnant woman, Daphney, whose pierced clitoris is the object of some of Bock’s most loving writing. Bock is to be commended for even attempting such a complicated structure, shifting rapidly and disorientingly between places, characters, and times. In this regard, *Beautiful Children* has doubtless learned a lot from recent films that attempted similarly “intertwining” plots: Steven Soderbergh’s *Traffic* (2000), Paul Haggis’ *Crash* (2005), Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006). Like those films, some characters hold more interest than others: one character, comic

book artist Bing Beiderbixxe, shows up early but—perhaps as a result of the author's boredom—disappears for nearly the entire length of the novel. And like those movies, *Beautiful Children* frequently sacrifices character for set-piece; political clarity for message-seeking.

It is clear that Bock chooses to have a stripper in his novel not out of some misguided sense of empathy, but out of a more severely misguided fascination with describing nude dancing and pornography; the dreariest portions of *Beautiful Children* are devoted to both. Describing the riotous background of a strip act, in which Cheri sets candle-wax tips attached to her nipples on fire, Bock writes, "Music thumped. Bass bumped. Extras laughed and high-fived and hooted." Bock deploys these useless notebook-type entries alongside automatic descriptions of videos: "A threesome. The copy repairman and the starlet temp and the curvy redheaded programmer. The copy repair guy had the redhead on the table, and was working on her back door. He was covered with sweat, really pounding into the redhead, who had stopped eating out the blonde and was lying on her side…" And so on. We learn from Bock's acknowledgments that he did a significant amount of on-site research in the pornographic film industry. Yet no amount of research saves Bock from having his characters deliver the blandest of insights about pornography: "This was at odds with all that was truly sexual and erotic toLincoln." Characters watch videos, laugh at the conventions, wince at the exploitation, and gratify themselves in spite of all of it. The point of the pornography of the novel is initially —Lincoln Ewing, for example, turns to pornography for a sexual solace that he ceases to find with his wife—but Bock's obsession with lurid details takes us far beyond character. As with his description ofLas Vegas, Bock doesn't withhold nearly enough—as if he imagined his readers to be completely unfamiliar with the conventions and human crimes of pornography.

Beautiful Children's children are little more than types (the knowing but conflicted stripper; the naïvely liberal, punk rock girl; the fat, exploiting, leering pornographer), all of whom are "runaway" children of some stripe. Their thoughts are frequently on the level of cliché; their actions all traceable back to some primal loss of parental guidance. Bock is an energetic but undisciplined writer. A subject like his would have benefited from coolness and detachment. Invoking his inner George Eliot, he writes, at the end of the novel, "Each and every one of us moves toward fates we cannot possibly know. Each of us struggles against the pain of the world, even as we are doomed to join it." These sententiously empty sentiments are characteristic of the novel as a whole. It is not rage that Bock feels, so much as childlike helplessness before a deterministic universe. What is mostly missing from *Beautiful Children* is what is normal to adult life: institutions, jobs. The novel is at its best when it is describing Kenny's aunt's pawnshop, in scenes clearly drawn from Bock's own life. These pained, unsentimentalized transactions between adults suggest a clearer, more measured sense of city life that would have done the novel credit, had it been employed more often. Far from the spectacle of tattoos and breast implants, stripping and fucking, it suggests harsher truths about life on the fringes of Las Vegas and cities like it. After all, most of Bock's readers do not end up like the aimless characters in his book—that is, we are *not* "doomed"—but getting by is no less difficult. It would take a more capaciously political understanding than *Beautiful Children* evinces to explain what the difference is.

Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality

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This book is like so many others. It is made of paper, full of text and pictures, and bound together with a hard cardboard cover. It is a stereotype, a copy, familiar and trite. The book does not know it is a stereotype, however. It cannot gain or lose by being reduced to the simplified category of books. Humans, however, usually do gain by the perception of this object as one more "book." Those who wrote, produced, and sell it gain fortune and fame. Those who buy and read it gain knowledge and more from possessing it. Is typecasting natural and inevitable? Has stereotyping always existed? Is it possible as David Cronenberg once said that "all stereotypes turn out to be true?"

This wonderful book provides 500 pages that document the idea that because people are not books, stereotyping has never been a neutral process. It presents a rich and comprehensive history of the evolution of stereotyping in Western society and the impact it has had on criminals, the poor, racial/ethnic groups, and women. It provides a striking and detailed record of how the predilection to place humans into simple categories has not only often proved wrong but has been mostly harnessed to colonial, repressive, and exploitative purposes.

Humans may not be able to avoid stereotyping. It may even be an unavoidable mental tool for processing information in complex environments. Ewen and Ewen argue, however, that stereotyping has taken a particularly destructive form in the West. Here, the categories developed to account for human difference were set early as mechanisms for exclusion and unequal treatment. Instead of a range or spectrum of difference, Europe and the U.S. created discrete, separate types. More specifically, Africans, criminals, and others were placed into sub-human categories. Instead of a continuum of differences between these populations, the West perceived discrete differences between black and white, rich and poor, as well as foreigners and native American citizens. These differences were often lodged in physical characteristics, marking some people as worthy of being in the category of civilized humans and others not.

This book has very little theory. It is mostly an account of the long history of stereotyping. It is exhaustive and fascinating. Readers will learn about the connections between the eugenics movement in the U.S. and Hitler's efforts to sterilize and eliminate the Jews. There is a fascinating account of how the emergence of black minstrel shows in the mid 19th century served to reinforce white racism. The theoretical reflections in the book are brief and tied to historically significant changes in stereotyping. Thus, the authors discuss Walter Lippman's

critique of the eugenics movement and the rise of the IQ test because Lippman coined the word "stereotyping" in 1922. The lack of theoretical analysis does not weaken the book, however.

The incredible amount of information and history in this book provides tremendous opportunities for testing and examining many theoretical arguments. The discussion of poor people's use of slang provides great examples of Foucault's concerns with the role of naming in the creation of power. In another example, they show that Roget's invention of the thesaurus did more than create a writer's tool. The thesaurus was also infused with "an imperial and hierarchical worldview." Synonyms for democracy, for example, included "low life" and "trash." Those interested in Goffman's or Lakoff's modern theoretical formulations of "framing" will learn about its roots in the authors' discussion of the evolution of photography and the role of definitions in perception.

One of the most interesting insights of this book is an indirect product of the authors' detailed account of the history of phrenology, cranial measurement, and natural history museums in the 19th century. They show how capitalist trade and expansion into places in the world that had been mostly obscure to Western eyes in the past led to the emergence of private collections of artifacts and pictures that later evolved into natural history museums. Wealthy Europeans and Americans created these collections, called "curiosity cabinets," in an attempt to account for and explain their encounters with strange new people in foreign places. These collections, however, became instruments for attributing impurity and degradation to these strange new people. This racist and imperialist project was important for other reasons, however.

Stereotyping has some origin in science, at least the kind practiced in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Ewens provide a marvelous history of the careful, quantitative, and methodical approach taken by 18th century individuals who sought a deterministic, scientific basis for social inequality and hierarchies. Thus, they describe the efforts of one Johann Caspar Lavater, a Swedish Protestant minister, who dedicated his life to developing a physiognomic technique for determining what shape of nose or ear indicated moral degeneration. That science could be hitched to narrow prejudices and artful imagination is nothing new. Such efforts to meld science to imperial and racist conceits do point, however, to the emerging cultural weight of science. Science's weight was able to bend most efforts at gathering truth, even stereotyped ones, to its methods. These findings also suggest the need for greater caution in accepting, at face value, the scientific foundation of contemporary intelligence and aptitude testing.

All in all, there is much to like about this book. What it lacks in theoretical argument it more than makes up with rich historical heft, which was the intent of the authors in any case. I recommend it highly for courses in racial and ethnic history, civil rights, and social inequality. It is a very educational, interesting and fascinating read.