



# Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Winter 2007

on  
nonviolence  
& violence

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& Robert S. Boynton  
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*Inside front cover:* Mahatma Gandhi, April 5, 1930, leading a march to the sea to make salt in defiance of the British salt monopoly. A living symbol of his nation's indomitable will, Gandhi preferred peaceful demonstrations of popular sentiment to a violent show of force: "You can chain me," he said, "you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind." In the struggle to free India from British rule, Gandhi favored large displays of "people power" to any recourse to violence, including the use of torture against the movement's enemies. See Mark Juergensmeyer on *Gandhi vs. terrorism*, pages 30 – 39: "Torture, from Gandhi's point of view, is ineffective . . . because it corrupts the moral character of a society that allows it to be used." Image © Bettmann/Corbis.

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# Dædalus

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The labyrinth designed by Daedalus for King Minos of Crete, on a silver tetradrachma from Cnossos, Crete, c. 350 – 300 B.C. (35 mm, Cabinet des Médailles, Bibliothèque National, Paris). “Such was the work, so intricate the place, / That scarce the workman all its turns cou’d trace; / And Daedalus was puzzled how to find / The secret ways of what himself design’d.” – Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 8

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. The journal’s namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. Its emblem, a maze seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to “lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness.”

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# William H. McNeill

## *Violence & submission in the human past*

The retreat of Gandhian ‘nonviolence’ in public affairs from its high points in the 1930s when the might of the British Raj in India was so seriously challenged by Gandhi and his followers, and since the 1950s and 1960s when Martin Luther King, Jr., led civil-rights demonstrators in facing police dogs and truncheons in the American South, is obvious today. That is scarcely surprising. It takes enormous self-discipline to invite attack and refrain from retaliation, and the moral effect of nonviolence depends on who witnesses such confrontations and how that larger public reacts. Violence exercised in secret against helpless victims, as at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, escapes the price of public disapproval as long as it remains secret. And all too ob-

viously, the art of shaping public opinion by managing the news has become a far more potent ally of established authority, even (or especially) in the exercise of violence, than it used to be.

Yet it is still true that violence has serious limits and that command of superior force is a very precarious basis for government. As Napoleon is supposed to have remarked, one can do anything with bayonets except sit on them. Effective and sustained public action requires at least tacit consent of the governed; active support is much more effective, if it can be contrived. More generally, human society depends on perpetual interaction between leaders and followers, and the exercise of violence and the threat of violence is part of that interaction. So is submission and obedience; and in practice the great majority of humankind has always submitted for very good reasons. Only so can collective action be efficiently exercised, only so can home territory be effectually defended, and, in a word, only so can conditions for group survival be optimized.

In all probability, violence and threats of violence played a prominent part in defining which of several competing males achieved leadership of the proto-human, and then the first fully human, bands of foragers from whom we all de-

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scend. Recent studies of “chimpanzee politics” by Franz de Waal and others offer a plausible model for what probably existed among our remote ancestors. Among chimps, careful observation showed that the alpha male maintains his position only by facing down repeated challenges from one or more of his subordinates – encounters usually limited to gestures of defiance before the challenger backs away without engaging in actual combat. But every so often, after years of backing down, a challenger does fight, and sooner or later one of them displaces the older alpha male, thus assuring a succession of physically vigorous leaders. Moreover, male chimpanzees guard their home territory against intruders from neighboring bands and, when unopposed, cross those borders to pick up extra food. As a result, band territories are elastic, widening or shrinking with population growth or collapse, and with the corresponding vigor of local defense and aggression.

Effective local defense requires cooperation. That means subordination of most males to their established leader. Rivalry only goes so far: the common defense, on which the band’s food supply depends, requires everyone’s readiness to fight against intruders to the death if need be, using hands and teeth. Females are different; they migrate across band boundaries to mate, thus assuring dissemination of genes across longer distances and among larger populations.

Contemporary chimpanzee behavior, especially mating patterns, may not be the same as what prevailed among our human ancestors; but efficient cooperation in defense of territory, especially against fellow humans, was surely essential for them, and the subordination of other males to a single leader seems a very likely – almost necessary – means

to that result. No one can be sure, but since 99 percent of human time was spent in such foraging bands, we can be reasonably confident that human instincts and proclivities were shaped by that experience.

And how amazingly successful they were, rising to the top of the food chain and spreading around the habitable globe as no species before them had ever done. To all appearance, ready resort to violence against other humans – as well as killing animals for food – played a large part in that success.

But settled village life, starting perhaps as much as (or more than) eight thousand years ago, altered life patterns profoundly – as did the subsequent rise of cities and civilizations. In general, the effective scale of human societies expanded so that first hundreds, then thousands, and presently hundreds of thousands and millions, of individual persons began to interact within a loose and, at first, very slenderly integrated web. Older patterns of violence altered. Hierarchies of command and obedience embraced larger and larger numbers of persons, and age-old alternatives between violent self-assertion and submission became correspondingly complicated, compelling the same individual and local groups to shift back and forth between the two roles when encountering strangers, depending on who the particular strangers might be and where they ranked in the larger web.

Again, every such encounter was what it was, often beset by uncertainties on both sides. Generalization becomes more reckless as complication increased. Yet it seems to me that some general observations about the changing roles of violence are plausible or at least interesting and worth suggesting in print.

First of all, early agricultural settlements were of two contrasting kinds.



Tropical gardening may well have been older than grain agriculture, but it left only scant archaeological traces that still remain almost entirely unexplored. The reason so little is known about the history of tropical gardeners is that they did not support cities and civilizations: they simply left their crops in the ground until they were ready to consume them. As a result, outsiders could not carry stored harvests away by force or threat of force. It follows that new forms of human parasitism that grain farmers submitted to could not arise among tropical gardeners, who therefore remained in small, comparatively dense, but independent, village communities, like those discovered in interior New Guinea as recently as the 1930s. Cities and civilization passed them by; and local forms of violence, though real enough, conformed closely to the hypothetical patterns of violence among ancestral foraging bands. That is to say, local defense of territory played the central role: choice of local leaders was tied to the conduct of armed clashes with neighbors, and all adult males were expected to take part in such exercises. Costs as measured by death in battle varied widely, and we have too little information to make worthwhile generalizations.

By contrast, grain agriculture and the stored harvests it required provoked far more social diversity and, in the long run, sustained amazing transformations of human life. The whole trajectory of what we think of as human history depended on an initial differentiation between subjected villagers and urban dwellers, who lived on rents and taxes collected forcibly in kind from those who raised the food city folk consumed. Such an inequity could only be sustained if rent- and tax-takers allowed villagers to keep enough grain to feed themselves and leave enough for next year's seed.

The necessary restraint was presumably achieved by trial and error.

The basic fact was that exposure to natural disasters – hail, drought, flood, and blight – as well as the risk of total confiscation by human predators might bring death by starvation to grain farmers. Separate, isolated villages of a few hundred persons could not hope to safeguard their harvests unless a larger polity, supporting specialists both in the supernatural and in violence, were available to help protect them. That, in turn, required feeding such specialists by submitting to rents and taxes.

Both parties gained if custom regulated the transfer of food from producer to consumer so as to allow both to survive. Villagers had to work harder and consume less than they produced; urban specialists in protection – priests and warriors – probably consumed more per capita than rural dwellers did from the start, and protected themselves and their rural dependents as best they could. That partnership is what we call civilization, and civilized partnerships soon proved capable of raising monumental buildings and leaving other conspicuous archaeological traces wherever grain agriculture prevailed, in western Asia, Egypt, India, China, and Mexico.

Overall, this arrangement meant that the great majority of persons ceased to take an active part in defending their home territory. Submission to powerful outsiders who carried off part of the harvest every year was a heavy price to pay, but early grain farmers had no choice and, in western Asia, soon found ways of producing more grain than they needed for their own consumption by harnessing animals to plows, thus expanding the area of cultivation per capita substantially. In effect a new sort of symbiosis between draught animals and humans supplemented and sustained the emerging

symbiosis between village dwellers and city folk. Domesticated animals also supplemented human food supplies by giving milk (and eggs); their bodies constituted a sort of food bank in times of famine when grain was short. On top of that, domesticated animals could be made to carry heavy loads, both for short distances between field and barnyard, and cross-country for trading or military purposes.

The West Asian pattern of human and animal symbiosis eventually spread very widely through the Old World. As a result, in most of Eurasia and in parts of Africa, urban exploitation of rural peasantries was much facilitated by the parallel and harsher exploitation of domesticated animals by village farmers. It was different in the Americas, where pre-Columbian civilizations flourished without much in the way of large-bodied domesticated animals – a difference that eventually made Spanish conquest easier than it would otherwise have been.

To begin with, it looks as though in all parts of the world, protection from natural disasters by experts in the supernatural was what mattered most. But priests were supplemented from the start by military leaders, and even the most powerful priesthoods were eventually subordinated to military rulers when protection against outside human attack became more critical for local survival. Hence, it is not surprising that warriors or their descendants remained in charge of civilized governments until recent times.

Yet the polarity between specialized protectors against destructive violence and rural rent-payers and taxpayers was complicated from the beginning by new scope that civilized societies gave to artisans and merchants. Professional artisans were able to produce superior

goods, thanks to specialization and lifelong practice. Equipping suitably splendid rituals for pleasing and appeasing the gods constituted an insatiable market for artisan skills – so did the manufacture of superior weapons and armor. Hence, growing numbers of skilled artisans could and did claim a share of the food coming from the countryside as rent and taxes.

Merchants were just as important, for it was they who traveled far and wide, supplying artisans with the rare and precious goods they needed – raw materials, like metals, gems, pigments, timber, and much else. But securing raw materials peaceably from afar required giving something in return that local persons wanted and could not produce for themselves. To be sure, violent seizure was an alternative, and to judge by the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which describes an armed foray into the forests of Lebanon in search of timber, military expeditions in search of strategic raw materials were sometimes launched when cities were new in the land of Sumer.

But just as agreed arrangements between local payers and receivers of rent and taxes were more conducive to survival than violent seizure, so it was in interregional encounters. Both parties gained if local people could be induced to part with raw materials – or, better yet, prepare them for transport to distant urban markets – and accept manufactured goods in return. This created yet another elastic demand for the handiwork of urban artisans. As both sides came to recognize the advantages of such peaceful exchanges, regional specialization slowly assumed significant proportions throughout urban hinterlands. Large-scale efforts to mine metals, fell timber, dive for pearls, and find other specially attractive commodities allowed local elites, who organized such efforts,

to acquire luxury goods manufactured in distant urban workshops.

Resulting networks of exchange transmitted ideas and skills in both directions, as well as distributed material objects, thus hastening the civilizing process whereby more and more people over widening areas began to share in a common evolutionary process of differentiation and specialization that ran across political, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. That process eventually linked most of the Old World into a far more closely interacting whole than had prevailed when only foraging bands collided and peacefully exchanged preciosities with one another on festival occasions. A similar but weaker web of exchange also arose in the Americas, hampered by the absence of pack animals capable of carrying burdens as heavy as those that donkeys, mules, and camels did in the Old World. Flotation was always more capacious and sometimes safer than overland transport. Consequently, as rafts, boats, and ships became more elaborate, river and overseas trade routes grew in importance, and eventually connected the entire globe into a single web after 1500 CE.

Traveling merchants were the most prominent instruments of long-range human interactions. They often faced ambiguous situations when encountering strangers with respect both to prices and to violence. Prices were set in two different ways: by generous gifting, with expectation of spontaneous, honorable reciprocity; or by bargaining between buyer and seller for the lowest price. Economists commonly concentrate wholly on bargaining, but gifting played (and continues to play) a larger role in human affairs than we often realize. Gift-giving was what carried the gem dealer, Marco Polo, across Asia in the thirteenth century, for example. And

gifting still plays a central role in American politics in the form of political contributions, where the old rule – the greater the gift, the greater the return – still prevails.

With respect to violence, raid and trade were and remain alternative ways of getting hold of someone else's goods. But resort to violence was always costly. It was difficult to sustain, since robbery discouraged other merchants from showing up and did not usually yield a suitable array of goods. Hence, pirates and robbers often had to seek out peaceable markets in some special, well-guarded location, where they could sell their booty and buy the things that fitted their actual needs.

Parallel ambiguity prevailed in the metropolitan centers where merchants clustered together, forming marginal, often unstable, and semiautonomous communities of their own. To tax or not to tax – and, if so, how much – was a question local rulers always had to ask. A ready supply of goods – later of money – levied on visiting merchants was a welcome source of revenue; but charging too much discouraged visitors and reduced total revenue. Those rulers who charged least often gained most by attracting larger numbers of richer merchants to their cities.

Merchants were also capable of becoming rulers of independent city-states, like Venice, and of forming influential interest groups within territorial states, like medieval and early modern England. As such they sometimes exercised political and military force for their own purposes rather than submitting to armed superiors, as was more commonly the case.

Overall, one can safely say that merchants were a disturbing, quicksilver element in civilized society – upsetting old ways by bringing novelties from afar to

new places and peoples. Inhabitants of remote urban hinterlands suffered most. Local ways and traditions regularly crumbled as such populations were folded into the larger human web, and their new roles as suppliers of raw materials and manpower to distant urban markets were usually unattractive at best. Metropolitan centers also suffered strains when adjusting to novelties, since changing markets could destroy urban livelihoods without always creating new ones.

Above all, merchants made a living by crossing political and other boundaries, exposing themselves and those they dealt with to ambiguous situations in which resort to violence was often near the surface. Over time, recognition of the high cost of violence accumulated, and legal systems capable of settling disputes peaceably extended their jurisdiction over wider and wider territories. But crossing jurisdictional boundaries remained precarious, and merchants who did so reaped correspondingly swollen profits when they did not suffer crippling loss. Everywhere and always change and instability followed in their footsteps, interdependence of distant populations increased, as well as vulnerability to catastrophe whenever sudden breakdown of exchanges interrupted the generation of increasing wealth that drove the entire civilizing process.

What I have referred to as the civilizing process also brought far-reaching changes to religion. From the time military commanders began to compete with priestly leaders of civilized society, compromise of some sort between the two kinds of leaders prevailed. They needed each other. Supernatural sanction, confirmed and certified by priests, legitimated military rule, while priests needed military protection against outside raiders as well as heretics and/or

missionaries of alien faiths. More or less settled alliances between throne and altar usually prevailed, but there was a deficiency built into the human experience of life in large cities that recurrently upset such arrangements among the privileged leaders of society.

It took a long while for attachment between a population and local divinities to give way to universal faiths, and longer still for the new universal faiths to accommodate sectarian variation. The so-called higher religions – Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and (more ambiguously) Confucianism – mark the arrival of universal faiths between about 550 BCE and 634 CE. They were applicable in principle to every human being; but despite all the missionary effort they exhibited, these faiths divided most of humankind along new religious lines, and a wide variety of more local religions also continued to command devoted followings.

Propagation of the higher religions certainly helped innumerable human beings to adjust to urban living. That was what made these religions so successful. Yet their teaching, rituals, and institutional expression in monasteries, congregations, churches, mosques, and schools did not bring anything like religious stability. Instead, heresy and sectarianism continued to thrive and divide urban populations.

The problem was this. Most human beings need to belong to small primary groups. Only so does everyday personal life have meaning; only so are questions of what to do and when to do it unambiguous. Our descent from members of foraging bands, where everybody knew everyone else and also knew how to behave in everyday situations, undoubtedly explains this fact. Agricultural villages of a few hundred people were not too large to satisfy that need, and the conser-

vative stability of village life in most of the world until very recently reflects that circumstance. But cities where thousands congregated, where specialized occupations multiplied, and where different expectations and rules of behavior prevailed among different social classes could not do so. Smaller, subordinate groups were necessary, and among the variety of such groups, religiously defined linkages proved to be the most enduring, most flexible, and most powerful.

By definition, a functioning primary group has to be small so everyone can know everyone else. Markers distinguishing 'us' from 'them' help to define and confirm group boundaries. Details of clothing – especially headgear – and physical bearing or appearance commonly serve that purpose. Cities, accordingly, became an uneasy amalgam of separate, self-aware groups, often living close together in distinct neighborhoods and treating outsiders differently from the way they treated fellow members of the particular group to which they belonged.

One can think of such urban groupings as quasi-villages, with enough in common to sustain meaningful personal life and channel everyday behavior along firm customary lines. Occupational convergence and/or ethnic commonality was often a factor. But, as I said, the most flexible, enduring, and powerful cement for such groups was a religion that differed from other, especially official, forms of worship.

The power of sectarian religion rested on two realities. First and foremost, such faiths had priests or teachers who defined, propagated, and defended it against challenges of every kind – forcible, logical, or merely snobbish. Such specialists also adjusted details to ever-changing circumstances, partly deliber-

ately, but mostly without admitting or realizing they were doing so. When wisely done, such adjustments kept the faith alive and vigorous across generations and centuries.

Second, these religions dealt directly with the standard human crises – birth, marriage, sickness, and death – offering solace and ritual resolution for the hopes and fears such events provoke. Life without such support was difficult and unsatisfying. With it, ordinary persons could carry on even in time of extreme distress and endure yet another day. Tight-knit communities sustained by sectarian faiths, in short, contributed to survival within big cities just as much as protection by military specialists did; these faiths were even more effective because they were more immediately personal than more splendid rituals conducted by priests of official, state-supported forms of religion.

But religious differences also invited violent persecution. Minority religious groups normally submitted. Some, like Quakers and Jains, made nonviolence an article of faith. Sometimes, however, new winds of doctrine attracted so much enthusiasm that followers attempted to overthrow the established forms of worship, either by conversion or by force. Consequently, reform movements in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim history have frequently provoked large-scale violence; and religiously justified or inspired militancy remains active in several parts of the world today, as the so-called war on terror surely suggests.

Peaceable coexistence of separate religious groups, and legal toleration of diverse practices and belief, is always precarious. In proportion to the emotional attachment to a particular form of religion, the cohesion of fellow-believers is strengthened. Encounters with unbelievers become correspondingly pricklier



and at least potentially violent. To be sure, the weaker normally submit to the stronger, enduring whatever hardships and indignities may be imposed upon them. But the gain from belonging to a small, incandescent community of believers is always countered by the costs of collision with outsiders, together with ever-present possibilities for hurtful violence.

It seems clear that human proclivity for violent action will always be with us. Violence was essential to survival among our remote ancestors – it is ironic that self-destruction on a global scale is now within human capability, thanks to atomic bombs and other forms of mass destruction. It is equally true that, since the invention of agriculture, most human beings submitted to others and seldom even tried to kill anyone else, though killing domesticated animals remained essential to most farming populations. Specialization and peaceable exchanges have gradually enriched humankind over millennia, and recently did so beyond the imagination of older times. But violence, magnified by modern weaponry, has also increased beyond anything our ancestors ever thought possible.

How the civilizing process will stumble or advance under such circumstances – complicated by increasingly obvious environmental constraints – remains to be seen. But human ingenuity is enormous, and new ways of satisfying our wishes and needs are contagious and tend to spread. They can do so very rapidly today when instantaneous communication assaults our ears and eyes every day. Mighty states and rich corporations crumble precipitously when old attachments yield to new; and so far, at least, human numbers and wealth have continued to grow. An end to the increase

of human numbers seems sure before much longer; but whether wealth and comfort will collapse as violence spreads more widely, or whether means for constraining destructive violence and sustaining collaboration on a global scale will be found, seems still an open question.

It has been an open question throughout the past, so I see no need to despair but much need for ingenuity and wisdom, together with the common sense that stubbornly prefers survival to destruction, and compromise, even submission, to victory by enforcing our will (whoever ‘we’ may be) on everyone else.



Steven A. LeBlanc

## *Why warfare? Lessons from the past*

If we ever hope to end warfare we must first understand why it occurs. Because this is trivially obvious, it is surprising how poorly studied warfare is. Considerable work has been done on the details of particular wars and the events leading up to them, but little has been done to find the underlying reasons for warfare in general. My colleague Kevin Hill and I recently undertook a brief survey of courses on warfare taught at fifteen major research universities. We found numerous courses on specific wars, eighteen on the concepts and methods of war, and only six that we could construe as examinations of the general causes of warfare – and even those were based in a single discipline.

This lack is probably due in part to our approach to social problems in general.

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Most people tend to think that common sense is adequate for solving them. But we abandoned the commonsense approach to problems in physics and biology long ago, with the result that we have made great progress in these sciences. Despite its obvious importance, there has been little application of the scientific method of hypothesis, comparison, and testing to unearthing the causes of warfare.

One approach to understanding the reasons for warfare is to study deep history. Archaeology, anthropology, ethnohistory, and related disciplines provide great time depth for studying war. They also provide information on how and why warfare took place in a wide array of cultures. Yet this highly relevant information is often ignored. Most political scientists and historians who consider the reasons for warfare start with the modern era, or even the 1800s; fewer go back to the ancient Greeks. And almost all consider only the cultures of Europe and other state-level societies such as China. These studies are relevant, but they are too limited to exhibit general patterns over the entire span of human history and prehistory. Discerning whether or not human warfare has a genetic base, for instance, is an impossible task to accomplish with such limited

scope; instead, we must examine evidence from deep history and worldwide ethnography, which represent most of human history and most of human cultural variability.

The global study of warfare is necessary to determine whether war has a single cause or many different causes. If the causes of war have varied over time, then we must discern how and why this is the case. *Prima facie*, it appears that some modern wars, particularly in the West, are different from wars before the twentieth century, whereas recent regional wars in Africa and Asia appear to have the same causes as ancient wars. If significant changes in the nature of warfare took place in the modern era, knowing how and why such changes arose is necessary for understanding modern wars.

One problem with studying warfare is how to define it. Use of such criteria as the presence of standing armies and professional soldiers eliminates consideration of warfare during most of human history. On the other hand, including homicide and intragroup feuding, while relevant to the study of violence, makes the study of war difficult because it mixes behaviors that have very different causes.

Definitions of war must not be dependent on group size or methods of fighting if they are to be useful in studying past warfare. One productive approach is to view warfare simply as socially sanctioned conflict between independent groups or polities. This enables us to include warfare in all types of human societies throughout history.

Quite a bit is known about warfare in the deep past, and about warfare in non-state societies that have not been affected by nation-states. One obvious conclusion is that warfare was frequent long before complex societies developed.

This generalization is clearly established by Lawrence Keeley in *War Before Civilization*, and was also discussed recently by Richard Wrangham and Raymond C. Kelly.<sup>1</sup>

Such warfare was chronic, virtually annual. Few societies experienced even one generation without significant warfare. Regardless of its frequency, almost all societies lived in fear of attack. Great efforts, often at considerable costs, were made to live in protected places – such as on the tops of windswept hills and on the faces of cliffs far from water supplies – and to build fortifications. Some groups lived in settlements that were larger or more compact than optimum, simply for defense. The deadliness of war made these measures inevitable. Estimates of around 25 percent of males dying from warfare are derived for virtually all continents, for foragers and egalitarian farmers alike. The probability of dying as a result of warfare was, in fact, much higher in the past than it is today.

Even those few societies described as peaceful were neither inherently nor historically peaceful. For example, archaeological evidence now shows that the Salishian tribes of the Plateau area of western North America, who had no remembered history of warfare when studied by anthropologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had had significant warfare a few centuries earlier. One class of so-called peaceful societies consists of those that underwent demographic collapse and radical subsistence deprivation as the result of Western expansion. This is an important group from whom we can learn a great deal about the causes of warfare and of

1 Richard Wrangham, “Killer species,” *Dædalus* 133 (4) (Fall 2004): 25 – 35; Raymond C. Kelly, “The Evolution of Lethal Intergroup Violence,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 102 (43) (October 25, 2005): 15294 – 15298.

peace, but they do not provide evidence for societies that have learned to avoid war. Other so-called peaceful societies are foragers who have become symbiotic with nearby farmers, such as the Pygmies of Central Africa or the Semang of Malaysia. In both cases, the farmers fight intensively with each other while the foragers stand by outside of the conflict. Again, this is not proof of inherently peaceful societies.

In fact, I have been unable to find evidence of societies that were peaceful for more than three hundred to four hundred years. And even those societies that existed peacefully for that long were very rare. Furthermore, most archaeologists do not regard three hundred to four hundred years as a very lengthy time span for a society. And even these societies eventually became involved in significant warfare. Thus, stories that depict an age of peace in antiquity, or peaceful foragers, or warfare as a disease of modern society, or the ideal that human evolution took place in a peaceful environment are all erroneous. These beliefs are myths, and quite dangerous ones. So long as we believe them, we will be prevented from comprehending the real reasons for warfare.

Here is a basic fact about past warfare that we can substantiate with ample, unequivocal evidence: much warfare in the past was over scarce resources. Substantial data from North and South America point to the strong correlation between the intensity of ancient warfare and climate change. Not surprisingly, whenever the climate deteriorated, with resultant disturbance of the resource base, there was often a marked increase in the frequency, intensity, and deadliness of warfare. Especially good examples correlate with the onset of the Little Ice Age around AD 1400. Conversely, climatic

optima, such as the so-called Medieval Warm Interval preceding the Little Ice Age, correlate with less warfare than typically found at other times.

Resource competition is a very plausible stimulus for warfare. Human societies do not have natural mechanisms for keeping their populations within territorial carrying capacities: Malthus was correct in saying that population exceeds resources in the long run, which today means resources and population on a planetary scale. While regional resource bases are sometimes expanded, populations invariably grow more rapidly thereafter; for example, the result of the so-called Green Revolution, which increased grain production, was significant population growth. Malthusian limits changed regionally during the Industrial-Scientific Revolution; but, again, on a worldwide scale, even if it were technologically possible to feed everyone, economics and politics would contribute to prevent this from happening.

Particularly clear examples of resource stress leading to warfare are found on the Polynesian islands. Because farmers occupied them only recently, they provide well-documented examples of initial colonization, rapid population growth, resource stress, intense warfare, and, in some cases, societal and population collapse. This process has characterized even the very small islands, such as Tikopia and Easter Island, where there should have been considerable potential for developing social mechanisms to control growth and warfare. So, whether the societies and areas they live in are large or small, humans have not been able to solve peacefully problems of population growth in conditions of scarce and diminishing resources.

And since intense warfare goes back to our prehuman ancestors, we can reasonably surmise that there has been am-

ple time for selection for war-related behaviors. This conclusion directly contradicts a long tradition of saying that biology is irrelevant to discovering the causes of warfare because warfare is a recent phenomenon. Given warfare's long presence in human history, we can no longer reject the hypothesis that it does have a biological basis, just because *large-scale* warfare appeared only recently. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that warfare is genetically programmed in human beings, only that it makes sense that humans may have evolved strong tendencies toward defensive, and even offensive, behavior, under the impact of increasing numbers of people and decreasing resources – behavior that can be characterized as warfare.

Other general rules about warfare crosscut time and culture. For instance, all cultures – not just nation-states – institutionalize the process of war. Considering the advantage of being better than one's neighbors at waging war, it makes sense to cultivate practices of rewarding good warriors and good leaders, building concepts of 'us versus them,' and developing means of maximizing societal participation in war. Moreover, once institutionalized, these behavioral patterns are not easily changed. Determining the extent to which warfare continues because of prior development of such behavior is a very difficult problem.

Also, most societies require consensus decisions about whom and when to fight. Recognizing that wars are far too dangerous to allow a few hotheads to initiate them, most societies exert strong controls over intergroup aggression. For example, women are sometimes key decision makers in whether or not to go to war.

However, there are considerable differences between ancient and modern

wars. For example, in the past, people fought against people they knew. That is, they fought their neighbors. Only when states formed empires did people fight with people significantly different from themselves. This is important because, in a nonimperial conflict, the antagonists had a reasonable chance of predicting the responses of their opponents, such as how hard their opponents might fight or when they might negotiate for peace. In modern warfare, these are often difficult to determine.

Moreover, warfare was seen as a long-term process. Thus, groups preferred to use surprise attacks and treachery against their enemy because these tactics reduced risk. A successful ambush every few months could weaken, and ultimately defeat, an enemy. Pitched battles, in contrast, were, more often than not, shows of force and a means to assess the enemy's strength, rather than attempts to annihilate that enemy.

Modern wars, on the other hand, with their mass armies and pitched battles, force soldiers into much more dangerous situations than was once the case. True, the probability of dying in a war is much lower for someone living in an industrial society than it was for foragers and feudal or egalitarian farmers. Considerable evidence shows that more than 20 percent of adult males in nonstate societies would die from warfare, while perhaps a tenth of that figure of adult males in modern states die in war (with the exception of a few nations for short intervals). However, the likelihood of a soldier being killed in a single battle is vastly greater today. In the past, one side would retire after a few deaths, which usually took place not on the battlefield, but during surprise attacks on residences.

So, until recently, war in much of the world was attritional. There was no con-

cept of the decisive battle, and battles were not the primary means of winning wars. Long-term persistent weakening of the enemy was the path to victory. We describe this today as guerrilla warfare, and we are well aware of its effectiveness. Attritional war requires constant defensive vigilance and, thus, constant anxiety. The ancient world was not a safe place.

Since almost all wars in the past lasted for a long time, they usually resulted in the formation of buffer zones between polities. As much as half of a region's territory could consist of sparsely populated or empty zones. Such buffer zones greatly decreased overall regional productivity, but they also greatly reduced the chance of being surprised by one's enemies. Today, there are essentially no buffer zones between nations, other than oceans. Again, this is a radical departure from the past, and one with important consequences for civilian – collateral – casualties.

While the duration of past warfare was generally long, it could end abruptly, too, sometimes in a single day. One striking example is the Battle of Poitiers in France. On October 17, 732, the Arab general Abd-er-Rahman ibn-Abdullah was killed, and the Arab forces withdrew that night, leaving Charles Martel the victor of the last battle against Muslim forces, at the northwestern limit of Arab penetration into the Christian world.

Other examples of virtually instantaneous ceasefire have occurred all over the world and at all levels of social complexity. These include Eskimos (not just the Inuit), Salishians, New Guinea Highlanders, various Polynesian groups, Amazonian tribes, and Australian Aborigines. Some, such as the Inuit, stopped fighting each other when the benefits of cooperation increased. Others, such as the Amazonian tribes, the Salishians,

and the Polynesians, stopped when population decline, combined with new crops and technology, greatly drove up carrying capacity.

These examples point to the surprising existence of rational behavior in past warfare. When viewing warfare in general across time, one can correlate it with climatic and technological transformations that led to changes in the level of resource stress. Thus, war is less likely when the global human population is in balance with, or below, the world's environmental carrying capacity. War starts and stops in patterned ways that are most generally determined by people's need to secure a livelihood in a world where increasing populations make conflict over vital resources inevitable. I will now examine various specific explanations for warfare in light of evidence about intergroup hostilities in the past.

Religion is the first and probably most widespread source of explanations for warfare. For example, at one level or another, Christians accept that The Fall of Man – the belief that because Adam, the first man, disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, God has cursed all of Adam's progeny to be born into sin and to be naturally evil – accounts for why humans are prone to violence and war, not to mention doomed to an afterlife in hell. For Christians, this curse extends to all of humankind, among whom only those individuals who take Jesus Christ as their Savior can be redeemed. For Muslims, God forgave Adam, but all human beings suffer from the sin of pride, which leads to war and eventually to punishment in the afterlife. To attain Paradise, people must submit to Allah and follow his commandments.

I cannot evaluate the truth of such supernatural explanations for warfare, but



remark only that, among Christians and Muslims, belief in these religious doctrines has long been a contributing, if not a major, reason for ‘us’ – defined here as believers – to go to war against ‘them’ – the heathens. Still, the question remains whether these beliefs constitute the ultimate reasons, or are themselves a response to other more fundamental reasons, for warfare.

Nor do I intend to critique all of the prevalent naturalistic explanations for warfare. The most obvious, and perhaps most misunderstood, naturalistic explanation for warfare is that it has a genetic basis. This suggestion is often categorically rejected, sometimes because of a broad-based refusal to consider genetic bases for any human behavior at all. There is also perhaps a religious basis for such blanket rejection, a denial of the fact that human beings are animals, whose basic behavior may be genetically determined as is the behavior of all other animals. But whether or not human behavior in general – and engagement in warfare in particular – has genetic roots must be objectively investigated and not ruled out *a priori*.

In reality, it is not difficult to show that merely saying we are genetically predisposed to engage in warfare is not sufficient to explain why warfare is universal. There is, however, considerable evidence of selection for aggressive behavior and the desire to dominate, especially in male primates. For example, the evolution of coalitional killing among chimpanzees, and its probable genetic source, has been clearly and carefully dealt with by Richard Wrangham. Warfare also requires cooperation, however, for which there is also ample evidence in evolutionary history.

I argue that, through evolution, both cooperation and aggression in humans came increasingly under the control of

intelligence. Reason came to play a central role in deciding when to start or stop warfare. As I mentioned before, both the initiation and cessation of warfare in the past correlated strongly with climate change (and, thus, changes in environmental carrying capacity), giving us reason to see warfare as a rational response to a change, like a severe restriction in the food supply, and less as a result of genetic propensities alone. The speed with which switches were made from war to peace in improved circumstances provides further support of this.

Rational competition over scarce resources is the best explanation for warfare we have. But note that warfare is usually rational for only a portion of a group or complex society. For instance, from the point of view of an individual family among foragers and egalitarian farmers, it may be rational to take the chance of losing a son to save the family. And in more complex societies, it may be rational from the elites’ point of view to risk losing the lives of many commoners in order to protect their own lives and privileges. Even were some of them also likely to lose sons, it would still be rational for elites to initiate warfare because they have the resources to have large families and to replace lost sons.

What is considered to be scarcity is also quite variable. The perception of needing more living space that inspired the Germans to go to war in both World War I and World War II would baffle the crowded masses of some Eastern societies. Nevertheless, archaeological and historical evidence throughout history and prehistory indicates that most wars involved competition over resources.

The institutionalization of warfare complicates the direct relationship of warfare to scarcity. Such institutionalization is a rational response to the need



to prepare for the threat of warfare, but once established the institution itself can lead to the instigation of warfare. Recall, for example, the practice of building a concept of 'us versus them.' Such a concept usually includes loyalty to, and love of, the nation-state, as well as defensive dislike of foreigners. These culturally shaped attitudes are often strengthened to the point that they cannot be readily altered when no longer needed.

Thus, it is possible that some wars do not make rational or ecological sense, but result from archaic cultural patterns that have outlived their original rational bases. Records reveal examples of raids against people far too distant to have been competitors for resources. Several generations earlier, these same groups may have been in competition with each other over scarce resources. The scarcity may have ended, but the 'us versus them' attitude, the desire for revenge for ancestral deaths, and the social mechanisms that expedited earlier warfare may still be in place several generations later. The culturally maintained proximal causes of such warfare then are no longer rational, although the original ancestral cause was.

This may help explain why we have religious and ethnic wars, in which the enemy is categorically assumed to be evil or alien. Such warfare seems irrational. But the root cause of this type of warfare is seldom mere hatred of religious or ethnic differences. Rather, the conflicts between the two groups probably arose in the first instance from population pressure and competition for scarce resources.

Natural fear of strangers is another popular explanation for the hatred between ethnic or other groups. But even if hatred or fear of others were found to have a genetic basis, warfare still could

require an additional motive such as competition for resources. There may be, for example, a genetic basis for male status competition, but can this alone set the stage for males to fight each other without a specific reason? In fact, there is evidence for genetic bases for both competitive and cooperative behavior among mammals, but neither of these propensities as such is adequate for explaining the incidence of war or of peace.

Given the variation in cases of war and of peace, it seems obvious that genetic foundations, while a primary influence on human behavior, are far from determinative. For one thing, genetically driven propensities are very specific, for example, for such things as eye color. Furthermore, there is not one gene that determines the production of a thing as complicated as the eye. Likewise, we have no support whatsoever that genes for such complicated human activities as warfare exist.

There are several alternatives to my explanation of war, as arising from conflict over resources. One is the idea that expanding state-level societies introduced warfare to inherently peaceful peoples. The problem is that no inherently peaceful peoples are known. True, there are many cases of states – in the West, in ancient China, among the Romans, and among the Moguls – that, in attempting to subjugate or exterminate tribal and forager societies, have set off some of the most devastating wars ever recorded. But the notion that warfare is like a disease that infects otherwise peaceful societies is nonsense. There is no case where people impinged upon by expanding states have not been involved in significant warfare prior to the impact. In effect, not only is Rousseau's notion of noble savages in the childhood

of man wrong, it is dangerous. Belief in Hobbes's notion of the primal war of all against all is also wrong, but less so than that of a prelapsarian Garden of Eden in which the lion lies down with the lamb. Human beings have always been dangerous animals that can, in proper circumstances (usually circumstances of plenty), also be very nice.

Another postulated explanation for warfare is that it is the result of imperfect knowledge. If you know you will lose a war, you will probably prefer to negotiate rather than to fight. Similarly, if you know you are sure to win, you may prefer to negotiate at the outset rather than bear the cost of war. The theory here is that only because they have imperfect knowledge do sure losers and sure winners fight. While this may or may not be true for the recent past, it does not explain warfare in the distant past. Imperfect knowledge about the enemy is irrelevant for wars that correlate with climate change and scarcity of resources. If the ultimate long-term goal in such wars is control over critical scarce resources – without which you starve – then neither surrender nor negotiation is a viable option. Thus, many ancient wars were long, drawn-out affairs with many stagnant intervals, in which allies and enemies came and went. The hope was that your side would get lucky, even if the odds were against you.

Another culturally based explanation of warfare focuses on the type of government. Some empirical evidence shows that democratic states have fewer wars than do authoritarian states, especially if the potential conflict is between democratic states. Is this because democracies are more open than authoritarian regimes, which results in more widespread knowledge of circumstances? Or is it because decision processes in

democracies are more broadly based than they are in authoritarian states? Or perhaps it is because democracies do a better job solving critical resource problems by means other than war. This is a fruitful line of investigation, but in determining the root causes of warfare knowledge concerning the behavior of recent democracies and authoritarian states is both inconclusive and secondary. To the extent that this knowledge exposes the role of resource needs and availability, however, comparative examination of the relation between warfare and these forms of government should be quite useful.

Other empirical evidence shows a correlation between large numbers of unmarried young males in a society and a high probability that the society will go to war. Why might this be so? Perhaps the young men cannot marry because resource shortages leave them too poor to support families, and thus warfare results from resource stress. Or the situation might be culturally driven, with older males causing the imbalance by taking multiple wives. Or perhaps there is a severely uneven distribution of resources between elites and commoners. In any case, the correlation between high proportions of unmarried men and high probability of warfare is another promising line of investigation that supports the suggestion that war has more causal factors than hatred based on racial, ethnic, or religious differences. Finally, it has been suggested that some groups engage in raids or war for sport, but no pure case of this is known – there is always booty or grudges involved.

Misjudgment is a major factor in warfare today, despite or perhaps because of worldwide television reporting. When a nation's leaders commit the nation to war with a people halfway around the world, it is virtually certain that they do

not know or understand their opponents very well. As war becomes global, the potential for misunderstanding and misjudgment increases significantly. This is a big and very dangerous change from the past where one knew one's enemy well. Moreover, even long-standing democratic nation-states can quite easily supersede the process of achieving consensus for decisions concerning warfare. One of the most troubling issues about the war in Iraq, for example, was the lack of informed open debate about why, and whether or not, we should go to war in the first place.

Another crucial problem today is the absence of territorial buffer zones, which reduced warfare in the past. There may be no realistic substitute for this lack, but we must keep in mind what we lost when these zones disappeared. Finally, another very general lesson from the past is how much the rate of change in human lives has increased. Sociopolitical fluctuations are so rapid today that coping mechanisms cannot always catch up. For example, there are multiple examples of wars today in which ten- and twelve-year-old children are armed with Kalashnikovs. These children are deadly and often completely out of adult control. Another frightening fact is that over 35 million AK-47s (and subsequent models) have been distributed around the world. Nothing like this distribution of lethal weaponry ever happened in the past.

Despite the extensive and intensive levels of warfare today, we have some reasons for optimism. Warfare kills a far smaller percentage of the total population than it used to; hence the probability that any individual will die from warfare is much smaller than was the case in the past. Most people do not realize this, and are unduly terrified of war. We also

know much more today about why humans go to war than we did a century ago. Recent advances in biology show that there are primary genetic components leading to aggressive, competitive behavior, but we also know about genetic components leading to cooperative behavior.

The knowledge that most warfare is ultimately rational competition for scarce resources should also give us some hope for eliminating war. A third or more of the world's peoples are so well-off and so interconnected that warfare is not a rational option for them. The bases for rational warfare will decline to the extent that this elite can curtail warfare among the remainder of the world's peoples by increasing these peoples' wealth and well-being. This is not an easy solution to effect, given that the elite's way of life grossly wastes the world's resources.

The study of warfare throughout human history and prehistory also provides grounds for pessimism, however. If an ultimate cause of warfare is competition over scarce resources, and energy is the major scarce resource today, then the wealthy nations are not sheltered from the destruction of war and, in fact, are especially vulnerable to it. The world has also evolved groups that thrive on religious and ideological differences, leading to blind hatreds, democracies that abrogate the need for making collective decisions about going to war, and religious extremists actively working for the destruction of modern (sinful) industrial society.

Nevertheless, our current knowledge about the causes and features of warfare in the past provides some hope that for the first time in human history we have the potential to eliminate warfare. There has not been a world war now for sixty years and counting.

# Jonathan Schell & Robert S. Boynton

## *People's power vs. nuclear power: a conversation*

ROBERT S. BOYNTON: When did you first start thinking about the idea of cooperative power and people's war?

JONATHAN SCHELL: In the late 1980s, shortly before the collapse of Communism. I'd been a reporter in Vietnam in the mid-1960s, an experience that had led me to reflect on the extraordinary power that local peoples have to expel invaders wielding superior military

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force. The United States won almost all the battles, but it didn't matter. It won itself to defeat. The process was observable on a day-to-day basis. The fighting, with its indiscriminate destruction, was driving the population into the hands of the adversary. You didn't have to be a geopolitician to see it. In fact, geopolitics got in the way of seeing it.

Then, in the early 1970s, I got to know some Polish folks, Jan and Irena Gross, who had been driven out of their country in 1968 for protesting censorship by the Communist regime. They were sending care packages – practical articles, including consumables, plus subversive literature – to their high school friends in Poland who were continuing to oppose the regime. Over the years these friends became some of the intellectual leaders of the Worker's Defense Committee, the predecessor to Solidarity. Among them were Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron. So, through that personal connection, I gained a vicarious experience of the events in Poland. At the time, I had little inkling of the global importance of what was afoot. It was only later that it became clear that these more or less accidental personal experiences had opened up a small window for me on what turned out to be a pivot of late twentieth-century history, namely, the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In 1985, I was invited by Irena Gross to write an introduction to a wonderful collection of essays, called *Letters from Prison*, by Michnik. That introduction gave me my first chance to reflect on people's movements more generally. By now, I had had a taste of imperial defeats in two parts of the world. The empires – American and Soviet – were very different, and so were the movements, but they had something in common: the power of politics was beating the power of superior arms. In Vietnam, even as I admired the spectacular courage of the resistance, I did not admire the one-party system they seemed bent on establishing and did establish. In Poland, where the resistance was democratic, my admiration was unreserved.

Both experiences also gave me occasion to reflect on the relationship of imperial control to nuclear arms, something that had become a strong interest of mine. In Vietnam, the whole concept of 'limited war' had been born out of the paradoxical requirements of nuclear strategy. The idea was that although you could not fight a 'general' – i.e., nuclear – war, you could fight a 'limited' war. When it came to Poland, it seemed to me that perhaps it was because of nuclear paralysis that enough time was available for the slow process of nonviolent resistance to take root and succeed. These events made me wonder whether, if other totalitarian regimes, including Hitler's, had not been smashed by military force, they might also eventually – unlikely as it may seem – have fallen in the face of a people's movement. We'll never know.

RSB: *The Unconquerable World* does seem to alternate between your long-standing concerns over nuclear weapons, and your exploration of the role of people's movements in history. Would it be too

much to say that, perhaps, one was the condition for the fruition of the other?

JS: The two were especially close in the trajectory of the cold war. Of course, the nonviolent people's movements of the twentieth century got going long before there was any nuclear standoff, or even before the start of either of the two world wars. So you can't really say that the people's struggles *depended* on the nuclear standoff, but the two phenomena did seem to intersect in ways that are still not clear to me and that are worth thinking about.

For example, in both the revolutionary theater of people's movements and the geostrategic theater of nuclear war, violence seems to be transcended. It falls into a certain irrelevance. That is, it loses its deciding character, its historic role as the 'final arbiter.' In people's struggles violence doesn't decide because it's overmatched by other positive expressions of popular will, often called political. In nuclear war, violence can't decide anything because nuclear war blows up everything that people might fight about. In both cases, there occurs what I call a dematerialization of power. But why power should have lost its material basis in these two very different ways at the same time is not clear to me.

All I can suggest is that the fantastic rise in the twentieth century of violence to a point where it defeated itself created a need for something else, and that something turned out to be political struggle. The colonized peoples of the great Western empires were faced with an awesome disparity in power. People like Gandhi realized that they weren't going to win against the empire if they tried to do it with an army. So the question of how to act in what we today call an 'asymmetrical situation' was present as soon as Western imperialism was



launched upon the world. In these settings, the people's movements began as a solution to the problem of the overwhelming material power – military and economic – of the imperial states. The colonies responded by developing the immaterial power of people's will expressed politically.

RSB: So nuclear weapons were less the condition for the possibility of a people's war than they were the circumstances under which people's war found its most potent expression?

JS: I believe so. At that point, force became self-paralyzing, and therefore the invitation to make something happen in this world through other strategies became stronger than ever. The remarkable thing is that these strategies were found.

RSB: You chart the various waves during which people have assumed their 'rightful stations': following the American War of Independence, from 1905 to the mid-1970s, and then 1989 to the present. Do you believe that the emergence of what you call cooperative power is something historically foreordained, or do you believe history is simply "one damned thing after another"? Do you believe, like Francis Fukuyama, that a tendency toward freedom is working its way through history in a Hegelian manner?

JS: I'm agnostic about it. It's conceivable that one day we'll look back and see that history was developing in a certain direction, but I'm rather doubtful about it. I certainly don't believe in necessity in history. It is one thing to detect a phenomenon that has developed over a very long period of time – I certainly see examples of that. Consider, for instance, the development of market economics

over some five hundred years or more. But it is quite a different thing to identify even a long-term trend as the working of History, as if history were a person that did things itself. The development of cooperative power does, at the very least, seem to constitute one of the very long-term trends. It is certainly striking how long that development has already been taking shape, if you date its beginning, as I do, with the American Revolution.

RSB: Your concept of people's power is very suggestive, especially when you use it to narrate an alternative history of the past few hundred years. Is it robust enough to help you understand those occasions in which people's power has been stymied, such as the 1989 uprising in Tiananmen Square?

JS: A people's movement is much more likely to work if it is directed against a foreign power, and less likely if it is a rebellion against an authentic, domestic regime, such as the Chinese government. It is hard to find many failures when the program has been to kick out the foreign invader. Foreign rule seems to be something that people find especially offensive, that galvanizes them into action, and that has an incredible staying power. It seems that domestic tyranny is harder to fight.

The Soviet Union is an interesting case in this regard. The movements were strongest in such places as Poland or Hungary or Czechoslovakia, where Soviet power was most clearly felt to be imperial power. And the movement was paradoxically the weakest in the so-called center, in Russia itself. The difference in the revolutions corresponds to a difference in the outcomes. The stronger the nonviolent resistance movement was, the more likely it was to produce a



democratic regime. For example, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland still have democratic regimes, whereas Russia seems to be slipping back in an authoritarian direction. And in Central Asia, where the anti-Soviet movements were perhaps weakest, you have many outright dictatorships. Resistance was present in Russia, but it wasn't like Poland's Solidarity, which had something on the order of 10 million members.

RSB: But doesn't the presence of an anti-imperial movement often lead to surges of destructive nationalism, which is a bizarre form of 'cooperative people's power,' isn't it? You could make the argument, then, that Yugoslavia was cursed by not having been sufficiently under the boot of the Soviet Union – the result being that their rebellion was against itself, not the Soviet oppressors.

JS: I think that's right. If you look at the American Revolution, you see that it was both a democratic movement and a movement for independence and, therefore, a nationalistic movement. In that respect, there can be a dark side to these movements. Nationalism hasn't always been a positive force, to put it mildly. I was dismayed to discover that many of the techniques for acquiring power that were deployed by democratic movements – techniques such as creating parallel structures of governance – were also used by Hitler before his takeover in 1933.

RSB: You make a provocative argument that contrary to the common understanding of the revolutions of the past few hundred years – the French, the Russian – the rebellion phase actually came off with very little violence and the founding phase is when violence actually occurred. Why do you think this is?

JS: I'm not sure how to understand it, but it is a historically observable fact that the storming of the Bastille in 1789 and the initial moments of the Bolshevik Revolution involved relatively little violence. Yet, in both cases, the revolutionaries then brought to power were quite willing to shed rivers of blood. Of course, in neither case did they have any philosophical commitment to nonviolence. Quite the contrary: When Trotsky was masterminding the Bolshevik takeover, Lenin was actually disappointed to see so little violence occurring. How could it really be a revolution if it didn't spill blood, he wondered.

It seems that the following stage, where the factions of the new regime fight with one another to define the new arrangement, often becomes the occasion when the blood starts to flow most copiously. Certainly, Lenin saw to that in the Russian case.

One fascinating study would be to investigate why certain nonviolent revolutions produce violent regimes while other nonviolent revolutions produce comparatively gentle, peaceful regimes. You'd certainly want to look at the Iranian Revolution. There was very little violence at the time of rebellion, but once in power the new government unleashed oppression against its opposition in the French and Russian style.

Another paradox that struck me was the fact that the people in power when revolution is developing – even those with a history of violence – often fail to fully unleash the violence at *their* disposal. That was true of the Tsar's regime and even of the Shah of Iran. Most notably, it was true of the Soviet Union, which had more violence at its fingertips, perhaps, than any regime on the face of the earth, yet did not unleash it.

It is a great moral and intellectual puzzle how a system as violent as the Soviet

government was capable of producing a man like Gorbachev, who exercised such remarkable restraint. There must have been something that we misunderstood about that system that prevented us from seeing that such a man and such an act were conceivable.

RSB: The peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union seems like the paradigmatic act of nonviolent people's power for you. How do you respond to critics who say that this analysis gives insufficient credit to the military expenditures pushed by the Thatcher and Reagan governments, which allegedly crippled the Soviet economy?

JS: I don't think the Soviets were spent into bankruptcy by the Reagan military buildup. In fact, if you look at the figures for the Reagan period, you find that the rate at which the Soviets increased their military spending stayed constant. Still, there is an element of truth in this analysis. The technical success of the West – economically and militarily – provided a devastating point of comparison for the Soviet people and government. They saw that they were losing both races, and that was very important to them. Not to mention the lure of Western consumer culture for people who had so much less than we did. Soviet leaders were certainly unnerved by Reagan's Star Wars project, and would have gone to considerable lengths to stop it. Yet even before Reagan left office, they concluded that the system would not work, and could be countered easily and inexpensively.

RSB: Now all we have to do is overcome *our* belief in it!

JS: Yes, we have to learn the same lesson the Russians learned twenty-five years ago.

RSB: In *The Unconquerable World* you quote Lawrence Freedman as saying, "The Emperor Deterrence may have no clothes, but he is still emperor," in making a convincing argument that the threat of nuclear weapons has created a situation in which all-out war is virtually unthinkable. This position, though not identical to the theory of nuclear deterrence that shaped the cold-war period, is certainly compatible with it. How would you distinguish your position from the traditional deterrence argument?

JS: The question is very complicated. First, it is indisputable that the presence of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the great powers gave them a tremendous, perhaps a decisive, reason not to go to war. The whole deterrence doctrine is a sort of a fantastic overelaboration of the elemental fact that two countries with nuclear weapons are unlikely to fight each other for fear of annihilating one another and even the whole world. When you consider that today tiny little North Korea with its putative nuclear arsenal can probably deter the mighty United States, you can see the power in the idea of nuclear deterrence. So I do think that there is a solid core of truth in it.

The question, rather, is whether it's a good plan to constantly threaten annihilation, more or less in perpetuity, as your means of avoiding conventional war. My answer is that the bargain is a senseless and terrible one. It commits even the most supposedly civilized countries to executing genocidal policies, in the strict definition of the term, in certain circumstances. Surely there has to be a better – shall I say, a more civilized – way of assuring civilization's survival than living with the unrelenting threat to pull the trigger on that same civilization. And, human beings being what they are, it

must one day fail. For that reason alone, deterrence cries out to be replaced by a better system.

RSB: What about the Cuban missile crisis?

JS: It is easy to see that a war could have broken out. I believe that both Khrushchev and Kennedy were keenly aware of the danger, and for that reason both pulled back. On the other hand, the Cuban missile crisis was caused in the first place by nuclear weapons!

RSB: In this case one might say about nuclear weapons what Karl Kraus said about psychoanalysis: that they are a disease for which they pretend to be a treatment.

JS: Yes, that was exactly the situation in the Cuban missile crisis.

RSB: You do an excellent job of showing how nuclear weapons have supplanted conventional war. Nonviolent people's wars are one by-product of this state of affairs, but isn't terrorism as well?

JS: Yes, although I think you have to draw a very sharp distinction between terrorists who actually represent a mass movement, which is the case of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the less serious case – despite all the damage they can cause – of terrorists who are, essentially, out there freelancing. Bin Laden may be in that category. For all his popularity in certain parts of the world, you can't point to any specific population whose interests he represents.

RSB: In *The Time of Illusion* you describe the increasing role of "appearance" both in politics and in nuclear politics partic-

ularly in the 1970s. Is "appearance" more or less important in politics today?

*People's  
power vs.  
nuclear  
power*

JS: Well, terrorism, for one, is a form of warfare that depends utterly on appearances. Think of September 11. It was an attack designed for the maximum spectacle. It was almost an enactment of what you might see in a disaster movie, and it was picked up by television stations all over the world. In a sense, the United States, and the whole world, fell into a trap that bin Laden deliberately laid, and invested what he had done – which of course has a terrible intrinsic importance – with an *apocalyptic* importance that neither he nor his deeds actually have.

The United States waged actual war in Vietnam for the sake of the credibility of American power – in order to create an appearance that would be so fearsome to other countries that they would do what we wanted them to do. Terrorists are involved in the same thing in the sense that they, too, are using violence to send a message. It seems to me that this is another sense in which violence in general has become dematerialized: people are using it to create a psychological impression more than to actually blow up objects or kill people. The real power of bin Laden was not to defeat the United States – which would be absurd – but to precipitate something like a large-scale transformation in the way the U.S. government and its political system works, which is happening. That is real power: to be able to change radically the behavior of the most powerful country in the world.

RSB: Liberals are often faulted for having an insufficiently developed sense of evil. That isn't something one could say about you because of your fixation on the dangers of nuclear weapons. What

is the role of the nuclear threat in your thinking?

JS: It is at the center of a stream of thinking that started with the Vietnam War. When I returned from Vietnam, I started looking at the question of why America had gotten involved in Vietnam, and why it was having such trouble getting out. I came to understand that the answer to both these questions was deeply bound up with nuclear policy. Vietnam was conceived as a limited war; and limited war was the alternative to general war, which meant nuclear war. The policymakers at that time were beginning to realize that nuclear weapons were not the instruments of power they had hoped they would be at the beginning of the nuclear era: nuclear weapons paralyzed war rather than enabled military action; they, in fact, bound you hand in foot. In their search for usable military instruments, people like Henry Kissinger and General Maxwell Taylor hit upon the idea that the United States still had freedom of action on the so-called periphery, in places like Vietnam.

But the solution had unexpected costs attached to it. First, it pushed the United States into the buzz saw of the anti-imperial movement, as we discussed. But, second, just because 'limited war' was an alternative to nuclear war, it was caught up in the obsession with the 'credibility' of American power that bedeviled nuclear policy. The problem was that if limited wars like Vietnam were the only ones you could fight, then you *had* to win them because you had staked the whole credibility of American power on them. Therefore, no matter how crazy your war turned out to be *in itself*, no matter how costly, no matter how worthless the specific objectives might be on the ground, you felt you had no choice but

to persist, in the name of the credibility of American power.

There is another, more elemental way that Vietnam led me to think about nuclear weapons. I got to Vietnam when I was twenty-three, and like all of us I had seen the apparatus of American economy and life used largely for ordinary beneficial purposes: taking kids to schools, putting food in the supermarkets, and so forth. When I got to Vietnam I saw all that wealth and power turned to a senselessly destructive purpose. I came to understand that a few bad decisions could turn the world upside down, that all powers and talents could be systematically devoted to absurd or evil ends. The experience opened my mind to the idea that the disposition of nuclear arms might be equally misguided, equally perverse. That is what I came to believe and still believe.

RSB: Do you think Americans have come around to your way of thinking about nuclear weapons since, say, 1982, when you published *The Fate of the Earth*?

JS: No, on the contrary. I was just reading Adam Michnik's essay, "The Ultras of moral revolution," on the dangers of the extremes of the left and right. Those dangers are real enough. But what strikes me most forcibly now is the extremism of the center. Consider global warming. It is the product of business as usual, yet it threatens a slow devastation of the only planet we know of that is fit for human habitation. You don't have to do anything 'extreme' or 'fanatical' or 'crazy' to ruin the planet; you only have to go on living the life that is set before all of us.

Nuclear arms are in the same category. The idea of abolishing nuclear arms is called 'extreme.' But these weapons

themselves have conducted us all to the brink of the utmost extreme – the annihilation of cities, nations, even the species. Yet, today, the nuclear-armed nations, including the latest ones in South Asia, consider nuclear weapons entirely normal, as if they were just one more appliance in the home, like a dishwasher or a toaster, something that every self-respecting nation should possess.

Another example is the war in Iraq, which, from my point of view, was from the very outset an outlandish, fantastical project, doomed from the start to failure and worse. I feel entitled to say this now because I said it all before the war even began. Note, by the way, that the war is a product of the untenable global double standard regarding nuclear weapons. It is a first application of the radical new Bush policy of using force to oppose proliferation – a reversal of fifty years of American policy that cannot possibly succeed and, indeed, has already failed. Today, support for nuclear arsenals is a centrist tenet, rarely questioned, even though those weapons threaten us with our complete annihilation.

The 'center' is extreme in another sense. Almost wherever we look, it seems to me, we are seeing new concentrations of power – joining political power, money power, military power, and media power into huge combines that are proving more and more difficult for ordinary people to fight. You see this concentration of power – the very thing the checks and balances of the Constitution were designed to prevent – in one form in the United States, and you see it in another, more entrenched form in Russia and China. Italy's Berlusconi, fortunately now out of office though his influence remains great, personified this trend. These concentrations, so dangerous to freedom, likewise are not the product of fanaticism of right or left or

any other enthusiasm. They, too, grow quietly out of business as usual.

RSB: Do you see any possibility that the neglect of nuclear danger will end?

JS: I do. Whereas in the 1990s the issue was forgotten completely, it has now at least moved back into our consciousness. If you stop and think about it, you realize that nuclear danger – and, more broadly, weapons of mass destruction – has been at the center at least of the *declaratory* policies of the Bush administration. We went into Iraq to head off 'a mushroom cloud over an American city.' And the entire Bush Doctrine built up about September 11 really put the danger of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction at its center. And most of the crises – with North Korea and Iran – have to do with this. So it has once again returned to the center of policy.



# Mark Juergensmeyer

## *Gandhi vs. terrorism*

Immediately after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the idea of taking a nonviolent stance in response to terrorism would have been dismissed out of hand. But now, after the invasion and occupation of two Muslim countries by the U.S. military, the loss of thousands of American soldiers and tens of thousands of innocent Afghans and Iraqis, and the start of a global jihadi war that seems unending, virtually any alternative seems worth considering. It is in this context that various forms of less militant response, including the methods of conflict resolution adopted by India's nationalist leader, Mohandas Gandhi, deserve a second look.

Like us, Gandhi had to deal with terrorism, and his responses show that he was a tough-minded realist. I say this

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knowing that this image of Gandhi is quite different from what most Westerners have in mind when they think of him. The popular view in Europe and the United States is the one a circle of Western pacifists writing in the 1920s promoted – the image of Gandhi as a saint.

In a 1921 lecture on "Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today?" John Haynes Holmes, the pastor of New York City's largest liberal congregation, extolled not Lenin or Woodrow Wilson or Sun Yat-sen but someone whom most of the crowd thronging the hall that day had never heard of – Mohandas Gandhi.<sup>1</sup> Holmes, who was later credited with being the West's discoverer of Gandhi, described him as his "seer and saint."<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the term 'Mahatma,' or 'great soul,' which is often appended to Gandhi's name, probably came not from admirers in India but from the West. Be-

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1 John Haynes Holmes, "Who is the Greatest Man in the World Today?" a pamphlet published in 1921 and reprinted in Charles Chatfield, ed., *The Americanization of Gandhi: Images of the Mahatma* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1976), 98.

2 John Haynes Holmes, *My Gandhi* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 9.



fore the Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore used the term in his letter welcoming Gandhi to India in 1914, members of an American and European mystical movement, the Theosophists, had applied this name to Gandhi. Most likely, they were the ones who conveyed it to Tagore, and since then the term has persisted, even though it was Westerners rather than Indians who first regarded Gandhi in such a saintly mien.

In India, Gandhi was seen as a nationalist leader who, though greatly revered, was very much a politician. Though Gandhi was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize on several occasions, the selection committee hesitated, thinking that the choice of an activist rather than an idealist would stoke political controversies. Gandhi was indeed in the midst of political battle, and in the process he had to address the violence of both his side and the opponents, acts that looked very much like the terrorism of today.

India was on the verge of a violent confrontation with Britain when, in 1915, Gandhi was brought into India's independence movement from South Africa, where as a lawyer he had been a leader in the struggle for social equality for immigrant Indians. In India, as in South Africa, the British had overwhelming military superiority and were not afraid to use it. In 1919, in the North Indian city of Amritsar, an irate British brigadier-general slaughtered almost four hundred Indians who had come to the plaza of Jallianwala Bagh to protest peacefully.

But the nationalist side was countering with violence of its own. In Bengal, Subhas Chandra Bose organized an Indian National Army, and, in Punjab, leaders of the Ghadar movement – supported by immigrant Punjabis in California – plotted a violent revolution that anticipated boatloads of weapons and revolutionaries transported to India from the United

States. These Indian anarchists and militant Hindi nationalists saw violence as the only solution to break the power of the British over India.

Gandhi's views about violent struggle were sharpened in response to Indian activists who had defended a terrorist attack on a British official. The incident occurred in London in 1909, shortly before Gandhi arrived there to lobby the British Parliament on behalf of South African Indian immigrants. An Indian student in London, Madan Lal Dhingra, had attacked an official in Britain's India office, Sir William H. Curzon-Wylie, in protest against Britain's colonial control over India. At a formal function, Dhingra pulled out a gun and, at close range, fired five shots in his face. The British official died on the spot. Dhingra was immediately apprehended by the police; when people in the crowd called him a murderer, he said that he was only fighting for India's freedom.

Several weeks after Gandhi arrived in London, he was asked to debate this issue of violence with several of London's expatriate Indian nationalists. His chief opponent was Vinayak Savarkar, a militant Hindu who would later found the political movement known as the Hindu Mahasabha, a precursor to the present-day Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. At the time of the 1909 assassination Savarkar was reputed to have supplied the weapons and ammunition for the act, and to have instructed the ardent Hindu assassin in what to say in his final statement as he was led to the gallows. The young killer said that he was "prepared to die, glorying in martyrdom."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Sociologist*, September 1909, quoted in James D. Hunt, *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi: Promilla and Co., Publishers, 1973), 134. My thanks to Lloyd Rudolph for reminding me of this incident.

Shortly before the debate, Gandhi wrote to a friend that in London he had met practically no Indian who believed “India can ever become free without resorting to violence.”<sup>4</sup> He described the position of the militant activists as one in which terrorism would precede a general revolution: Their plans were first to “assassinate a few Englishmen and strike terror,” after which “a few men who will have been armed will fight openly.” Then, they calculated, eventually they might have to lose “a quarter of a million men, more or less,” but the militant Indian nationalists thought this effort at guerilla warfare would “defeat the English” and “regain our land.”<sup>5</sup>

During the debate, Gandhi challenged the logic of the militants on the grounds of political realism. They could hardly expect to defeat the might of the British military through sporadic acts of terrorism and guerilla warfare. More important, however, was the effect that violent tactics would have on the emerging Indian nationalist movement. He feared that the methods they used to combat the British would become part of India’s national character.

Several weeks later Gandhi was still thinking about these things as he boarded a steamship to return to South Africa. He penned his response to the Indian activists in London in the form of a book. In a preliminary way, this essay, which Gandhi wrote hurriedly on the

boat to Durban in 1909 (writing first with one hand and then the other to avoid getting cramps), set forth an approach to conflict resolution that he would pursue the rest of his life. The book, *Hind Swaraj, or, Indian Home Rule*, went to some lengths to describe both the goals of India’s emerging independence movement and the appropriate methods to achieve it. He agreed with the Indian radicals in London that Britain should have no place in ruling India and exploiting its economy. Moreover, he thought that India should not try to emulate the materialism of Western civilization, which he described as a kind of “sickness.”

The thrust of the book, however, was to counter terrorism. Gandhi sketched out a nonviolent approach, beginning with an examination of the nature of conflict. He insisted on looking beyond a specific clash between individuals to the larger issues for which they were fighting. Every conflict, Gandhi reasoned, was a contestation on two levels – between persons and between principles. Behind every fighter was the issue for which the fighter was fighting. Every fight, Gandhi explained in a later essay, was on some level an encounter between differing “angles of vision” illuminating the same truth.<sup>6</sup>

It was this difference in positions – sometimes even in worldviews – that needed to be resolved in order for a fight to be finished and the fighters reconciled. In that sense Gandhi’s methods were more than a way of confronting an enemy; they were a way of dealing with conflict itself. For this reason he grew

4 Gandhi’s letter to Amphill, October 30, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 9 (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 509.

5 Mohandas Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, or, Indian Home Rule*, 2nd ed. (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938; originally published in 1910), 69.

6 Gandhi, writing in *Young India*, September 23, 1926. I explore Gandhi’s ideas further in my book, *Gandhi’s Way: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

unhappy with the label, 'passive resistance,' that had been attached to the methods used by his protest movement in South Africa. There was nothing passive about it – in fact, Gandhi had led the movement into stormy confrontations with government authorities – and it was more than just resistance. It was also a way of searching for what was right and standing up for it, of speaking truth to power.

In 1906 Gandhi decided to find a new term for his method of engaging in conflict. He invited readers of his journal, *Indian Opinion*, to offer suggestions, and he offered a book prize for the winning entry. The one that most intrigued him came from his own cousin, Maganlal, which Gandhi refined into the term, *satyagraha*. The neologism is a conjunct of two Sanskrit words, *satya*, 'truth,' and *agraha*, 'to grasp firmly.' Hence it could be translated as 'grasping onto truth,' or as Gandhi liked to call it, "truth force."

What Gandhi found appealing about the winning phrase was its focus on truth. Gandhi reasoned that no one possesses a complete view of it. The very existence of a conflict indicates a deep difference over what is right. The first task of a conflict, then, is to try to see the conflict from both sides of an issue. This requires an effort to understand an opponent's position as well as one's own – or, as former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara advised in the documentary film *The Fog of War*, "Empathize with the enemy."

The ability to cast an empathetic eye was central to Gandhi's view of conflict. It made it possible to imagine a solution that both sides could accept, at least in part – though Gandhi also recognized that sometimes the other side had very little worth respecting. In his campaign for the British to 'quit India,' for instance, he regarded the only righteous

place for the British to be was Britain. Yet at the same time he openly appreciated the many positive things that British rule had brought to the Indian subcontinent, from roads to administrative offices.

After a solution was imagined, the second stage of a struggle was to achieve it. This meant fighting – but in a way that was consistent with the solution itself. Gandhi adamantly rejected the notion that the goal justifies the means. Gandhi argued that the ends and the means were ultimately the same. If you fought violently you would establish a pattern of violence that would be part of any solution to the conflict, no matter how noble it was supposed to be. Even if terrorists were successful in ousting the British from India, Gandhi asked, "Who will then rule in their place?" His answer was that it would be the ones who had killed in order to liberate India, adding, "India can gain nothing from the rule of murderers."<sup>7</sup>

A struggle could be forceful – often it would begin with a demonstration and "a refusal to cooperate with anything humiliating." But it could not be violent, Gandhi reasoned, for these destructive means would negate any positive benefits of a struggle's victory. If a fight is waged in the right way it could enlarge one's vision of the truth and enhance one's character in the process. What Gandhi disdained was the notion that one had to stoop to the lowest levels of human demeanor in fighting for something worthwhile.

This brings us to the way that Gandhi would respond to terrorism. To begin with, Gandhi insisted on some kind of response. He never recommended do-

<sup>7</sup> *Indian Sociologist*, September 1909, quoted in Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, 134.

ing nothing at all. “Inaction at a time of conflagration is inexcusable,” he once wrote.<sup>8</sup> He regarded cowardice as beneath contempt. Fighting – if it is non-violent – is “never demoralizing,” Gandhi said, while “cowardice always is.”<sup>9</sup> And perhaps Gandhi’s most memorable statement against a tepid response: “Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence.”<sup>10</sup>

Occasionally violence does indeed seem to be the only response available. Gandhi provided some examples. One was the mad dog. On confronting a dog with rabies, one must stop it by any means possible, including maiming or killing it.<sup>11</sup> Another case that Gandhi offered was a brutal rapist caught in the act. To do nothing in that situation, Gandhi said, makes the observer “a partner in violence.” Hence violence could be used to counter it. Gandhi thus concluded, “Heroic violence is less sinful than cowardly nonviolence.”<sup>12</sup>

By extension, one could imagine Gandhi justifying an act of violence to halt an act of terrorism in progress. If Gandhi had been sitting next to the suicide bomber in the London subway during the 2005 attack, for instance, he would have been justified in wrestling the man to the floor and subduing him. If no other means were available than a physical assault – even one that led to the man’s death – it would have been preferable to the awful event that transpired when the bomb exploded.

8 *Harijan*, April 7, 1946.

9 *Young India*, October 31, 1929.

10 *Young India*, August 11, 1920.

11 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, 505.

12 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 51, 17.

Responding to terrorism after the fact, however, is quite a different matter. What Gandhi argued in *Hind Swaraj* was that violence never works as a response to violence. It usually generates more violence as a result, and precipitates a seemingly endless litany of tit-for-tat militant engagements.

Gandhi was adamantly opposed to the political positions that justified terrorism, but he was remarkably lenient toward the terrorists themselves. In the case of the assassination that occurred when Gandhi was in London in 1909, he did not blame Dhingra, the assassin of Curzon-Wyllie. He said that Dhingra as a person was not the main problem. Rather, Gandhi said, he was like a drunkard, in the grip of “a mad idea.”<sup>13</sup>

The difficulty was the “mad idea,” not the terrorists. Though he might have justified killing them if he had caught them in the act, after their tragic mission was over, Gandhi’s attitude toward those who carried out terrorist acts was more of pity than of revenge. He would not let them go free, of course, but he treated them as misguided soldiers rather than as monsters.

Moreover, Gandhi thought it quite possible that the ideas for which the violent activists were fighting could be worthy ones. In the case of Dhingra and the Indian militants in 1909, for instance, they were championing a cause that Gandhi himself affirmed. Hence it would be an enormous mistake – foolish, from a Gandhian point of view – to fixate on terrorist acts solely as deviant behavior without taking seriously the causes for which these passionate soldiers were laboring.

A Gandhian strategy for confronting terrorism, therefore, would consist of the following:

13 *Indian Sociologist*, September 1909, quoted in Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, 134.

*Stop an act of violence in its tracks.* The effort to do so should be nonviolent but forceful. Gandhi made a distinction between detentive force – the use of physical control in order to halt violence in progress – and coercive force. The latter is meant to intimidate and destroy, and hinders a Gandhian fight aimed at a resolution of principles at stake.

*Address the issues behind the terrorism.* To focus solely on acts of terrorism, Gandhi argued, would be like being concerned with weapons in an effort to stop the spread of racial hatred. Gandhi thought the sensible approach would be to confront the ideas and alleviate the conditions that motivated people to undertake such desperate operations in the first place.

*Maintain the moral high ground.* A bellicose stance, Gandhi thought, debased those who adopted it. A violent posture adopted by public authorities could lead to a civil order based on coercion. For this reason Gandhi insisted on means consistent with the moral goals of those engaged in the conflict.

These are worthy principles, but do they work? This question is often raised about nonviolent methods as a response to terrorism – as if the violent ones have been so effective. In Israel, a harsh response to Palestinian violence has often led to a surge of support for Hamas and an increase in terrorist violence. The U.S. responses to jihadi movements after the September 11 attacks have not diminished support for the movements nor reduced the number of terrorist incidents worldwide. Militant responses to terrorism do not possess a particularly good record of success.

Yet there is a recent example of a successful end to terrorism that was forged through nonviolent means. This is the

case of Northern Ireland, a region plagued by violence for decades.

The troubles of Northern Ireland could be traced back to the British establishment of the Ulster Plantation in 1610, though the most recent round of violence began after a free Irish state was established in 1921. Catholics in the Northern Ireland counties felt marginalized in what they claimed to be Irish territory. Protestants feared they would become overwhelmed and banished from what they regarded as a part of Britain.

Violence erupted in the summer of 1969 in the Bogside area of the city of Londonderry. Following the clash, Protestants revived an old militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, and militant Catholics created a ‘provisional’ version of the Irish Republican Army that would be more militant than the old IRA.

In 1971, Northern Ireland officials adopted a preemptive stance and began rounding up Catholic activists whom they regarded as potential terrorists. The activists were detained without charges. Within hours, rioting and shooting broke out in the Catholic neighborhoods of Belfast and adjacent towns. The government, rather than retreating from its hard line, pressed on, declaring a war against terrorism. The suspects were beaten and tortured in an attempt to elicit information. They were forced to lie spread-eagle on the floor with hoods over their heads, and subjected to disorienting electronic sounds.

The government’s attempt to end the violence by harshly treating those it suspected of perpetrating violence backfired. The Catholic community united solidly behind the insurgency, and the violence mounted. Later the Home Minister who sanctioned the crackdown admitted that the hard-line approach was



“by almost universal consent an unmitigated disaster.”

The violence of the early 1970s came to a head on what came to be called ‘Bloody Sunday,’ when a peaceful protest march against the internment of Catholic activists turned ugly. British troops fired on the crowd, killing thirteen.

For over twenty years the violence continued. Tit-for-tat acts of terrorism became a routine affair. The British embassy in Dublin was burned, British soldiers were attacked, police stations were bombed, and individual Catholics and Protestants were captured by opposing sides and sometimes hideously tortured and killed.

In 1988 an internal dialogue began to take place within the Catholic side between a moderate leader, John Hume, and the activist leader, Gerry Adams. In 1995, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell was invited to Northern Ireland to help broker the peace talks. Initially they were unsuccessful, but then Mitchell returned for eight months of intensive negotiations. The talks involved members of Irish and British governments and eight political parties on both Catholic and Protestant sides of the Northern Irish divide. They reached an agreement on April 10, 1998 – a day that happened to be Good Friday, the Christian holiday that precedes Easter.

The Good Friday Agreement is a remarkable document. It attempted to provide structural resolutions to several different problems at the same time. To respond to the public mistrust and insecurity brought on by years of violence, the Agreement set up Human Rights and Equality Commissions. It called for an early release of political prisoners, required the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, prescribed reforms of the criminal justice system

and the policies of police, and supplied funds to help the victims of violence. It also addressed the problem of balanced governance by setting up a parliament with proportional representation, an executive branch that guaranteed representation from both communities, and a consultative Civic Forum that allowed for community concerns to be expressed directly from the people. The Agreement also dealt with relations among the three key states involved – Ireland, Great Britain, and Northern Ireland – by establishing several councils and mediating bodies.

Prior to the Agreement, the British government and the paramilitary forces on both the Unionist and IRA sides had found themselves in a situation similar to many violent confrontations. Their positions had been staked out in extreme and uncompromising terms, and the methods used by all sides were so harsh as to be virtually unforgivable. Ultimately they were able to break through this impasse by employing several basic nonviolent techniques:

*Seeing the other side’s point of view.* When the British began to open lines of communication to the radical leaders on both sides, they began to break through the ‘we-they’ attitude that vexes most hostile confrontations.

*Not responding to violence in kind.* A series of ceasefires – including unilateral ceasefires by the IRA – were critical in helping to break the spiral of violence. Even as severe an incident as the Omagh terrorist bombing on August 15, 1998, did not elicit retaliatory attacks.

*Letting moderate voices surface.* Once the spiral of violence had been broken, and both sides no longer felt under siege, there was room for moderate voices to surface within the warring camps.

*Isolating radical voices.* The peace negotiators did not try to change what could

not be changed. Hence they did not waste time in trying to reason with the militant Protestant leader, Reverend Ian Paisley, who had opted out of the process.

*Setting up channels of communication.* They involved an outsider – Senator Mitchell – to play a mediating role, and set up impartial frameworks of communication for the two sides, which had been deeply mistrustful of one another.

Peace in Northern Ireland was not inevitable, and there is no assurance that the agreement will last forever. Violence may again return to that troubled area of Ireland. Yet for a time the bombs have been silenced. At least in one case in recent political history terrorism has come to an end – through nonviolent means.

It is reasonable to ask whether the approach taken in Northern Ireland could work in other situations. Could it work in Kashmir, for instance, a region that is also claimed by two religious communities backed by powerful governments? It would not take a huge stretch of imagination to think that India and Pakistan could join in a settlement surprisingly similar to the Good Friday Agreement. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more complex, but like Northern Ireland it is essentially a conflict over territory in which both sides have a moral and political claim. Since the Oslo Agreement in 1993 a negotiated settlement in the region has seemed a realistic though still elusive possibility.

But what about the global jihadi war? This is the global conflict that President George W. Bush designated “the war on terror” shortly after September 11, 2001, and relabeled “the struggle against radical Islam” in July 2005. Osama bin Laden enunciated his own proclamation of this war in a fatwa against the United States in 1996. Bin Laden called on Muslims to

join him in “correcting what had happened to the Islamic world in general” since the end of the Ottoman Empire. The aim, according to bin Laden, was “to return to the people their own rights, particularly after the large damages and the great aggression on the life and the religion of the people.”<sup>14</sup>

Groups sharing an Al Qaeda perspective have attacked the very centers of Western power in New York, Madrid, and London, but their struggle is not in any simple sense about territory. It is a war without a frontline and without clear geographic lines of control. On the jihadi side it is a war without a conventional army and without the apparatus of a political state. For that matter, the jihadi movement seems to be without much centralized control at all.

With no one clearly in charge, negotiation is a difficult affair. It is unlikely that U.S. officials would hike into the mountains of Pakistan to chat with bin Laden, if indeed he could be found. And even if there were such conversations, what would be the point? He has no real control over the policies of the Middle East and is in no position to negotiate a settlement of the underlying issues of Western influence that his fatwa describes. To acknowledge bin Laden as a representative of the Muslim people would be to magnify his importance and reward his terrorism with political legitimacy. The United States has already exaggerated his importance – and unwittingly enlarged his support within the Muslim world – by singling him out as the global enemy of the United States. Negotiations with renegade extremists like bin Laden would not achieve any

14 Osama bin Laden, “Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places,” first published in Arabic in *Al Quds Al Arabi*, a London-based newspaper, August 1996.

changes in underlying policy positions that would lessen tensions in the Middle East.

Behind the jihadi war is a conflict between ideas and worldviews. In saying this I do not mean to belittle the importance of the struggle, for ideas can have enormous power. But because the contest is between differing ways of perceiving the world and the relationship between political and moral order, the struggle has had a remarkably moralistic tone. The enemies are not really individuals as much as they are ways of thinking.

Both sides define their goal as freedom. On one side it is the liberty to choose a nation's own officials through democratic elections. On the other side it is liberation from outside influence and control. On both sides these positions have been magnified into a moral contest of such proportions that it has become a sacred struggle. The enemies have become cosmic foes. Large numbers of innocent people have been killed with moral indifference – or worse, with the self-righteous thinking that God is on one's side.

Is a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution relevant to the global jihadi war? Consider the guidelines that Gandhi enunciated in response to the terrorism of the Indian activists in London in 1909. They might be applied to the current situation in the following way:

*Stop a situation of violence in its tracks.* The first rule of nonviolence is to stop an act of violence as it occurs – or better, to prevent it before it happens. Gandhi would have approved of efforts to capture those involved in acts of terrorism and bring them to justice, and he would have applauded attempts to ward off future terrorist assaults through the legal forms of surveillance and detection that have been adopted after September 11.

Even those measures that seem to be aimed only at giving the appearance of security have a certain utility, since they diminish the prime effects of terrorism – fear and intimidation. But even though Gandhi occasionally supported military action, including the British defense against Hitler in World War II, it is doubtful that he would have accepted large-scale military operations as a response to terrorist acts, especially if they left large numbers of casualties in their wake. Nor would he have approved of changes in the legal system that would deprive the public of its rights.

*Address the issues behind the violence.* The crucial part of nonviolent resolution is to look behind the violence at the issues that are at stake. Gandhi's goal was to form a resolution with the best features of both sides of a dispute. In the case of the global jihadi war, this would mean affirming the positive principles of both sides – though the 'sides' in this case are not only state and non-state organizations but also the concerned publics that stand behind them. Gandhi might have approved of the principles of both sides: the desire of many traditional Muslims in the Middle East to be free from American and European domination, and the expectation of those who hold modern social values that all societies should respect peoples of diverse cultures and be democratically governed. Since these goals are not necessarily incompatible, a resolution that accepts them both is conceivable.

Ultimately, tensions might not be fully resolved until there are significant changes in the political culture of Middle Eastern countries and dramatic reversals of the West's military and economic role in the Middle East. But in the meantime small steps can make a large difference. Any indication that either or both sides accept both sets of principles

would be a positive shift toward reconciling the underlying differences and diminishing the support for extremists' positions.

*Maintain the moral high ground.* As Gandhi remarked to the Indian activists in London who proposed a violent overthrow of British control of India, violence begets violence. Proclaiming a 'war on terrorism,' from Gandhi's point of view, is tantamount to sinking to the terrorists' level. The very idea of war suggests an absolutism of conflict, where reason and negotiation have no place and where opponents are enemies. Though violent extremists are indeed difficult opponents, and Gandhi would not expect one to negotiate with them, he would be mindful that the more important struggle is the one for public support. This support could shift either way, and it would be a tragic error – and perhaps a self-fulfilling prophecy – to regard potential supporters as enemies.

Mistreatment of those suspected of being involved in terrorist acts can also lead to a loss of public support. Gandhi urged that the assassin, Dhingra, be treated with caution but also with respect, as any suspect in a crime would be treated. Torture, from Gandhi's point of view, is ineffective not just because it rarely produces useful information but also because it corrupts the moral character of a society that allows it to be used. This was the point he made in *Hind Swaraj* when he stressed that the means of freeing India from British control should be consistent with the goals a free Indian society would want to achieve.

Many of these guidelines have been part of the public debate in the United States in the years following the September 11 attacks. Thus a nonviolent response to terrorism is already an element of political discourse. It is not a

new idea, but rather a strand of public thinking that deserves attention and, Gandhi might argue, respect. As a pragmatic idealist, Gandhi would be pleased to know that nonviolent approaches to terrorism were taken seriously, not only because they invariably were the right thing to do, but also because on more than one occasion they have worked.

# Neil L. Whitehead

## *Violence & the cultural order*

Almost all theoretical and research approaches to violence begin with the assumption that, at its core, violence represents the breakdown of meaning, the advent of the irrational, and the commission of physical harm. Certainly the violence of language, representation, and the structures of everyday life are acknowledged as relevant examples of harm, but these are peripheral phenomena and dependent on the existence of bodily damage and vicious attack as a substrate to these more ethereal examples of violence. A similar ambiguity exists with regard to the way in which natural processes or zoological behaviors exhibit damage of a fleshy kind, but here the supposed reign of instinct and survival invites not only repugnance but also an absence of ethical evaluation.

This informal cartography of the idea of violence in modern Western thinking

indicates that orthodox solutions or responses to the problem of violence can only envisage its suppression, as a behavior inappropriate or misjudged to its ends. But what if violence is considered ennobling, redeeming, and necessary to the continuance of life itself? In other words, the legitimacy of violent acts is part of how they are constituted in the minds of observers, victims, and the perpetrators of such acts; and matters of legitimacy are not at all separate from the way in which given acts and behaviors are themselves considered violent in the first place.

Consonant with the recognition that violence is not a natural fact but a moral one, current anthropological thinking has moved steadily away from the notion that it is a given category of human behavior, easily identified through its physical consequences and understood as emerging from the inadequacies of individual moral or social political systems of restraint, or from underlying genetic proclivities. In the light of not only encountering violence more frequently as part of ethnographic fieldwork, but also through more properly understanding the historical importance of colonialism and neocolonialism in establishing certain codes of violent practice, anthropology has now moved toward ideas that

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stress the centrality of bodily and emotive experiences of violence to the normal functioning of any given cultural order, including that of the West. The problem now is not how to end violence but to understand why it occurs in the ways it does. This involves recognition that violence is as much a part of meaningful and constructive human living as it is an imagination of the absence and destruction of all cultural and social order.

This essay is intended to outline the role violence can play as meaningful cultural expression, whatever its apparent senselessness and destructive potential. This exercise entails a questioning of assumptions as to the self-evident nature of 'violence.' It also involves asking how issues of legitimacy critically influence understandings of violent acts, and how such acts themselves are often complex social performances expressive of key cultural values. It also implies a critique of analyses that suggest historically transcendent biological and evolutionary homologies in human violence, as well as of Hobbesian analogies drawn between a 'primitive,' savage past and contemporary 'tribalism' and 'terrorism.'

In archaeology, controversy as to the origins of, and reasons for, human violence and warfare is intense. Some argue that the archaeological record shows endemic warfare going back indefinitely in time. However, the archaeological data to support such arguments appear to have been deliberately assembled to illustrate prehistoric violence, with the worst cases being given rhetorical prominence.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the overall distribution

of the archaeological data, which are certainly punctuated through time with examples of organized killing, surprisingly reveals a starkly less violent record when contrasted to the bloody historical and ethnographic accounts of the past few centuries.

No one is suggesting that we cling to a Rousseau-like image of the peaceful, noble savage, but many others<sup>2</sup> who have carefully studied the archaeological record have come to a very different conclusion about the incidence of violence and war. Basically, they have concluded that war leaves archaeologically recoverable traces. And with few exceptions, the evidence is consistent with a relatively recent development of war as regular practice – after the transition to sedentary existence (though not necessarily to agriculture), or, to put a date and place on it, around 6000 BC in Turkish Anatolia. From then and there war developed in and spread from other locales, such that, by AD 1500, war was quite common around the world, in all kinds of societies. But with the important codicil that the intensity and lethality of warfare then spiked strongly as a direct consequence of European imperialism.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly then, archaeology can play a key role by focusing on the indicators of ancient violence. But it has no logical

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*the Peaceful, Noble Savage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

2 See, for example, Debra Martin and David Frayer, *Troubled Times: Violence and Warfare in the Past* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1997), or Raymond C. Kelly, *Warless Societies and the Origin of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

3 See R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *War in the Tribal Zone – Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1999).

1 See, for example, Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), or Steven A. LeBlanc and Katherine E. Register, *Constant Battles: The Myth of*

priority in understanding violence and war, since locating the temporal origins of such cultural patterns do not explain their persistence. There is, of course, a wider cultural meaning in this debate as the more strident advocates of a Hobbesian scenario are obsessively concerned to explode ideas of a 'noble savage' who 'lives in harmony with the natural world.' Their agenda relates more to a need to discover ourselves in the past, as a means to evade the hard questions about the persistence and increasing intensity of our own violence and warfare, than it does to the actual distributions of archaeological data.<sup>4</sup> However, this debate is without end and beyond resolution through archaeological evidence, since it is an attempt to limit the meanings of past violence to the political agendas of the present day.

In a similar way, recent speculations about humanity's warlike nature have been fueled by supposed observations

of 'warfare' by chimpanzees and other primates.<sup>5</sup> These are indeed very influential views, reportedly even reaching into the White House.<sup>6</sup> But in fact, the chimpanzee comparison, and much other work on the comparative genetics and evolution of violence, is based on two defective premises: the first one, which I have already discussed, is that war has been continuously present throughout humanity's evolutionary and archaeological past; the second is that the record of recent ethnography is a valid reflection of that past level of violence. The latter premise does not hold when one considers the fact that local state expansion and imperial domination, especially in the last five hundred years, have been critical in intensifying patterns of tribal conflict – much as is true of the spread of high-tech weapons into contemporary regional conflicts with an 'ethnic' component, such as in the Horn of Africa.

Moreover, if primatologists clamor to have their insights applied to humanity, they must recognize that it is a two-way street: they, in turn, must consider anthropological theory on collective violence when interpreting chimpanzee violence. In just this vein, many primatologists<sup>7</sup> have argued that both ob-

4 Such presentations also miss the point that the presence of violence in the archaeological record is not the same as the presence of warfare. For example, recent attempts to 'prove' Anasazi cannibalism in the Southwest, as in Christy G. Turner II and Jacqueline Turner, *Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence in the Prehistoric American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), or Steven A. LeBlanc, *Prehistoric Warfare in the American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), simply ignore the logical possibilities of many other kinds of violent behavior to produce the skeletal and coprolitic evidence trumpeted as demonstrations of cannibalism, and instead blithely assume a relation to expansive warfare. Likewise, claims as to the 'Caucasian' form of skeletal remains more than nine thousand years old found in the Northwest also exploit a persistent cultural need to barbarize and question the status of Native American culture; see David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

5 See, for example, Michael Ghiglieri, *The Dark Side of Man: Tracing the Origins of Male Violence* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1999), and Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

6 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

7 See Margaret Power, *The Egalitarians – Human and Chimpanzee: An Anthropological View of Social Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), or Frans B. M. de Waal, *Peacemaking Among Primates* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), and most recently, Christopher Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*

served collective violence and extreme hierarchical behavior among chimpanzees is a manifestation of change brought on by an intensifying human presence. Notably, those primatologists<sup>8</sup> who argue that lethal chimpanzee violence occurs in the absence of major human disruption have asked to have this characterization accepted on faith. But as with tribal warfare and with ethnic violence more widely, if these claims are to be taken seriously, their defenders must publish thorough descriptions of historical contexts illustrating an absence of exogenous stimulation of such violence.

Antedating but reinforced by primatologists' claims, sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists, and indeed Social Darwinists before them, claim that our evolutionary heritage has endowed or cursed us with an inherent tendency for in-group amity and out-group enmity. These tendencies – to cling to those close to us and to react with unreasoning hostility to those who are different – are then taken to explain 'ethnic violence' in the modern world.<sup>9</sup> These views, in reality, often propound naïve caricatures of contemporary conflict, as with Michael Ghiglieri's suggestion of a three-way association among cultural difference, genetic distance, and proclivity to violence.

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(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

8 As in Wrangham and Peterson, *Demonic Males*, or Ghiglieri, *The Dark Side of Man*.

9 See, for example, Vernon Reynold, Vincent Falger, and Ian Vine, *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism: Evolutionary Dimensions of Xenophobia, Discrimination, Racism, and Nationalism* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), or R. Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong, *Genetic Seeds of Warfare: Evolution, Nationalism, and Patriotism* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

In contrast to all of these approaches, the recent work of cultural anthropologists can provide a markedly more sophisticated frame of reference, in which identity and violence are understood as being historically and culturally constructed. As is patent even to the casual observer, ethnic conflict emerges from complex and highly variable processes; it is anything but the eruption of some primitive and fixed group loyalty so beloved of the sociobiologists and their archaeologist supporters.

After the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib was revealed, many wondered whether individual psychopathology or systematic military policy was at fault. Few understood that the revelations also underlined the importance of understanding how violence works as part of our cultural order. Since the form of abuse practiced by the U.S. soldiers seemed to emphasize sexual humiliation and religious desecration rather than gross forms of physical injury, and since it is widely understood – including by the interrogators themselves – that torture is not an effective means of intelligence gathering, the purpose of such abuse clearly requires further thought. In particular, we need to examine the relationship of the abuse to the cultural meaning of the war in Iraq and to the place of the military in American society.<sup>10</sup> In this light, 'homeland security,' and preparedness for biological attack, is no less a part of a performance of our own violent sociocultural order than tanks, guns, and bombs are.

Unfortunately, the Western media, in automatically locating the bases for 'violence' and 'terrorism' in 'radical Islam' and other unfamiliar political ideologies,

10 See, for example, John Conroy, *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

has obscured this need to understand the role of violence in our own cultural order. The dominance of this commentary is part of the reason we consider only the violence perpetrated by liberal democracies as 'legitimate.' However, the Abu-Ghraib revelations destabilized these presumptions to some degree, leading to the broader questions of how and when does our society regard violence, or at least torture and prisoner abuse, justifiable.<sup>11</sup>

Anthropology offers the best method of exploring these questions. But understanding violence through anthropology's standard approach to human research – ethnography – is fraught with intellectual and personal risks. Witnessing violent acts is problematic in itself, to say nothing of the challenge presented by the fact that ethnography is a method of participant observation.<sup>12</sup>

11 See Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004).

12 See accounts of such entanglements with witchcraft and sorcery by Paul Stoller, *In Sorcery's Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship Among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), or Neil L. Whitehead, *Dark Shamans: Kanaimà and the Poetics of Violent Death* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), as well as Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). In more general terms, such topics are a difficult and possibly deadly subject for ethnographic research. Moreover, cultural anthropologists are apt to elect more positive topics for research, justly fearing that to discuss violent cultural practices with our informants can lead to a negative and deadly stereotyping, as was clearly demonstrated by the recent controversy over ethnographic practices in Amazonia. See Patrick Tierney, *Darkness in El Dorado: How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon* (New York: Norton, 2000), and Robert Borofsky and Bruce Albert, *Yanomami: The Fierce Con-*

And while various theoretical approaches to the anthropology of war have certainly emphasized the relevance of changing global conditions to the violent contestation of nationalism, ethnicity, and state control, the question of why such violence might take particular cultural forms – such as specific kinds of mutilation, 'ethnic cleansing,' or other modes of community terror – has not been adequately integrated into anthropological theory, despite the pioneering work of a few authors.

As a result, anthropology has been unable to counter the commentary of the popular media, which stresses the 'primitive' or 'tribal' nature of many of these conflicts by repeatedly referring to the culturally opaque violent practices observed in these clashes. These pseudoanthropological attempts at explanation only recapitulate colonial ideas about the inherent savagery of the non-Western world and, as such, proffer no hope for better understanding. In policy terms, the failure to appreciate the connection between cultural affirmation and violence often leads to intractable quagmires – such as in Iraq or Afghanistan, Ireland or Israel – where the violent insertion of external political 'solutions' has only served to induce even fiercer opposition. Of course, such resistance is then linked again to the discourse on tribalism and savagery by reference to the 'religious' (or antimodern) nature of the insurgents' motivations.

Understanding violence as a discursive practice – whose symbols and rituals are as relevant to its enactment as its instrumental aspects – is an indispensable aspect of being able to interpret, and not just condemn, violent acts. In order for an act of violence to be considered legiti-

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*trovery and What We Can Learn from It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

mate, it needs not only to have the expected pragmatic consequences but also to be judged appropriate. Therefore, among the key questions we must address are how and when violence is culturally appropriate, why it is only appropriate for certain individuals, and the significance of those enabling ideas of appropriateness to a cultural tradition as a whole. In addition, it is necessary to ask how a reevaluation of violent cultural expression affects the concept of 'culture' and to consider whether 'violence' is itself a cross-cultural category.<sup>13</sup>

We therefore need to pay more attention to the generative schemes for culturally appropriate behavior – as well as the historically constituted matrix of symbolic and ideational forms upon which cultural representations, expressions, and performances are based. This critical field of analysis has largely been ignored. As a result, there have been few attempts to map how cultural conceptions of violence are used discursively to amplify the cultural force of violent acts, or how those acts themselves can produce a shared idiom for violent death. (This discursive amplification is

precisely what is meant by the 'poetics' of violent practice.)<sup>14</sup>

Instead, the study of violence has tended to focus on the political and economic conditions under which it is generated, the suffering of victims, and the psychology of its interpersonal dynamics. Such work has vastly improved our conceptualizations of violence, but it ignores the role of perpetrators, their motivations, and the social conditions under which they are able to operate. However, this imbalance in theorizing victims rather than perpetrators is just beginning to receive better attention from both anthropologists and others working on humanistic approaches to violence.<sup>15</sup>

Also, until recently, the anthropology of violence was principally concerned with the birth of war, the political economy of small-scale conflicts, or with the general context of the encounter between tribal and colonial military traditions. This approach certainly provides an important material context for understanding the development of cultural forms of violence. But new domains of anthropological analysis – state violence and death squads, postcolonial ethnic conflicts, serial killings, and revitalized forms of 'traditional' killing, such as assault sorcery and witchcraft – have required a much closer consideration of the symbolic, ritual, and performative qualities of violent acts in order to conceptualize cultural variety in the discursive practice of violence more fully.

13 As Christopher Taylor points out in his 1999 study of the Rwandan genocide, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (New York: Berg, 1999), this does not mean that 'culture,' conceived of in a simplistic way as in Daniel Goldhagen's controversial analysis of the Nazi genocide, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), can simply be cited as a cause of violence. Moreover, even the most careful analyses of Western forms of violence, such as of the Nazi genocide, are not necessarily relevant to the understanding of postcolonial ethnic violence, such as the genocide in Cambodia, precisely because 'genocide' is here mediated through cultural forms with which we are often unfamiliar. See Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

14 See Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, and Neil L. Whitehead, ed., *Violence* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004).

15 The website for the *Legacies of Violence* research circle at the University of Wisconsin-Madison illustrates many of these approaches, <http://www.internationalresearch.wisc.edu/LOV/>.



In any case, violence is becoming an unavoidable fact of anthropological research. We face burgeoning ethnic and community violence in many of the traditional field sites for anthropological analysis, even in those locations that seemed to have already peacefully negotiated their postcolonial economic and political conditions. Research on violence has also become an important part of anthropology's understanding of globalization. In the economically and politically marginal spaces of the global ethnoscape, violence has become a forceful, if not inevitable, form of cultural affirmation in the face of a loss of 'tradition' and a dislocation of ethnicity. Violence here is often engendered not simply by adherence to globalized ideologies, such as communism or Islam, but also by the complexities of local political history and cultural practices. This is true even where global ideologies do come into play, since it is the local meaning of those ideologies that drives conflicts.

In tandem with this changing context for ethnographic research is the resurgent debate within anthropology as to the existence and meaning of 'traditional' violence, which cannot be characterized simply as a 'return to barbarity.' A growing body of ethnographic and historical work is seeking to develop aspects of cultural theory in a way that overcomes these problems: work examining the Rwandan/Burundian genocide and the destruction of Liberia; studies of the resurgence of 'traditional witchcraft' as a political force in various global contexts; studies of the discursive practice of violence in the South and Southeast Asian contexts; or material concerning state terror from Central and South America. Such studies, and others, clearly suggest that the moment is right to compare ethnographic interpre-

tations and seek new principles for representing and studying violence as a cultural practice.

Violent acts embody complex aspects of symbolism that relate to both order and disorder in a given social context. Because of these symbolic aspects, violence has many potential cultural meanings. This is particularly important to remember when we consider the violent acts committed in the name of a particular religion, or in a belief that these acts conform to a set of 'moral' or 'patriotic' teachings directly linked to specific ideologies.

When an atrocity or murder takes place, it feeds into the world of the iconic imagination. Imagination transcends reality and its rational articulation, but in doing so it can bring more violent realities into being. We should not underestimate the significance of this phenomenon. Under early modern European regimes, simply showing torture instruments to a prisoner was often sufficient to produce the required confession of heresy or apostasy from him or her. So, today, simply seeing the aftermath of terrorism is enough to induce each citizen to rehearse complex political commitments to 'freedom' and 'democracy.' These pledges, in turn, sustain those political regimes that locate the terrorist threat at the very gates of society.

In many popular presentations of indigenous, or 'tribal,' ways of life, the message is usually that the lives being portrayed are subject to the kinds of arbitrary violence that Western liberal democracy has banished from everyday existence. Accordingly, we are repeatedly exposed to the notion that these societies face the pervasive threat of the Hobbesian condition, a war of all men against all men – with the inevitable consequence that the lives of most men

are nasty, brutish, and short. This mode of representation, and the imagination of others' subjectivities it entails, is particularly evident in the treatment of topics such as sorcery and witchcraft, and in the televisual dioramas of 'traditional' violent rituals, such as initiation ceremonies, mystical practices of self-mutilation or pain endurance, and so forth.<sup>16</sup>

What such portrayals neglect in their urgent concern to convince us of the degree to which such lives are immured in superstition and fear is that we, too, live in a state of constant fear, kept active in the public consciousness by such devices as government-issued threat levels, civic exercises in disaster preparedness, and the nightly news bulletins and television dramas. For these measures imply that, even if we are somewhat defended against the terrorist of yesterday, the potential for similar violent disruptions always exists.<sup>17</sup>

These representations overlook not only the way in which states of terror and acts of violence are entangled with the social and political order, but also how those apparently undesirable conditions are nonetheless valorized as the contexts for the expression of desirable cultural values – be they heroism and self-sacrifice, or physical endurance and indifference to pain.

Moreover, the televisual contrasts between savage, violent others and our pacific, sophisticated selves are not just implicit endorsements of 'Western' culture. They also efface our own capacities for, and institutions of, violence, with a resulting enfeeblement of the individu-

al in the face of, or prospect of, the exercise of violence. We sit entranced by the sights and sounds of 'terrorist violence' – the twisted piles of metal and rubble, the wailing of women, the shouting of men, and the telltale pools of blood – which confirm the overriding importance of this kind of violence as a token of the perpetrators' barbarity and an occasion for our condemnation. Implicitly, we are invited to infer the relative insignificance of our own counter-violence, which is rarely itself so starkly presented, in defeating the monstrous perpetrators of such acts. We also learn that we are dependent on the professionals of violence to achieve that end.

This is partly why the visual materials emanating from Abu Ghraib were so shocking to, and incommensurable with, our understanding of the violence we deploy. Although American cultural values were overtly shaping the forms of violence – all of the torturers wore plastic gloves, focused on sexual humiliation, and generally gave off the impression that this was merely a frat party or hazing – the automatic responses of analysts were either that the individual offenders were psychopathic or that the higher authority was aberrant (albeit understandably so, since the aim of defeating terror is far more important). Even liberal-inspired commentary sought to validate the U.S. government and the nation's body-politic by suggesting that free journalistic inquiry, and a Freedom of Information Act that would help journalists uncover the 'truth' of such abuse, balances out the 'mistakes' of Abu Ghraib. Presumably, then, the detainees at Guantánamo Bay are doing just fine.<sup>18</sup>

16 A recent series of programs on such topics, made for the U.S. Discovery Channel, was thus entitled "Culture Shock Week."

17 Carolyn Nordstrom has aptly named this "the tomorrow of violence"; see her chapter in Whitehead, ed., *Violence*.

18 See the review of Mark Danner's *Torture and Truth* by Andrew Sullivan in the *New York Sunday Book Review*, January 23, 2005.

Of course, the latest terrorist pandemonium is in many ways just a reinscription of the pervasive threats that were earlier evident during the cold war. 'Weapons of mass destruction' are back in vogue, again suggesting the imminent possibility of another terrorist catastrophe in the vein of the September 11 attacks, if not the emergence of a cold war-style stand off with North Korea or Iran.<sup>19</sup>

In the imagination of terror and violence, there is no limitation on how far such discourses can travel, or at least on the mediums in which they are expressed.<sup>20</sup> Such discourses, however, often proliferate locally through gossip to constitute a cultural imaginary, sug-

19 Clearly, though, certain forms of violent 'terrorist' action cannot serve this cultural purpose, as shown by the way in which responses to Timothy McVeigh's bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma have been noted but not introduced into the wider public discourse on the 'war on terror.' This precisely highlights the difference between personal safety and national security as relating to different realms of political thinking and priority. Security is the politico-military prerogative of government while safety remains a culturally diverse and individualized idea. 'Safety' in this sense can only be realized by the occupation of a different kind of space to that of threat and terror. Perhaps a nostalgic retreat, as in the sudden popularity of American folk music and the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* in the immediate wake of September 11, or the current vogue for re-making and recycling movie/TV formats from, or about, the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

20 My own discussions in *Dark Shamans* of a regional form of terror, the *kanaimà*, underscores this delocation, since, despite regional use of the idea in Brazilian and Venezuelan film and literature, it has not connected with a global discourse of terror in the way that other local imaginings, such as vampires, zombies, or werewolves, have done; see also Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in East and Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

gesting a useful comparison between the discourses surrounding sorcery and witchcraft and our current conceptions of terrorism.<sup>21</sup>

In the contemporary West, the figure of the suicide bomber has replaced that of the sorcerer in our cultural imaginary. The suicide bomber evokes the image of an irrational violence whose motivations are buried in the obscurity of religious cultism. It is important to note that the 'suicide bomber' is a formulation of the Western media. For the perpetrators, martyrdom and self-sacrifice, or 'fighting to the death,' are much closer renderings of the ideas that motivate them. Moreover, recent studies are beginning to reveal the multiple cultural imaginaries from which such acts actually emerge.<sup>22</sup> In Japan, Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, and Palestine, such acts acquire meaning from quite distinct ethical traditions and practices of violence. Just as was the case for an older idea of exotic terror, cannibalism, the apparent behavioral similarity of these acts belies their distinct cultural meanings and trajectories.<sup>23</sup>

21 See Andrew Strathern, Pamela Stewart, and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *Terror and Violence: Imagination and the Unimaginable* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pluto, 2005), and Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

22 See Christoph Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, trans. Helena Ragg-Kirkby (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Nasser Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

23 This is very strikingly born out by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's study of Japanese *kamikaze*, whose motivations were more the result of an admiring contemplation of Western modernity than a remnant of anachronistic and traditional *samurai* ethics; see Emiko Ohnuki-Tier-

The figure of the suicide bomber also makes dramatically overt the identification of the human body with the body-politic: through the social order our bodies are shaped. The body is also joined to locations and landscapes, such that the destruction of sites of civic identity are felt as bodily invasions, from which the invader must be repelled, purged, cleansed. So, too, in the absence of specific kinds of bodies – suspects, offenders, terrorists – or physically distinguishing features for such categories, the site of a war on ‘terror’ or other kinds of ‘enemies within’ must become internalized as an aspect of ‘mind’ and ‘attitude.’ It is obvious now that acts of violence are acted out necessarily, and sometimes only, in the imagination.

Earlier colonial commentators on sorcery were no less aware of the significance of the imaginative order in understanding sorcery’s cultural influence.<sup>24</sup> Just as the modern-day expansion of global media can fill many more minds with a conviction of the reality of present terror, an elaborate theater of public punishment and execution imbued people in the colonial era with the belief that the destruction of the bodies of the condemned was integral to the reproduction of society – paradoxically achieving the incorporation of society through the exclusion of its victims.

It is significant then that colonial depictions of other rituals of public bodily destruction, particularly cannibalistic human sacrifice, put great stress on the collective-participation aspect of the victim’s destruction – both commentators

and illustrators would repeatedly allude to the participation of women and children in the cannibal moment – as a way of emphasizing the barbarity of the ritual exercise of cannibalism. It is striking that this community participation in the incorporating cannibal moment, not its cruelties and torments, shocked the early modern Europeans.

By contrast, an exclusion, not inclusion, of the victim is envisaged in the European tradition of torture and execution as an adjunct to judicial process. Such is now the fate of detainees at Guantánamo, whose marked bodies and tortured minds leave them in a limbo of nonbeing, excluded from the society of human rights and law. British anthropologist Sir Edmund Leach noted in response to the IRA terrorist campaigns nearly thirty years ago:

We see ourselves as threatened . . . by lawless terrorists of all kinds . . . [W]e feel ourselves to be in the position of the European Christians after the withdrawal of the Mongol hordes rather than in the position of the unfortunate Caribs . . . at the hands of the Spanish invaders . . . We now know that the dog-headed cannibals against whom Pope Gregory IX preached his crusade were representatives of a far more sophisticated civilization than anything that existed in Europe at the time . . . . However incomprehensible the acts of terrorism may seem to be, our judges, our policemen, and our politicians must never be allowed to forget that terrorism is an activity of fellow human beings and not of dog-headed cannibals.<sup>25</sup>

Control over bodies – both alive and dead, imaginatively and physically – is a way of engendering political power. And

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ney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

24 See Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*.

25 In Edmund Ronald Leach, *Custom, Law and Terrorist Violence* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1977), 36.

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of all the modes of controlling bodies the violence of physical assault is an irresistible mode of domination. But even as we contemplate the shock and awe of attacks on terrorist hideaways, or the systems of secret CIA prisons and torture camps that have most recently surfaced in the nightly news, we are reminded that a war on terror of all kinds should also confront our own deep traditions of violence, which persist as part of a quasi-mystical and deeply imaginative search for the final triumph of democratic progress over the terror, violence, and barbarity of others.



Tzvetan Todorov

## *Avant-gardes & totalitarianism*

*Translated by Arthur Goldhammer*

The history of modernity is characterized by an immense transformation: the transition from a world structured by religion to a world organized exclusively in terms of human beings and worldly values. This process of emancipation and humanization, which has been going on for several centuries, has taken two main forms. First came the project of replacing the divine absolute with a collective human absolute, what revolutionaries in France called ‘the Nation.’ Initial enthusiasm for this project began to wane, however, from the moment the Revolution engendered the Terror. The struggle for liberty had ended in the suppression of liberty: was this not proof that the project itself had been ill-conceived from the beginning?

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Those who did not wish to turn back the clock but were still dissatisfied with the present then sought a second way, that of an absolute accessible to the autonomous individual. The search for this second way itself took several forms; the most influential of these identified the individual absolute with beauty and favored what Friedrich Schiller would call the aesthetic education of man. This doctrine was Romanticism, adopted first in Germany and then throughout Europe; it glorified the poet in place of the prophet and the work of art in place of prayer. “Beauty in its absolute essence is God,” declared a spokesman for the movement.

The fact that Romanticism reserved such a role for art and poetry, exemplary incarnations of the beautiful, did not mean that it neglected other human activities: for Schiller and his successors, aesthetic education and political vision went hand in hand. One of the best examples we have of the desire to improve the human condition by action in both spheres is that of the German composer Richard Wagner. Influenced by the revolutionary ideas of Mikhail Bakunin, Wagner took part in political agitation in Dresden in 1848 – 1849. Forced into exile by the ensuing repression, he sought refuge in Switzerland, where he produced

two texts setting forth his ideas about art and its relation to society: *Art and Revolution* and *The Art Work of the Future*, both written in 1849.

These texts make clear that Wagner aspired to the absolute but did not seek it in traditional religion. Art seemed to him the absolute's best incarnation: it was "living religion represented."<sup>1</sup> On this basis, he suggested, a two-way relationship between artistic activity and social life is established. If art was to flourish, society must have the most favorable conditions for it. Now, Wagner's world, as defined by the Germanic states of his day, was far from satisfying those conditions. Hence, that world had to be transformed; revolution was essential. Wagner was interested in politics only to the extent that politics enabled art to flourish. For him, social revolution was not an end in itself but a means to artistic revolution, the foundation of a new edifice of the arts.

Why bestow such honor on artists? This is where the second part of the relationship between art and society comes in: "The supreme goal of man is the artistic goal," Wagner declared, and "art is the highest activity of man," that which crowns his earthly existence. "Genuine art is the highest form of freedom." Wagner shared the dream of the Saint-Simonians, who believed that machines would soon take over man's most arduous labors. Freed from exhausting chores, all would turn their attention to artistic creation in freedom and joy.

Art was not opposed to life, as another version of Romantic doctrine held, but

rather the culmination of life. 'Artistic humanity' was synonymous with 'free human dignity.' Craft was to become art; the proletarian was to transform himself into an artist; the industrial slave was to metamorphose into a producer of beauty. The society of the future would no longer exist to serve art, as Wagner demanded for the present, because all life would have become artistic. Here art became the ideal model of society. There would no longer be any need to celebrate artists because everyone would be an artist. To be more precise, the community as a whole would freely decide how it was to live, thus adopting the attitude of the creator. "But who will be the artist of the future? The poet? The actor? The musician? The sculptor? Let us put it in a nutshell: the people."<sup>2</sup> Because this could be achieved only by a *common* effort, Wagner opted for the opposite of egoism, namely, *communism* – whose *Manifesto* had been published the year before by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

The failure of the revolutions of 1848 throughout Europe would sound the death knell of such dreams. Thereafter began a second major period in the history of the worldly absolute, from 1848 to World War I, during which the two paths, the collective and the individual, the political and the aesthetic, diverged. Baudelaire, though an enthusiastic commentator on Wagner, saw the hope that art might influence the world as an illusion. Meanwhile, Marx showed little concern for the aesthetic education of the individual. The two proudly ignored each other, though neither dreamed of renouncing the absolute.

Things changed again between the two world wars – the period to which I now turn. Two trends can be discerned, but

1 Richard Wagner, *Œuvres en prose*, vol. 3 (Paris: Éditions d'Aujourd'hui, 1976), 91; English translation by William Ashton Ellis, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 1 (New York: Broude Bros., 1966).

2 Ibid., 19, 16, 243.

each can be described as an actualization of the Wagnerian project of a total work of art, one that would be coextensive with life itself and with the world as a whole. On one hand, avant-garde groups, such as the Futurists and Constructivists, differentiated themselves from the modernist movement in general by attempting to expand the limits of the work of art so as to act on society at large. On the other hand, extremist political movements modeled their plans for transforming society and humanity on the creative activity of the artist. This was true of Communism, Fascism, and Nazism.

Both avant-garde artists and political extremists saw violence as a legitimate means of achieving their ends more rapidly. They knew they were promoting revolution, which might well provoke resistance. That resistance had to be overcome – if necessary, by force. We see signs of this rapprochement of the two major forms of the worldly absolute – the political and the artistic – in Russia, Italy, and Germany. The convergence persisted until the end of World War II.

Avant-garde movements appeared in Russia around 1910 with the first glimmerings of abstraction in painting and Futurist experimentation in poetry. Initially, however, the gulf between art and society widened rather than narrowed. Painters were exhorted to forget the material world and to obey no laws other than the intrinsic laws of their art. Later, however, people began to question this divorce of art from the visible world of objects and the intelligible world of the senses – and therefore to question as well the quest for the absolute in the work of art as opposed to society. Some of those who questioned this divorce were the same people who had advocated it earlier.

The new turn took the name ‘Constructivism’ because its adherents eschewed artistic creation in favor of constructing objects and artifacts intended to become part of the environment. Their first group show was held in 1921, but the first manifestations of the movement date from 1915, when Vladimir Tatlin presented his “Counter-Reliefs” at the same time that Kazimir Malevich unveiled his “Black Square.” The “Counter-Reliefs” were assembled from a variety of materials; and the artist’s goal was not to reveal to the world the existence of a ‘work’ but rather to bring out the intrinsic qualities of the materials used in the construction.

The difference between Constructivism and earlier avant-garde movements was not political: all enthusiastically supported the ongoing revolution. It was rather in the relation between the work of art and its social context. According to one Constructivist theoretician, Boris Arvatov, even when earlier artists took nothing from life but its spiritual content or other essential elements, as in the case of Wassily Kandinsky and Malevich, they still “placed art above life and sought to render life in the form of art.” By contrast, Constructivism “placed life above art” and gave primacy to function at the expense of form. “Not the creation of forms of great ‘aesthetic’ value but utilitarian construction from basic materials,” he wrote. “Not autonomy of the thing as such, but richness of content.”<sup>3</sup>

In concrete terms, Constructivism transformed all forms of expression.

<sup>3</sup> Boris Arvatov quoted in J.-Cl. Marcadé, *L'avant-garde russe 1907 – 1927* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 19; “L’utopie objectalisée,” 1923, in G. Conio, *Le constructivisme russe*, vol. 2 (Lauzanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1986), 46.

Instead of producing literary works, writers were urged to focus on the utilitarian value of language. For example, Vladimir Mayakovsky would eventually turn to the production of political slogans and advertising. In his autobiography, he defined his group's position as being "against fiction and aestheticism, for propaganda, for qualified journalism, and for opinion writing." Indeed, the materials he had in mind were not only language but also real events evoked by language: rather than imaginative literature, Constructivists preferred what they called 'factual literature,' drawn from the world in which the writer lived. Thus, literature no longer existed in a separate sphere; everyone could participate in its creation. "In the Commune, everyone was a creator," wrote another Constructivist theoretician, Osip Brik,<sup>4</sup> who was repeating, perhaps unwittingly, an idea of Novalis: "Every man should be an artist. Everything can become fine art."<sup>5</sup>

The same could be said of the visual arts: their goal was no longer to produce paintings or sculptures but rather to transform the world through artistic action. Alexander Rodchenko, the leader of the plastic Constructivists, was as fervently opposed to easel painting as Mayakovsky was to fiction. "Non-figurative painting has left the museum," he declared in the course of a 1920 show of his work. "Non-figurative painting is *the street itself, the town square, the city, and the entire world.*"<sup>6</sup> He chose to make posters and to design wallpaper and fabrics.

4 Quoted in Conio, *Le constructivisme russe*, 153; Osip Brik, "L'artiste et la Commune," in Conio, *Le constructivisme russe*, vol. 1.

5 *Foi et Amour* in Novalis, *Œuvres*, vol. 1, 341.

6 Quoted in Conio, *Le constructivisme russe*, vol. 1, 44.

Here, too, reality was preferable to the imagination – Rodchenko devoted himself more and more to photography. Tatlin, meanwhile, went from "Counter-Reliefs" to architectural constructions, such as his (proposed but never-built) tower intended as a "Monument to the Third International." Architecture was the logical culmination of the Constructivists' plastic experiments: inspired by artistic principles, the architect shapes the world by building real houses, life-sized cities, and landscapes.

The performing arts followed the same course. Arvatov spoke of the "fusion of theater with life in socialist society" as though it were self-evident. But what form was this fusion to take? In his view, the goal was no longer to stage plays in the traditional manner, even if the audience were expanded to a broad segment of the population. It was rather to give form to life itself, "to construct our way of life rationally."<sup>7</sup> This was the best way for the theater to fulfill its propaganda function. In film, Dziga Vertov's theories of montage similarly reflected Constructivist aims. Merely by filming what existed and then proceeding to an audacious montage, Vertov created beautiful films without inventing anything: he simply reorganized the visible world. The material itself acted on the viewer, provided the filmmaker knew how to put it together in the right way. Thus, everything in the world became potential material for the artist.

The Constructivist theoretical project was pushed to its ultimate limit by yet another theoretician, Nikolai Chuzhak, who explicitly proposed "the construction of life" as the movement's goal. In articles published in the journal *LEF*, edited by Mayakovsky, in 1923 and 1929,

7 Arvatov, "Utopie ou science?" in Conio, *Le constructivisme russe*, vol. 2, 65 – 66.

he drew the consequences of this extension of artistic experimentation's benefits to all of life. As he saw it, two conceptions of art were in contention. One of these, the bourgeois conception, saw "art as a method for obtaining *knowledge* of life." The other, the proletarian conception, perceived "art as a method for the *construction* of life." The first view limits art to representation and invites us to contemplate the world; the second seeks to dominate and transform the material. In this we hear echoes of Marx's celebrated formula concerning the status of knowledge: "Until now philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it."<sup>8</sup> Now it was the frontier between the artist and the political activist that was being crossed. Art in the old-fashioned style might, at best, serve as a kind of preparation, a "timid apprenticeship in the formidable creation of a new way of life now under way." Chuzhak believed that the moment had come to "declare war on artistic literature," or *belles-lettres*, that is, on literature based on opposing literature to life when in fact the two ought to merge to the point of indistinguishability. It was high time, he argued, to dispatch "belles-lettres to rot on the rubbish heap of outmoded art."<sup>9</sup> The new art was simply to be one more method of constructing life.

At first sight, art emerged the loser from its conflict with life. Instead of delving into his imagination, the artist now borrowed his materials ready-made. Instead of creating original artifacts, he settled for demonstrating the

intrinsic quality of existing materials, which he assembled according to pre-established rules. Instead of creating works for disinterested contemplation, he placed them in service of society, subject to "social command." But his submission was also a kind of victory, and his humility stemmed from a higher ambition: the artist now identified with the political actor who shapes society, the people, and individuals, in accordance with a preconceived design. The Constructivist project thus represented, at the same time, a death sentence for art and its apotheosis, since the artist no longer worked solely with words or colors but rather with human beings: he became an artist, engineer, and demiurge all rolled into one.

If the dream was to become reality, however, politicians would have to agree to share their power with artists. This did not happen: none of these grandiose utopian conceptions was realized. By the end of the 1920s, the last vestiges of the avant-garde in Russia were reduced to silence. The leaders of the movement were either punished – victims of the revolution they themselves had wanted – or else turned into obedient propagandists for the regime.

At the end of World War I, Germany experienced political upheaval similar to Russia's but with the opposite result: The revolution was crushed in bloody repression. The uprising of the (communist) Spartacists in early 1919 ended in failure; its leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were executed; and the liberal Weimar Republic was established. Yet a transformation of the arts had begun even as the political revolution was being prepared: a "council (*so-viet*) for the arts" was established, and the architect Walter Gropius became its codirector. The council declared that

8 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Etudes philosophiques* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1947), 11.

9 Conio, *Le constructivisme russe*, vol. 2, 39, 23, 170, 178; Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach."



“art and the people must be one” and that “art will henceforth be not for the pleasure of a few but for the welfare and life of the masses.”<sup>10</sup>

Once again, this project was reminiscent of Wagner’s some seventy years earlier. Like Wagner, Gropius seemed to want to compensate for the failure of the political revolution by launching a project in the arts (whereas, in Russia, the victory of the revolution had for a time facilitated progress in the arts). And again, like Wagner, Gropius dreamed of unifying the arts, though not in opera but rather in architecture, which he envisioned as absorbing painting and sculpture.

One week after the inauguration of the Weimar Republic in 1919, the Bauhaus was founded. This was a group of architects led by Gropius and committed to the same principles as the council. Art does not coincide with life, according to the Bauhaus manifesto, but rather aims to create a total work of art, an edifice “that will one day rise toward the sky, the crystalline symbol of a new faith.” This edifice would resemble a cathedral more than anything else: like the old religion, the new faith would need a temple. Both were incarnations of the absolute. But this project, with its religious overtones, was not maintained for long. Bauhaus theoreticians could not ignore the fact that the religious absolute had been brought down to earth. Modern man’s temple was no longer a cathedral. “Man has become God – his house is his church.”<sup>11</sup>

10 In *Anthologie du Bauhaus* (Brussels: Didier Devillez, 1995), 51–54; quoted in E. Michaud, “L’oeuvre d’art totale et le totalitarisme,” in *L’oeuvre d’art totale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 43, whose analysis I am following here.

11 *Bauhaus 1919 – 1969*, Musée National d’Art Moderne, 1969, 13; quoted in Michaud, *L’oeuvre*

Thus, the work envisioned by the founders of the Bauhaus gradually drew closer to everyday life. The goal was not only to build homes for people but also to transform their entire environment, from furniture and utensils to cities and landscapes. Such a program required knowledge of the ‘people’ for whom the artist worked: Gropius introduced courses in sociology and even biology at the Bauhaus. By transforming the setting in which people lived, one could perfect the people themselves. By producing objects for everyday use, artists could influence individual and collective ways of life.

In this period the Russians and Germans maintained constant contact. Kandinsky began teaching at the Bauhaus in 1922. The arrival of the Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy in 1923 introduced a significant new influence, as he was steeped in the ideas of the Constructivists. The goal, he declared in 1925, should not be to create a total work of art à la Wagner but rather “to synthesize all the moments of life, which is itself a total work of art encompassing everything else and annihilating all separation.”<sup>12</sup> The aim was no longer to produce art but to shape life. To build houses and cities was to organize a vital process. Thus architect-artists would henceforth fashion a new mankind.

Once again, however, Constructivist ambitions would run up against political power. The founders of the Bauhaus would not have been unhappy to carry out the architectural plans of the Nazis, who came to power in 1933, but the Na-

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*d’art totale*, 47; *Anthologie du Bauhaus*, 110; Michaud, *L’oeuvre d’art totale*, 53.

12 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Peinture, photographie, film* (Nîmes: J. Chambon, 1993), 78; Michaud, *L’oeuvre d’art totale*, 54.

zis chose to implement their own 'total work of art.' The political revolution did not need the support of revolutionary art.

In fact, there was a deep reason why the role of demiurge was not accorded to artists: political leaders reserved it for themselves. The identification of the political leader with the artist, each working with different material but in a similar spirit, reflected a long tradition but had yet to be transformed into a program of action. Plato compared the statesman to the painter, whose gestures mimicked those of the divine creator. "[N]o city could ever be blessed unless its lineaments were traced by artists who used the heavenly model .... They will take the city and the characters of men, as they might a table, and first wipe it clean." Elsewhere he compares the legislator to the poet: "We are ourselves authors of a tragedy, ... the finest and best we know how to make. In fact, our whole polity has been constructed as a dramatization of a noble and perfect life .... [W]e also are poets in the finest of all dramas."<sup>13</sup> The German Romantics, inspired by Platonic concepts of beauty, rediscovered this comparison of the statesman with the artist – an artist who works with an entire country as his raw material.

In any case, whether in Plato, in French revolutionary discourse, or in Romantic doctrine, the idea of applying artistic creation to social life remained just an idea rather than becoming a concrete project. The situation did not really change until the advent of the modern totalitarian state, in which the supreme leader wields the means necessary to re-

duce the metaphor to its literal meaning. Once political religions supplanted traditional beliefs, the transformation of the individual and that of the state could be promoted in parallel. The new man and the new society both became works of art to be produced by the leader of the nation.

Mussolini was quick to seize on the parallel between political action and creative work. In November 1917, he wrote in *Popolo d'Italia* that "the Italian people is now a deposit of precious mineral. A work of art is still possible. It requires a government. A man. A man who combines the delicate touch of an artist with the iron fist of a warrior." In 1922 he described himself as the "sculptor of the Italian nation" and declared that "politics works with the most difficult and obdurate of materials, man." The politician, like the artist, must create the perfect work out of the most refractory material: marble in the one case, man in the other. To anyone who would listen, Mussolini explained that his goal was to create new Italians, to transform the Italian soul, to shape the masses, to mold an entire people. "The whole problem," as he put it some years later to Emil Ludwig, "is to dominate the masses as an artist does,"<sup>14</sup> to turn a shapeless raw material into a masterpiece. To achieve this goal, he may use physical means (Mussolini embraced various eugenicist ideas that were in the air) or spiritual ones: the Great War had been a formidable educator, without which the new fascist man would have been inconceivable.

13 *Republic*, 500e – 501a; *Laws*, 817b. Quoted from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon Bollingen Series, 1963).

14 Quoted in *L'homme nouveau dans l'Europe fasciste* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), 7; quoted in E. Michaud, *Un art de l'éternité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 17; Emil Ludwig, *Colloqui con Mussolini* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1932); quoted in *L'homme nouveau*, 284.

In peacetime, mass organizations, especially youth groups, would play an essential role and help transform the whole country into a vast laboratory of human experimentation.

Mussolini's project had one distinctive feature: *il Duce* was not content simply to be the artisan of Italy's renewal but portrayed himself as its most consummate product. He was both artist and work of art. In seeking to fashion a new man, he took his inspiration from his own image. In the beginning he sculpted his own image, as if he were a statue; the child of modest background transformed himself by a conscious effort of the will, so as to appear to his compatriots as a perfect man, an example for others. Mussolini never missed an opportunity to demonstrate that he was capable of doing the work of both peasant and worker. He also liked to demonstrate his mastery of sports, such as swimming and skiing, as well as his ability to write philosophy and literature. An editorial in *Critica fascista* flatly stated, "For now the regime's only great artist is its founder, Mussolini. All the speeches he has given and all the political articles and essays he has written suffice to show that he is our greatest contemporary writer of prose."<sup>15</sup> This was more than just flattery. Once again, the association of art with politics was not fortuitous.

Mussolini found both inspiration and support in the contemporary avant-garde, especially the Futurists. The ideological proximity of the artistic and the political movements is obvious. To begin, both were fond of the military metaphor 'avant-garde,' the forerunner heralding the coming of the revolution and a new day. Both believed in the regenerative virtues of violence. Both sought to

exercise their influence over all aspects of society. Both bore the hallmarks of political religions. The Futurists recognized themselves in Mussolini and were pleased that he reserved an important role for cultural action in the fabrication of the new man. In this respect, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the Italian Futurist, resembled Mayakovsky, the Russian Futurist: both sought to place their talent at the service of the revolution.

Fascism relied on artistic action to transform society, to make it a spectacle worthy of admiration. Foreign observers noted the aesthetic aspects of Fascist political action. The French writer Robert Brasillach wrote that Fascism was "a kind of poetry, the distinctive poetry of the twentieth century (along with Communism, to be sure)."<sup>16</sup> Particular attention was devoted to anything susceptible of being turned into a spectacle for the masses – holidays, parades, and indeed architecture, which was regarded as the supreme art because it encompassed all individuals and was available for all to admire. But the aestheticization of the political never became an end in itself; it always remained subordinate to the political objective. What became sacred under Fascism was not the beautiful but the state.

It has to be said that, in the eyes of *il Duce* himself, his project ended in failure: he did not succeed in transforming the Italians into new men or valiant Fascists, and he therefore believed that Italy would lose the war. He formulated even this failure in artistic terms, however: the problem lay in the material, too soft for its intended purpose. "What I lacked was good material," he told Galeazzo Ciano a few months before his death. "Michelangelo himself needed marble

15 February 15, 1927; quoted in *L'homme nouveau*, 82.

16 "Lettre à un soldat de la classe 60," in *Ecrit à Fresne* (Paris: Plon, 1967), 140.

to make statues. If he had had only clay, he would have been a potter and nothing more.”<sup>17</sup>

With Hitler, the relation between political action and artistic activity was no less powerful, but it took a somewhat different form. As is well known, *der Führer* reserved a special place for Wagner, whose very name stands, in German-speaking countries, for the idea of the artist – not as one figure among others in society but as the very model of what society ought to be. Hermann Rauschning, in his book *Hitler Told Me*, reports, “Hitler refused to admit that he had precursors. He made only one exception to this rule: Richard Wagner.” This acknowledgment of Wagner was not an isolated act. On May 5, 1924, while in prison following an abortive attempt to seize power, Hitler wrote to Wagner’s son Siegfried to say that he found in Siegfried’s father “the spiritual sword with which we are fighting today.”<sup>18</sup> Later he established a special relationship with the inhabitants of Bayreuth.

What accounts for this dubious privilege accorded to Wagner? Hitler had been fascinated by Wagner’s music from his youth in Austria. *Rienzi*, in particular, plunged him into a state of stupor and ecstasy. But his worship of Wagner did not end there. His best friend from this period, August Kubizek, reports that “Adolf sometimes recited by heart . . . the text of a letter or note of Wagner’s or read to me out loud from his writing, such as the *The Art Work of the Future* or

*Art and Revolution*.”<sup>19</sup> Hitler himself claimed to have seen *Tristan and Isolde* thirty or forty times.

The special place accorded to Wagner’s youthful opera *Rienzi* suggests a possible explanation for Hitler’s attitude, particularly since his devotion to that work persisted throughout his life. Years later, the overture to *Rienzi* was regularly played at Nazi Party conventions. When Hitler visited the composer’s daughter-in-law, Winifred Wagner, in 1939, he spoke to her of the impact this opera had had on him. Kubizek, who witnessed the conversation, reports what Hitler said about hearing the work for the first time: “It was at that moment that it all began.” Hitler said much the same thing to his other friend (and favorite architect), Albert Speer: “While still a young man, listening to this inspired music at the Linz opera, I had the vision of a German Reich, which I would unify and make great.”<sup>20</sup>

One might therefore assume that Hitler’s attraction to this opera was determined, above all, by its subject: how a powerful orator can capture the attention of a people and what dangers he ought to anticipate. But this explanation does not go far enough, as we can see from Hitler’s familiarity with Wagner’s other musical works as well as with his writings. Hitler, who in his youth dreamed of becoming a painter, could not have been unaware of Wagner’s general notions about the relationship

17 Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1939 – 1943* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1963), 445; quoted in E. Gentile, *Qu’est-ce que la fascisme?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 393.

18 Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler m’a dit* (Paris: Coopération, 1939), 255; *Musique en jeu* 23 (1976): 60.

19 August Kubizek, *Adolf Hitler. Mein Jugendfreund* (Graz: L. Stocker, 1953), 101; quoted in B. Hamann, *La Vienne d’Hitler* (Paris: Editions des Syrtes, 2001), 88.

20 Kubizek, *Adolf Hitler*, 343; quoted in Hamann, *La Vienne d’Hitler*, 77; Albert Speer, *Journal de Spandau* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1975), 108; quoted in Michaud, *Un art de l’éternité*, 86.

between art and society. What attracted him was precisely the continuity between the two, the possibility that each might support the other. Though Wagner gave up on revolution in the streets to devote himself to the creation of a total work of art, his opera, the goal remained the same: to act on his people, to make his country great and prosperous. Similarly, Hitler, having experienced not revolution but war, gave up the practice of painting and committed himself to producing an even more 'total' work of art: the new German people. Unlike Mussolini, however, he did not put himself forward as an example of a successful 'work.' In his case, the gap between the guide and the masses was unbreachable. Hitler was an artist, not a work of art.

The resemblance of the two postures, that of the artist and that of the statesman, can be found in the work of other Nazi theoreticians. In 1929, Joseph Goebbels, who thought of himself as a writer and therefore an artist, wrote a novel entitled *Michael*, in which he borrowed Mussolini's simile: the people were like the sculptor's stone, material to be shaped. Two years later he insisted: "For us the mass is but shapeless material. Only the hand of the artist can bring forth a people from the mass and a nation from the people." After coming to power, he wrote an open letter to orchestra conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler in April 1933: "We who are giving shape to modern German politics think of ourselves as artists entrusted with the lofty responsibility of taking the brute mass and shaping it into a solid and complete image of the people." No work of art could be more total or more ambitious.

And the best preparation for the role of statesman was none other than practice in the arts. In April 1936, the Nazi party newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*

published a front-page article entitled "Art as the Basis of Creative Political Power," which stated, "There exists an intimate and indissoluble connection between the Führer's artistic works and his great political work.... His artistic endeavors... were the prerequisite for his creative idea of the totality."<sup>21</sup> It was because he had been an artist that Hitler knew how to lead his people. It is worth noting, moreover, that a good half of the members of Hitler's first government had previously been involved in the arts. In 1937, Goebbels concluded: "All of Hitler's work is proof of his artistic spirit: his state is truly an edifice of classical composition. The artistic creation of his political work establishes his preeminence among German artists, a position he has earned by his character and nature."<sup>22</sup> Wagner's dream seemed to be coming true at last.

Why is the artistic model so attractive to politicians? We know that since the Romantic crisis, artists, especially poets, have sought to occupy the place of priests, of being guides and educators of the people. In the eyes of Nazi leaders, artists also enjoyed this advantage over the servants of the old religions: they were not obedient to an independent Book or law but were free to define their own goals and their own ways of achieving them. This is the privilege of genius, the model of every artist: it spurns all rules so as to be totally free to create. By the end of the nineteenth century, liberation from the weight of tradition had

21 *Combat pour Berlin*, ed. Saint-Just (Paris, 1966, original 1931), 38; quoted in Michaud, *Un art de l'éternité*, 20, 62.

22 Quoted by Franz Dröge and Michael Müller, *Die Macht der Schönheit, Avantgarde und Faschismus oder die Geburt der Massenkultur* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995), 57.



become the rallying cry of avant-garde movements in the arts. Cubists, Futurists, Dadaists, and abstract painters outspokenly asserted their right to shape the world according to their will.

Thus, for Hitler it was no longer enough simply to aestheticize politics, to stage triumphal marches and funeral processions, to combine dazzling lighting with stirring music. He had to fuse politics and aesthetics, subordinating all institutions and actions to the ultimate objective of producing a *Volk*, a new people – new in both a spiritual and a physical sense. The artist had become demiurge. “Anyone who fails to see that National Socialism is a religion doesn’t know anything about it,” Hitler said to Rauschning. “It is more than a religion: it is the will to create a new man.”<sup>23</sup> He conceived of this as a deliberate effort, like that of an artist in his studio or an inventor in a laboratory, on the scale of an entire nation.

The two principal means of carrying out this vast project were propaganda and eugenics. The propaganda effort could well profit from the example of artists, while the eugenics effort would depend on scientific progress. Both art and science were to be enlisted in support of the Nazi program. Eugenics meant eliminating defective individuals and inferior races as well as selecting the best individuals and controlling their reproduction. No longer was science content to interpret the world; now, in keeping with Marx’s dictum, it aimed to change it, to bring it closer to the desired ideal – an ideal that science claimed to have deduced rigorously from empirical observation. In this it resembled art: what was the work of the sculptor if not to bring forth from a shapeless mass of

stone or wood a perfect form, if not to shape clay or plaster in accordance with an idea of perfection?

Thus, what mattered was not so much art as such, although Hitler invariably emphasized its exemplary role; it was rather art in the service of life. Hermann von Keyserling, a Nazi fellow-traveler, said as much in the title of a speech he gave in 1936: “Life is an Art.” Germanic myths and legends of the sort that Wagner had exploited were invaluable, but it was, above all, the everyday life of the German people that would benefit from an infusion of myth and legend. Every individual would behave as an artist, at the appropriate level. Work must become creative; utilitarian activities must respect norms of beauty.

Hitler seized power in Germany after gaining a foothold in the 1932 elections. At almost the same time, Stalin, having defeated his rivals within the Communist Party, consolidated his absolute power and began to devote some of his attention to the situation of the arts in the Soviet Union. Previously, various schools had competed for the right to be seen as the foremost representative of the Communist Revolution. Stalin put an end to this squabbling by replacing a range of arts organizations with a single centralized ‘union’ per profession: a Writers’ Union, a Painters’ Union, and so on.

At the same time the slogan ‘socialist realism’ was imposed as the defining goal of Soviet art. At first sight a danger of incompatibility between the two terms seems to exist, since ‘realism’ appears to involve the relation of representation to reality and therefore to belong to the category of truth, whereas ‘socialist’ refers to an ideal and therefore involves the power of a work to promote the good. What if truth and goodness,

23 Dröge and Müller, *Die Macht der Schönheit*, 273.

‘is’ and ‘ought,’ proved not to be so harmonious? What if realism did not lead to the defense of socialism? Stalin, who liked to discuss such questions with writers, believed such incompatibility to be inconceivable. “If a writer honestly reflects the truth of life, he will inevitably come to Marxism,” he insisted.<sup>24</sup>

Andrei Zhdanov, a Party theoretician, provided the explanation of this inevitable solidarity, in a speech to the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. Socialism was the Soviet future, he said, and the seed of that future already existed in the present. Writers who realistically reported what they saw around them must therefore include the socialist future. “Soviet literature must learn to show our heroes, must learn to project itself into our future. That future is no mere utopian ideal, because the groundwork for it is already being laid today as a result of conscious planned effort.”<sup>25</sup> But was that future so certain that it could be described as present? Yes, because progress is no accident: the future will unfold according to both the laws of history and the will of the Party (as set forth in its official plans). Hence, it is perfectly predictable.

Zhdanov also reminded the Congress that during a 1932 meeting with writers Stalin had bestowed a new definition on them: they were “engineers of the human soul.” In the Russian tradition, it was commonplace for the great writer to be awarded the role of teacher of the nation. Now the teacher was to be re-

placed by the engineer, and the methods of the humble craftsman were to give way to scientific knowledge of reality and of the masses whose soul it was the writer’s task to shape.

However, unlike the Constructivists, who toyed with the same image, Stalin denied all initiative to the specialists of the spirit. The Party was in charge of construction, the master builder; the writer-engineer had only to follow orders. The need to observe reality and describe it faithfully was not even mentioned. The role of the writer, like that of the Marxist philosopher, was not to interpret the world but to change it. The works of the 1930s that adhered most closely to this program were narratives of individual or collective education. By describing the promise of the present, the writer helped bring the future into being. As the Romantics had hoped, life imitated art. Thus, Nikolai Ostrovsky’s *How the Steel Was Tempered* was the story of a man whose Bolshevik faith enabled him to overcome paralysis and blindness, while Anton Makarenko’s *Pedagogical Poem* told of the transformation of a group of young vagabonds. Literature therefore ceased to search for an absolute of its own and subordinated itself to the propaganda needs of the Party, which stood alone in possession of a worldly absolute.

Much the same can be said of the other arts, which were denied any autonomous objective. Looking for an appropriate form, artists turned, as in Nazi Germany, to the pompous bourgeois styles of the nineteenth century rather than to the revolutionary art of the twentieth, which was deemed less effective. In practice, however, even such zealous propagandists as Mayakovsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Sergei Eisenstein tangled with the Party, with the result that the first committed suicide, the

24 Report by S. I. Sechukov, *Neistovye revniteli* (Moscow: Moskovskij rabochij, 1970), 339; quoted in V. Strada, “Le réalisme socialiste,” in *Histoire de la littérature russe. Le XXe siècle*, vol. 3 (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 20.

25 *Pervyj vsesojuznyj s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelej* (Moscow, 1934), 5.

second was shot, and the third knuckled under and toed the party line.

When Stalin called Soviet writers “engineers of the human soul,” he was flattering them. In reality, they were mere technicians. The true creator of new souls, the blacksmith who hammered out a new nation, was of course Stalin himself, backed by his closest collaborators. The only true artist was the dictator – an artist close to God – since his work was the entire nation, with millions of people as his raw material. Paradoxically, we find confirmation of this idea in a text written by the greatest Soviet poet of the period, Boris Pasternak. In a poem significantly entitled “The Artist” and published in a Moscow newspaper on January 1, 1936, Pasternak drew a contrast between the solitary poet, who stays home and contemplates his soul, and the man in the Kremlin, Stalin, who was bringing to life the most audacious of dreams and who daily performed “a fugue in two voices,” combining “two extreme principles that know everything there is to know about each other,” poetry and power. He did not act as an individual would act because he was “a genius of action,” “an act of global dimension.”<sup>26</sup> What the traditional poet accomplished in his imagination, Stalin would accomplish on the scale of world history: altering the destiny of mankind.

From this standpoint, art in the narrow sense was merely one of the means available to the artist-dictator. To be sure, it was a particularly effective means, as Communist theoreticians noted and Nazi propagandists agreed. Education was another means of action, social pressure exerted through the family a third, and manipulation of informa-

tion a fourth. The state security organs, known successively as the Cheka, GPU, NKVD, and KGB, had every imaginable means of coercion at their disposal. Might they not turn out to be better “engineers of the human soul” than writers? Indeed, Maxim Gorky, the leading Soviet writer, described their agents in just those terms: “The GPU is not only the keen sword of the dictatorship of the proletariat but also a school for the reeducation of tens of thousands of people who are hostile to us.” After a visit to the White Sea-Baltic Canal, a gigantic project built by the labor of *zeks* from Soviet prison camps, he described it as a “miracle of reeducation,”<sup>27</sup> a successful transformation of human beings through labor, conveniently forgetting the fact that the canal bed was littered with the corpses of prisoners. Under totalitarianism, in Russia as in Germany, “work makes free.”

The physical transformation of the human race was not as important a part of the Communist project as it was of the Nazi project, but it did play a role. Evidence of this can be seen in Leon Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution*, published in Moscow in 1924. In the conclusion of that work, Trotsky tried to imagine the socialist society of the future. The frontier between art and industry would be abolished – everyone would be an artist – and so would the boundary between art and nature. Indeed, the man of the future would not be content simply to reshape society; he would also transform nature to suit his desires. “The current location of mountains, rivers, field and meadows, steppes, forests, and coasts cannot be regarded as definitive.” The human demiurge was truly the

26 O. Ivinskaya, *Mes années avec Pasternak* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).

27 *Belomorsko-Baltiiskij kanal imeni Stalina* (Moscow, 1934), 397; quoted in M. Heller, “Maxime Gorki,” in *Histoire de la littérature russe*, 78–82.

equal of God: he would create a world to suit his own convenience. It was in this context that Trotsky envisioned the transformation of the human element of the universe. This task would be entrusted, as we have seen, to educators, both of individuals and of society as a whole. It would also be shared by the organizers of communal life. "At the initiative of society, the family will be relieved of the tedious chore of feeding and raising children." Life in communist society could then advance not blindly but in a fully planned and controlled way.

But that was not all. Trotsky envisioned an even more radical way of obtaining the humanity he wanted: eugenics. Why should one shrink from changing the human race through selection and organic action, or what would today be called genetic manipulation? Scientific artificial selection would supplement natural selection: "Should the human race, which no longer grovels before God, the Czar, or Capital, capitulate to the obscure laws of heredity and blind sexual selection? When man becomes free, he will seek to achieve a better equilibrium in the functioning of his organs and a more harmonious development of his tissues." After a successful physical transformation, human beings "will achieve a higher level and create a superior biological and social type, a superman if you will."<sup>28</sup>

Trotsky would later be deprived of power by Stalin and never have the opportunity to put his ideas into practice, though the Nazis did. In pursuit of the goal of creating a new man and a new society, Stalin made do with more familiar levers of power, among them the party, the police, educators, writers, and artists.

28 Leon Trotsky, *Littérature et révolution* (Paris: Julliard, 1964), 213, 215, 217.

It should be said, however, that the dictator was alone in identifying his work with artistic creation. The subjugated masses, whether in Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, or Mussolini's Italy, failed to perceive the fusion of politics and art and were unaware that their lives were being shaped in accordance with a canon of beauty. The absolute in the name of which the state subjugated them, and which they were supposed to worship, wore a very different visage; it appeared as a collective, not an individual, ideal. In Fascist Italy, this new god was called the nation or the state; in Nazi Germany, it was the people; in Soviet Russia, Communism. In all three places, the high priests of the cult organized themselves as a political party. The average citizen of these states was not at liberty to shape his own life as a work of art, according to his own conception of beauty. He was obliged to conform to the common ideal. Where the dictator saw the fusion of two modern approaches to the absolute, the political and the artistic, the people saw only the imposition of a political absolute: the revolution, the party, the guide. The role of beauty was quite minor.

How are we to interpret this parallel between the ideas and forces that inspired both avant-garde artists and totalitarian dictators in the period between the two world wars? Following Walter Benjamin, it has often been noted that extremist political movements had a tendency to combine aesthetic and political considerations in two different ways: "Fascism naturally tends to aestheticize politics.... The response of communism is to politicize art."<sup>29</sup>

29 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1986).

What we see here, however, is a proximity that cannot be reduced to an instrumentalization of one project by the other. Rather, it shows us how to understand both as stemming from the same matrix. What dictators and avant-garde artists have in common is their radicalism, their fundamentalism. Both are prepared to start *ex nihilo*, to take no account of what already exists, in order to construct a work based solely on their own criteria. What differentiates them, by contrast, is the scale on which they work: that of an entire country, including its people, in one case; that of a book, a canvas, a stage, a house, a street, or, at most, a neighborhood in the other. What they have in common is their totalizing ambition, which recognizes no sacred boundary: the artist does not respect existing aesthetic canons; the dictator is ready to overturn all prior social norms. Faithful to the Promethean project that permeates all modernity, both artist and dictator propose to fabricate an entirely new art, new men, new peoples. Nothing is given; everything is the product of the will. Their ambition is infinite, yet it defines an enclosed space, because it recognizes nothing outside of it. Artists and dictators, intoxicated by pride, are united by the belief that they are masters of the entire process of construction – whether it be of works of art or of societies.

This comparison of Romantic and revolutionary projects also suggests a more profound relation between the two, going back to their origins in the nineteenth century. Consciously or unconsciously, Romantic thinkers embraced a Manichaean vision of the world: for them, artists and poets constituted the elite of mankind, and art played the role reserved for gnosis in ancient religious doctrine. The same can be said of utopian thinkers, who dreamed of collective

salvation, whether of all mankind or of a particular people. Political and aesthetic Manichaeism may find themselves at odds in certain circumstances, yet they share similar worldviews. Proponents of totalitarian doctrine may have been contemptuous of Romantic thinkers, just as Romantic thinkers may have spurned political engagement of any kind, yet both were caught up in the same historical movement. Karl Popper, who was aware of the similarity between political extremism and aesthetic extremism, ended his analysis of the origins of totalitarianism with these words: “The enchanting dream of a marvelous world is nothing more than a romantic vision.”<sup>30</sup>

We now know the damage the dream of total revolution can do when the ideal that inspires it is political in nature. The utopian visions that proposed a radiant future in the place of present mediocrity turned into the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, a remedy far worse than the disease they purported to cure. Today we spurn the peddlers of political dreams, the utopians who promised imminent happiness for all, because we have learned that such promises served to hide the sinister maneuvers of Lenin and Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler. We sometimes think of Romantic images of artistic perfection as the antithesis of those political dreams. In reality, that is far from the truth. The two were not simply associated or competitive; they grew out of the same conception of the world, the same conviction of possessing a recipe for the perfect creation, one that would not need to take any account of earlier ways of living or creating. Both posited a radical opposition between low and high, present and future, evil and good, and sought to

30 Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945).



*Tzvetan  
Todorov  
on  
nonviolence  
& violence*

eliminate the first term of each pair once and for all. But if the ideal ceases to be a horizon and turns into a rule of everyday life, disaster follows: the reign of terror. History teaches us that the Romantic dream – though infinitely less lethal than its inverted double, political utopianism – is doomed to disappointment nonetheless.

Adam Michnik

## *The Ultras of moral revolution*

*Translated by Elzbieta Matynia*

We need a moral revolution!<sup>1</sup>

Do we really need one?

But of course! Replied an ultrarevolutionary, a Jacobin.

But of course! Replied an ultrareactionary, a partisan of the Counterrevolution.

Radicals, adherents of extreme solutions, Ultras of all the colors of the rainbow, have a need for revolutionary upheavals, because only upheavals that turn the world upside down allow them to fulfill their dream of a great cleansing.

I

The Jacobin, the revolutionary Ultra, says:

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We need a moral revolution because we are surrounded by 'souls of mud' – reactionaries, hidden royalists, petty individuals, one-day patriots – who are conspiring against our revolutionary government. We need a moral revolution because vice is spreading. Reactionary newspapers are sowing lies; so one has to force them into silence. Corruption is spreading; so we must look carefully at the rich. "I regard wealth," said Robespierre, "not only as the price of crimes, but as a punishment for them; I want to be poor, so as not to be unfortunate." France is surrounded by traitors – those poisonous insects sowing shamelessness, deceit, meanness. It is they who caused the collapse of a state and society functioning according to one system of values, discovered in 1789, with rules that allowed us to maintain a dignity and a brotherhood founded upon the need to do good. We need a moral revolution today, now that we have a chance to leave the crisis of nonmemory and the curse of a fresh start. We need a cleansing, a capacity to do good for the Revolution. It also means a recognition of one's own errors – one's fatal tolerance for 'moder-

<sup>1</sup> For Professor Barbara Skarga, with a deep bow. This article was first published in Polish in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 15, 2005.

ates,' for the forgiving and the temperate.

The conservative, the reactionary Ultra, says:

We need a moral revolution because now, after the return of the Bourbons, the tide of revolution has receded. The time has passed when vice ruled triumphant over France; when regicide was a law unto itself; when those responsible for regicide dictated their own laws; when virtue was humiliated, loyalty persecuted, and property confiscated. It's true that a cruel despotism and the omnipotent guillotine, that revolution – this huge gutter of filth – polluted France. Nevertheless, France still has many virtues; so one can, wrote Joseph de Maistre, "start the nation anew." France, washed clean from the dirt of Jacobinism, restored to its monarchic and Catholic roots, will become a symbol of reconciliation between the King and his subjects. We need a moral revolution in order to restore the dream of a state and society functioning according to one system of values, with rules that allow us to maintain the loyalty and dignity befitting royal subjects, always inclined to do good. We need a moral revolution because today everything is possible, 'even the resurrection of the dead,' not to mention the resurrection of 'our own moral subjectivity.' One must avoid at all costs a compromise with the bastards of Jacobinism and Bonapartism, who want a constitutional monarchy, that is, a king without royal power – they don't understand that 'every constitution is regicide.'

## II

What familiar voices despite such different historical costumes. I hear them continuously today – with mounting

sadness and amazement. After all, those who echo them ought to know where it all leads.

Does history repeat itself? Karl Marx once wrote, paraphrasing Hegel, that each historical fact repeats itself twice – the original drama turns into farce. Marx was wrong: history repeats itself much more frequently. The world is still full of inquisitors and heretics, liars and those lied to, terrorists and the terrorized. There is still someone dying at Thermopylae, someone drinking a glass of hemlock, someone crossing the Rubicon, someone drawing up a proscription list. And nothing suggests that these things will stop repeating themselves.

We like to reiterate that history is a teacher of life. If this is indeed true, we listen very poorly to its lessons. That is why I am reflecting today on the Ultras of the Revolution and the Ultras of the Counterrevolution, who dreamt about a Big Cleansing and a Moral Revolution – not so that the language of that reign of terror may never repeat itself, but because I'm convinced it will inevitably do so.

## III

After a victorious civil war, Lucius Cornelius Sulla, the Roman dictator, began his rule by taking revenge on his opponents. He did it with an exacting method, namely, by ordering the drawing up of proscription lists, that is, lists of outlawed enemies – and designating a reward for their heads. "With nerve-racking premeditation," write historians Max Cary and Howard Hayes Scullard, "Sulla prolonged the listing of new victims, announcing from time to time additional proscription lists. Terror reigned. This modernized system of

mass murders was aimed with particular viciousness at those adversaries who were wealthy. Their property was confiscated, and the cities of Italy became theaters of execution.”<sup>2</sup> This was the purpose of the proscription lists Sulla announced: it was terrifying to find one’s name on such a list.

For centuries the list of names has been an irremovable element of social history: the lists of witches burned at the stake; the lists of heretics examined by the Inquisition; the lists of Jesuits condemned to exile; the lists of Masons; the lists of Jews; the lists of Christians suspected of Jewish background; the lists of Communists and those suspected of having Communist sympathies; the lists of royalists and other enemies of revolution; the lists of agents of Tsarist Okhrana; the lists of hostages; and the lists of those beheaded by guillotine or axe, or those who were shot.

Executions were usually preceded by the lists of suspects – those suspected of revolutionary or subversive activities, of a sinful past or present, of betrayal. Suspicion marched ahead of accusation and execution.

## IV

The French Revolution overturned an absolute monarchy and established a constitutional monarchy. “This constitution was also vitiated,” wrote Hegel, “by the existence of absolute mistrust; the dynasty lay under suspicion, because it had lost the power it formerly enjoyed .... Neither government nor constitution could be maintained on this footing, and the ruin of both was the result.”

2. H. H. Scullard and M. Cary, *Dzieje Rzymu* (Warszawa: n.p., 1992); translated from the Polish edition.

Hegel later writes:

A government of some kind, however, is always in existence. The question presents itself then, Whence did it emanate? Theoretically, it proceeded from the people; really and truly, from the National Convention and its Committees. The forces now dominant are the abstract principles – Freedom, and, as it exists within the limits of the Subjective Will – Virtue. This Virtue has now to conduct the government in opposition to the Many, whom their corruption and attachment to old interests, or a liberty that has degenerated into license, and the violence of their passions, render unfaithful to virtue. Virtue here is a simple abstract principle and distinguishes the citizens into two classes only – those who are favorably disposed and those who are not. But disposition can only be recognized and judged of by disposition. *Suspicion* therefore is in the ascendant; but virtue, as soon as it becomes liable to suspicion, is already condemned. Suspicion attained a terrible power and brought to the scaffold the Monarch, whose subjective will was in fact the religious conscience of a Catholic. Robespierre set up the principle of Virtue as supreme, and it may be said that with this man Virtue was an earnest matter. *Virtue* and *Terror* were the order of the day; for Subjective Virtue, whose sway is based on disposition only, brings with it the most fearful tyranny. It exercises its power without legal formalities, and the punishment it inflicts is very simple – *Death*.

## V

And it had begun so beautifully. The Revolution began under a hopeful sign of Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood. The Bastille – a bastion and symbol of tyranny – was captured. King Louis XVI

chose a path of compromise with the revolutionary camp; absolutism collapsed. It looked like ‘the King with the people, the people with the King.’

Speaking parenthetically: in July of 1789, the Bastille, where opponents of the King had been imprisoned, had only seven prisoners – four counterfeiters, two mentally ill, and one imprisoned at the request of his father. Such was this bastion of tyranny. Such a bastion; such a tyranny. It was already absolutism with broken teeth.

In spite of that, an historic event took place, the event of an epoch: in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen it was proclaimed that people are born and remain free and equal under the law. The words of Marie Joseph La Fayette were repeated: “People become free as soon as they want to be free.” And the revolutionaries repeated: “It was different in England, where so much blood was shed; our revolution triumphed almost without bloodshed.” And they repeated that the Revolution opened the gate through which France advanced from tyranny to freedom.

## VI

The Restoration also began beautifully. After a quarter century of revolutionary and Napoleonic turmoil, there began – along with Louis XVIII – a time of gentle words and conciliatory gestures. François René de Chateaubriand, the most distinguished Bourbon ideologue, wrote in 1814 that Louis XVIII is “a prince who is known for his enlightened mind, is unsusceptible to prejudice, and is a stranger to vengeance.” He quoted the words of Louis XVI: “I forgive with all my heart those who for no reason from my side became my enemies, and I ask God to forgive them.”

Speaking on behalf of the supporters of the Restoration, Chateaubriand declared: “We want a monarchy based on the principle of equal rights, the principle of morality, civic freedom, political and religious tolerance.”

The Restoration did not end in words. Louis XVIII proclaimed a charter that was an act of reconciliation between the Restoration and the Revolution. It guaranteed the inviolability of property from the Napoleonic period and maintained the nobility of the status of the empire; but it also declared the equality of citizens and their fundamental freedoms. And it even promised amnesty to those who were involved in regicide.

Louis XVIII wanted to reassure Frenchmen that he did not want revenge, as his enemies claimed. He declared that only “a system of moderation could prevent France from tearing itself apart with its own hands.”

## VII

Every revolution has its own dynamic; each is too slow, unfinished, betrayed. From within each revolution is a demand for acceleration, completion, protection against betrayal.

On the very threshold of the French Revolution the demand that the monarch give in to the National Assembly was revolutionary. A compromise between the Revolution and the monarch on behalf of constitutional rule and a Declaration of the Rights of Man was celebrated as a victory of the revolutionaries. But soon this compromise, built on a dualism (the self-limitation of the monarch in his power and of the Revolution in its demands), turned out to be fragile. The radical monarchists saw in it the capitulation of the King; the radical revolutionaries saw it as a betray-



al of their ideals. The Revolution ought to be crushed by the army. The King ought to be removed; long live the Republic, retorted the revolutionary Jacobins.

The Jacobins came out on top. Monarchists escaped abroad, and the King was imprisoned, judged, and guillotined. Any voice against the dissolution of the monarchy – the constitutional one – was called treason, as were voices that demanded a normal judicial process or at least a renunciation of the death penalty.

The Revolution, begun in the name of freedom, transformed itself into an aspiration for a republican order against the constitutional monarchy. It was not about freedom anymore but about the Republic, and any critic of this solution was suspected of treason. And the controversy over the Republic transformed itself into a ruthless fight for power in the revolutionary camp.

## VIII

Every restoration has its own dynamic; each is too slow, unfinished, betrayed. Each restoration hides within itself the guardians of the holy flame of past institutions and customs – the Ultras. The Ultras have to reject any compromise between tradition and revolution, because the Revolution was for them an absolute evil, without a grain of good – the height of absurdity and moral decay. It is “a pure impurity,” said Joseph de Maistre. “It is a wonder of decay, a wonder of absurdity, and a wonder of banditry.”

For an Ultra then, the Charter of Louis XVIII was nonsense, an absurdity, “a work of madness and darkness.” One has to break with the chimera of the Rights of Man, restore censorship and

the privileges of the aristocracy. And the Catholic Church has to guard against “the scum of equality.” The Ultras clearly had nothing against France tearing itself apart with its own hands.

## IX

There is no reason to question the good intentions of the Jacobins, those Ultras of the Revolution. They really wanted to save the Revolution from the royalists, from foreign armies, from superstition, from treason and corruption. They, diligent readers of the Encyclopedists and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, really wanted France to be ruled by virtue.

But in order to fight monarchists and émigré aristocrats, the Jacobins confiscated the aristocrats’ properties and closed their newspapers; to win the war, they demanded unity around the revolutionary government and punished anyone who deviated. To remove superstition, they demanded the loyalty of Catholic priests and exiled those who refused to take an oath. To prevent treason and corruption, they announced a ‘Great Vigilance’ with regard to traitors and the corrupt. Moreover, they introduced a law on suspects – each loyal citizen was obliged to denounce suspects. The measure of revolutionary fervor was the number of denunciations. Long lists of suspects were compiled, then long lists of those imprisoned for being suspect. France was taken over by fear. The Reign of Terror had begun. The theater of the revolutionary guillotine was launched.

The Jacobins saw in the guillotine an instrument for the defense of the Revolution. They believed that it was they who were the Revolution and that they were the guarantors of the durability and continuity of the rule of Freedom and Virtue. This is why they defended

their power without scruples, and why any critic was branded a traitor to the Revolution.

It all began with the trial of Louis XVI. Nobody cared to collect any evidence of guilt or observe normal judicial procedures. The King was guilty because he was King. He had to be guillotined; the people had sentenced him through their representatives. A motion was made to ask French citizens whether they supported the carrying out of the death penalty. Antoine Louis de Saint-Just, a Jacobin Ultra, retorted passionately: "This appeal aims at creating a conflict between the people and the Legislature, and therefore a weakening of the people. This intrigue is a way to bring back the tyrant to his palace." The crime has wings, argued Saint-Just. It will spread. This intrigue to save the King through "votes bought by foreign gold" will win the ear of the people. But the monarchy is an eternal crime, and the monarch is a barbarian, a tyrant, and a foreigner. The public good requires the death of the King, and the only ones who could think otherwise are either allies of the tyrant or people who have been bribed.

After such arguments, which terrorized the National Assembly, the execution of the King was a mere formality. Justice and the public good – as understood by the Jacobins – won out over the logic of mercy, forgiveness, and conciliation.

Not only was Louis XVI guillotined, but symbolically the old order was sentenced to death. The guillotine for the King defined the norms of the new order. Freedom and Virtue entered into a marriage with the guillotine.

## X

In any revolution the dialectics of moderation and radicalism takes place. At each revolutionary turn, yesterday's radical person turns out to be today's moderate. If he is lucky, he is accused of cowardly opportunism; if he is not lucky, of treason and participation in counterrevolutionary conspiracy.

Vladimir Lenin, quite fluent in revolutions, wrote this about the Girondistes (moderates): "They wanted to deal with autocracy gently, in a reformatory way, without hurting the aristocracy, the gentry, the court – without destroying anything." But the Jacobins – according to Lenin – wanted people "to deal with the monarchy and the aristocracy 'in a plebeian way,' mercilessly exterminating the enemies of freedom, strangling by force their resistance, without making any concessions on behalf of the accursed legacy of subjection."

This is how Lenin imagined the Jacobin moral revolution, and this is how – in a Bolshevik way – he implemented it personally. It is not difficult to understand why he glorified Jacobin terror, calling it "plebeian." It is more difficult to understand why the gentle and compromising path of the Girondistes deserved contempt; and why the Girondistes were still accused of moral relativism, of blurring the boundary between good and evil – why the aspiration to pluralism and compromise with opponents was taken as an abandonment of moral principles.

The Jacobins perceived their adversaries as conspirators against Freedom and Virtue. In these they believed fanatically, but they understood them in a peculiar way. The symbol of Freedom was the capture of the Bastille, from which seven people were freed, while in the

prison of France ruled by the Jacobins, there were thousands. And Virtue? The Reign of Terror, as Friedrich Engels, also interested in the topic of revolution, soberly wrote, was “a rule by people who spread fear around them, and on the other hand it was a rule by people who were themselves full of fear.” Those were “cruelties committed by people who themselves were in fear,” and in this way they reassured themselves.

Fear and denunciations, those were the methods of Jacobin Virtue.

The Jacobins declared that they defended Freedom against treason, against enemy conspiracy, but conspiracy, simply speaking, was opposition to Jacobin rule and the methods of governance applied by the Ultras. Conspiracy, in the opinion of Furet, an historian of the Revolution, is an idea typical of the traditional religious mentality, which is “accustomed to treating evil as a product of hidden forces.” It is also an idea characteristic of revolutionary consciousness. Thanks to this idea, any obstacle could be explained as the result of enemy actions – high prices, food shortages, corruption scandals. The belief in a conspiracy “reinforces the horror of the crime because it cannot be admitted, and expresses the cleansing function of its elimination; it frees one from having to point out the perpetrators of the crime and from revealing what their plans were, because one cannot describe perpetrators who are hidden and whose goals are abstract.”

Saint-Just unmasked the Girondistes: he said that within the very body of the National Convention conspirators aimed at the restoration of tyranny had built a nest. Their plans were “sinister” and their actions “refined.” They were neither courageous nor open enemies of Freedom. They spoke its language; they appeared to be its defenders.

The conspirators were unmasked – some of them escaped, the rest were imprisoned. “Not all the imprisoned,” explained Saint-Just, “are guilty. The majority of them were just confused. But in the struggle with the conspiracy, the salvation of the nation is the highest law.” Then, it is very difficult to distinguish an error from a crime, and one has to sacrifice the freedom of a few in order to save all. A faction of the conspirators, “secretive and politically sophisticated, seemingly caring about freedom and order, skillfully opposed freedom with freedom, did not distinguish inertia from order and peace, nor republican spirit from anarchy.” It walked with the people and freedom to direct them toward their goals – toward monarchy – “by making current conditions and the horror of these days look repugnant.”

This is the language of Saint-Just, whom Albert Camus considered a great man. Robespierre was also called ‘The Incorruptible,’ ‘The Spotless.’ Yet it is they, Robespierre and Saint-Just, who became symbols of the cruel Terror, the monstrosity of informers, and the guillotine, which killed anybody who got in the way.

It is worth remembering that behind the backs of those idealists of cruelty and apostles of terror hovered out-and-out scoundrels, who used revolutionary slogans and the guillotine to settle dirty accounts, to blackmail, and to pursue shady interests. The idealist fanatic is followed by thugs, scoundrels, and hypocrites. This is the fate of every revolution. But the scoundrel is less interesting – he appears wherever one can fish in murky waters, get rich by informing on others, get promoted through intrigue, get famous by kicking someone who is down.

More interesting is the idealist: this one is ready to give his life for his ideals,

but more willingly he puts others to death on behalf of those ideals. Before he puts them to death by guillotine, though, he puts them to death with words. A fanatic idealist, he reaches for mud before he reaches for his sword. Before he exterminates his enemy, he has to dehumanize him, defile him. If the absolutism of Jacobin Virtue was to justify absolute terror, then their enemies – the victims of terror – had also to be absolutely evil, the embodiments of total treason and perfect degradation.

Among the Jacobins – including the leaders – were plenty of corrupt people hungry for power, privilege, and money; people guilty of corruption and theft; people with many complexes; ne’er-do-wells; incurable schemers; careerists at the service of any government. For idealists, it could not have been very pleasant. But, as they say in Polish, when you chop wood, the chips fly. If an informer served Virtue, his very contribution eliminated all character flaws. If the intriguer hurt the enemies of Virtue, the intrigue became the servant of the Revolution. The service of Virtue manifested itself in only one way: hatred of the enemies of Virtue. Hatred – as Barbara Skarga has recently reminded us – is a feeling that does not know how to look at the world other than from the perspective of negation. Even in what to others seems valuable and important, it notices exclusively trickery and deceit. Because, for one who hates, this is the natural state of the human condition. Hatred does not aim at improving. Quite to the contrary, it favors the existing situation and with satisfaction cites every error and unsuccessful endeavor, confirming the correctness of its attitude. But above all, with such an orientation, it wants to poison everybody around. And it begins to ooze out until it embraces the whole society.

France ruled by the Jacobins was taken over by the madness of searching for enemies and traitors. Informers, revolutionary tribunals, guillotines – everybody was suspect. Denunciations triumphed along with meanness and fear – all in the name of Virtue.

In trying to describe the people of hatred, Skarga writes about those who have a dispersed identity, about people who are “weak” and “susceptible to influence,” “ambition-driven,” “pathetic” people. Indeed, there were plenty of those in Jacobin clubs and revolutionary tribunals. But more fascinating are the strong people, the honest ones, the idealistic, who are blinded by the drug of revolution and transformed into skillful manipulators, cynics of the political game, demagogues of fluent speech and dried-up heart – people of a religious sect transformed into a gang of bandits.

The idealist fanatic, the Jacobin Ultra, believed that one could build a better world according to the ideals of Rousseau and through revolutionary methods, by excluding from public life the people of the *ancien régime*, which had been based on the oppression of subjects by the mighty of the world. Rousseau said, “I hate subjection because it is the source of all evil.” The Ultra Jacobin believed that the revolution would help to end all evil. This is why the Jacobin never spoke in his own name; but in the name of the Revolution and the Nation, in the name of Freedom and Virtue, in the name of those humiliated by subordination, he sent to the guillotine people suspected of vice. Virtue is possible and fascinating only when surrounded by vice. This is why the ‘just and spotless’ need popular injustice and all-embracing sin.

The Jacobin “glorifies the poor,” observes Hannah Arendt, so that “his praise of suffering as the spring of Vir-

tue” becomes dangerous, usually serving as a “mere pretext for lust for power.”<sup>3</sup> Was the Jacobin sincere in declaring his compassion for the poor and the suffering? We have no reason to doubt it. On the other hand, it was not a compassion for any specific, individual persons. The Jacobin identified with the “boundless suffering of the masses,” the suffering of millions. “By the same token,” wrote Arendt, “Robespierre lost the capacity to establish and hold fast to rapports with persons in their singularity; the ocean of suffering around him”<sup>4</sup> drowned all particular reasons – reasons of friendship, truthfulness, loyalty to principles. The Revolution in the name of Virtue and Freedom turned into a dictatorship of sacrilegious liars – the Jacobins in power became perfectly indifferent to the fate of individuals who had been victimized or humiliated. Such people could already be sacrificed without scruples in the name of Revolutionary Cleansing. The cleansing became a purge – a purge that was meant to wash the dirt of hypocrisy and duplicity from the clean face of revolutionary Virtue.

“The Revolution,” wrote Arendt, “before it proceeded to devour its own children, unmasked them.” In the end, “No one is left among the chief actors who does not stand accused, or at least suspected, of corruption, duplicity, betrayal, conspiracy with the court, and accepting money and instructions from London or Vienna.”<sup>5</sup>

Preparing the accusation of Danton, Robespierre wrote in his notebook:

3 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 89.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 98.

There is in Danton a certain feature which reveals a thankless and petty soul: he praised the recent productions of Desmoulins, at the Jacobins he dared to demand for them freedom of the press, when I suggested to them the privilege of burning. [...] When I showed him the system of calumny of the Girondistes, he answered, ‘What does that matter to me? Public opinion is a whore, posterity is nonsense!’ The word Virtue made Danton laugh: ‘There is no more reliable virtue,’ he said laughingly, ‘than that which I cultivate every night with my wife.’ How could this man, to whom any moral idea was alien, be a defender of Freedom? Another maxim of Danton’s was that one ought to use rascals; that is why he was surrounded by the dirtiest intrigants. He believed in a tolerance for vice, which was to ensure him as many supporters as there are corrupted people in this world. [...] At every time of crisis Danton took a vacation.

When the Jacobins were cursed,

he remained silent. When he was attacked himself, he forgave. All the time he appeared to the Girondistes as a tolerant mediator, he bragged publicly that he had never denounced any enemy of freedom, he constantly reached out to them with an olive branch. [...] He did not want the death of the tyrant; he wanted people to be satisfied with his exile. [...] He desired amnesty for all of the guilty; therefore he wanted counter-revolution.

This is an accounting of Danton’s crimes drafted by Robespierre. And a close friend of Danton said to the Jacobins: if you kill the Girondistes, the next ones will do the same with you. And that is what happened. The day before his execution Danton was to say: “In revolutions power remains at the end with the biggest scoundrels.”



Led to the square where the guillotine loomed, he was to shout, “Robespierre! You will be following me!” And that is what happened four months later. Louis Auguste Blanqui, an icon of French revolutionaries in the nineteenth century, imprisoned in 1848, prepared a ruthlessly honest portrait of Robespierre, whom he called “a would-be Napoleon.” He wrote: “No other personality was as destructive as he was; when he demanded that others give up their personal dreams, it was only so that they could put them onto the altar of his own pride.” The National Convention, the highest revolutionary power, “was like a herd speechless from fear, standing at the gate to the slaughterhouse. All tongues were frozen, all eyes were glazed, all gestures were petrified in horror.”

Robespierre declared: “We need to instill in each person a religious respect for man, this deep sense of obligation that constitutes the only guarantee for introducing a state of social happiness.” Blanqui commented:

It was apparently in order to instill religious respect of man for man that Robespierre sent to the guillotine all his rivals, including the least dangerous opponents. A furtive glance was enough to send his best friend to the guillotine. Camille Desmoulins, a friend from youth and a comrade in the struggle and an admirer, was executed because he dared to say ‘Burning is not an answer.’

All of those godlike warriors were cruel people, hungry for power, armed with hypocrisy and their blessed stilettos. Robespierre, mercilessly beheading all those who opposed his ambitions or awakened distrust, constantly presented himself as a victim. On the heaps of corpses murdered by his hand, he con-

sistently repeated the pathetic refrain of Socrates: “They want to force me to drink hemlock . . . and I know that I will drink it.” A magnificent pretext for serving it to his opponents.

For Robespierre, the end justified the means, even the most vicious means, when the real goal, wrote Blanqui, was “the desire for power.”

## XI

But every restoration also swings from moderation to radicalism. Every restoration is unfinished, inconsistent; it does not fulfill the expectations of its supporters.

After initial declarations on behalf of moderation, conciliation, and accord comes a moment when the Ultras of restoration – also known as White Jacobins – feel disappointed. In France, after a short honeymoon, Napoleon returned to power for a hundred days; after those hundred days, the Ultras retaliated against the thankless French. If the symbol of the beginning of restoration were the appeals to forget about the hatred dividing France, now the Ultras declared that conciliatory Louis XVIII was a “Jacobin with a lily.” They called to stop the appeals for reconciliation because there can be no reconciliation between the party of the hangmen and the party of the victims. The time of doing justice had begun – in the name, of course, of the Great Cleansing of France from this hellish dirt of both the Revolution and the empire. Because – the Ultra argued – revolution was the child of haughtiness and madness, which fed upon corpses; it was a monster enjoying looting, arson, and butchering. Now one ought to bring back the old prerevolutionary laws, customs, and privileges for the gentry, aristocracy, and the Church –

as well as discipline and censorship. "The freedom to print and freedom of the press," said the Ultra, "are the most horrible plague of our unfortunate times."

And he was sincere in these confessions: he believed that the return to the prerevolutionary golden age is necessary and realistic, but he warned that the revolutionary forces are still powerful, that the majority of the positions in the administration are still occupied by Jacobins and Bonapartists. This is why a Great Cleansing is needed. "The time for handling with kid gloves is over!"

And indeed it was over. The White Terror flooded France with blood; paramilitary units of royalist guerillas introduced a climate of vengeance, inquisition, and repression aimed at all suspects; and anybody could be suspected of Jacobinism, of Bonapartism, of anything. In Avignon, the Napoleonic Marshal Brune was murdered. His body was dragged down the street and thrown in to the Rhône.

The royal government released proscription lists of enemies; censorship was restored. A ban was announced on "provocative shouting and subversive journals." The newly created lists of suspects were kept secret. After the first trials, the first heads rolled. The acts of the executioner brought order and calm. "There is a need for chains, hangmen, torturers, death; let the heads of the Jacobins roll; there is the need for a fear that redeems."

Among those the Chamber of Peers judged was a famous Napoleonic Marshal, Michel Ney. The perfidy of this trial was that those who were to sentence him were his comrades-in-arms. And it was to be chaired by Marshal Jeannot de Moncey. Distressed by the situation, de Moncey sent a letter to Louis XVIII in which he wrote: "Allow me to ask

His Majesty, where were his accusers when Ney was fighting on so many battlefields? Can France forget about a hero of the Bersina battle? Am I to put to death someone who has saved so many French lives? I know that I am arousing the hatred of the courtiers, but standing near my grave, I can say, like one of your distinguished ancestors: 'All lost but honor.' I will die satisfied." For these words de Moncey was thrown out of the Chamber of Peers and locked up in a fortress.

The witness for the defense was Marshal Louis Nicolas Davout, who defended Ney to the very end. Unfortunately, other marshals were short on honor and courage. So Ney was sentenced and shot. In the name of the restoration of knightly virtues, people were used as marshals who had behaved despicably, choosing obsequiousness, cowardice, and betrayal.

The violence that was to guarantee Virtue became an instrument of villainy. The moderate and the lenient in the camp of restoration were losing; the Ultras were winning. Their restoration was to be the Grand Counterrevolution, that is, revolution – also moral – with a minus sign. All changes introduced by the Revolution were to be erased; all the chimeras of the philosophers of the Enlightenment concerning the state of nature, the social contract, the constitution, the rights of man and the citizen, and parliamentary representation were to be abandoned. The absolute monarchy was to be restored, as this was the only way to return to God's order guarded by the Catholic Church.

Tradition provided an easy model: the Inquisition. The Spanish Inquisition, argued the Ultra, understood that one needs to beat to death any serious assassination of religion. Nobody has the

right to criticize the kings of Spain. They know their enemies, and under the law they can punish them. Nobody ought to feel sorry for evildoers, who deserve the punishment for questioning Spanish dogmas. Those who spread heresies ought to be put among the worst criminals. After all, heresy led Europe to the Thirty Years' War.

If there had been an active Inquisition in France, the Revolution would never have happened. Therefore, the ruler who does without the stakes of the Inquisition deals a deadly blow to humanity. "The Inquisition on its own," argued de Maistre, the perfect Ultra, "is a blessed institution that provides Spain with an extraordinary service which a sectarian and philosophical fanaticism has derided, and shamelessly."

The direct consequence of such reasoning was a law on sacrilege that the Ultras introduced during the Restoration. It stated that "sacrilege is recognized as any active insult to religion made consciously and out of hatred. The profanation of Church vessels is subject to the death penalty. The profanation of consecrated bread calls for the same punishment as parricide."

We should add that those guilty of parricide first have their hand cut off and then their head. The Ultra argued eagerly that "as far as someone guilty of sacrilege is concerned, in sentencing him to death one is after all simply sending him to face his natural judge." The author of those words, Louis Gabriel Bonald, a philosopher of the Ultra camp, certainly believed that it would serve the Cleansing and the Moral Revolution.

Chateaubriand – an unquestioned legitimist – tried unsuccessfully to argue that the principle of religion is mercy, and if it needs the guillotine it is only a triumph for their [the Church's] mar-

tyrs. The Ultras won. Because they believed that only the use of similarly forceful means could prevent huge political defeats and push back particularly forceful attacks on the state. And the most effective of those means was violence; it is violence that creates order, "that stops the hand of man, and threatens with chains, with the sword, with the knout, and with the guillotine." Against rebels one ought to send "soldiers and executioners."

The executioner is the guarantor of order who struggles with chaos, dirt, and rebellion. The executioner is a man who metes out punishment.

De Maistre asked:

Who is this inexplicable being, who, when there are so many agreeable, lucrative, honest and even honourable professions to choose among, in which a man can exercise his skill or his powers, has chosen that of torturing or killing his own kind? This head, this heart, are they made like our own? Is there not something in them that is peculiar, and alien to our nature; Myself, I have no doubt about this. He is made like us externally. He is born like all of us. But he is an extraordinary being, and it needs a special decree to bring him into existence as a member of the human family – a fiat of the creative power. He is created like a law unto himself.

Consider what he is in the opinion of mankind, and try to conceive, if you can, how he can manage to ignore or defy this opinion. Hardly has he been assigned to his proper dwelling-place, hardly has he taken possession of it, when others remove their homes elsewhere whence they can no longer see him. In the midst of this desolation, in this sort of vacuum formed round him, he lives alone with his mate and his young, who acquaint him with the sound of the human voice: without them he would hear nothing but groans.

The gloomy signal is given; an abject servitor of justice knocks on his door to tell him that he is wanted; he goes; he arrives in a public square covered by a dense, trembling mob. A poisoner, a parricide, a man who has committed sacrilege is tossed to him: he seizes him, stretches him, ties him to a horizontal cross, he raises his arm; there is a horrible silence; there is no sound but that of bones cracking under the bars, and the shrieks of the victim. He unties him. He puts him on the wheel; the shattered limbs are entangled in the spokes; the head hangs down; the hair stands up, and the mouth gaping open like a furnace from time to time emits only a few bloodstained words to beg for death. He has finished. His heart is beating, but it is with joy: he congratulates himself, he says in his heart, 'Nobody quarters as well as I.' He steps down. He holds out his bloodstained hand; the justice throws him – from a distance – a few pieces of gold, which he catches through a double row of human beings standing back in horror. He sits down to table, and he eats. Then he goes to bed and sleeps. And on the next day, when he wakes, he thinks of something totally different from what he did the day before. Is he a man? Yes. God receives him in his shrines, and allows him to pray. He is not a criminal. Nevertheless no tongue dares declare that he is virtuous, that he is an honest man, that he is estimable. No moral praise seems appropriate to him, for everyone else is assumed to have relations with human beings: he has none.

And yet all greatness, all power, all subordination rest on the executioner. He is the terror and the bond of human association. Remove this mysterious agent from the world, and in an instant order yields to chaos: thrones fall, society disappears. God, who has created sovereignty, has also made punishment; he has fixed the

earth upon these two poles: 'For Jehovah is master of the twin poles and upon them he maketh turn the world' ....<sup>6</sup>

"Translating this apology of the executioner," the modernist writer Boleslaw Micinski wrote in an essay, *On Hatred, Cruelty, and Abstraction*, "I had the impression that my fingers were stained with blood."

One must analyze the style of this excerpt to notice," wrote Micinski, "that the source of this spirit is sadism. From behind the mask of the defender of conservative principles, "the face of a sadist appears." And also the conviction arises that "man is evil and must therefore be ruled with an iron truncheon."

So much for Micinski. Isaiah Berlin, after reading *The Saint Petersburg Dialogues*, observed that de Maistre is sincerely convinced that "men can only be saved by being hemmed in by the terror of the authorities [ ... ] must be purged by perpetual suffering, must be humbled by being made conscious of their stupidity, malice, and helplessness at every turn. [ ... ] Their appointed masters must do the duty laid upon them by their maker who has made nature a hierarchical order by the ruthless imposition of the rules – not sparing themselves – and equally ruthless extermination of the enemy."<sup>7</sup> All in the name of Moral Counterrevolution and Cleansing.

6 Joseph De Maistre, [http://www.newphilsoc.org.uk/Freedom/berlinday/a\\_great\\_and\\_virtuous\\_man.htm](http://www.newphilsoc.org.uk/Freedom/berlinday/a_great_and_virtuous_man.htm); *St. Petersburg Dialogues*, quoted in Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 116 – 117; also in [http://maistre.ath.cx:8000/st\\_petersburg.html](http://maistre.ath.cx:8000/st_petersburg.html), quoted in *ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*, 118 – 119.

## XII

Who is the enemy poisoning the order of Freedom and Virtue during the Revolution? Who is the enemy destroying God's order on earth and the established hierarchy with Christ's envoy at the top? The Red Ultra will answer the same way as the White Jacobin: this enemy is a sect. There exists in France a political sect, argued Saint-Just. This sect that poisons public life is made out of monarchists both open and hidden, who wanted to remove Louis XVI but did not want to end the monarchy. Today the members of this sect demand moderation and leniency, amnesty for the enemies, and reconciliation with the enemies of Virtue. Those people are criminal and arrogant; they are émigrés and British agents. They are corrupted and depraved, thieves, bribe-takers, and dishonest speculators; people who are weak and vain, malcontents and sowers of disagreement, hypocrites and fruitless shouters.

Public life is entangled in the web of this sect. Should not such a society – in which self-interest and envy are the hidden springs of many enemies and criminals who through bribery want to escape justice – launch the greatest possible effort to cleanse itself? And those who try to stop this cleansing, are they not trying to corrupt society? And those who want to corrupt it, are they not trying to destroy it?

"There is no hope of prosperity," explained Saint-Just, "if the last enemy of Freedom would breathe; you ought to punish not only traitors but also those who are neutral; you ought to punish everyone in the Republic who is passive and does not do anything for it." The flame of Freedom would cleanse us just as liquid crude iron throws off any dirt.

"It is time," appealed Saint-Just, "for everybody to return to moral principles, and for terror to be used against the enemies. It is time to declare war against wild corruption, and to require everybody to lead modest and frugal lives and to observe civic virtues, and to wipe out the enemies of the people who favor crime and the passions of the depraved."

In this way Saint-Just declared war on the sect and announced a Great Cleansing and Moral Revolution.

And what was 'the sect' for de Maistre? They are those who try to corrupt people or overthrow the existing order. "They are the disturbers and subverts," wrote Berlin. "To the Protestants and Jansenists he now adds Deists and Atheists, Freemasons and Jews, Scientists and Democrats, Jacobins, Liberals, Utilitarians, Anti-clericals, Egalitarians, Perfectibilians, Materialists, Idealists, Lawyers, Journalists, Secular Reformers, and intellectuals of every breed; all those who appeal to abstract principles, who put faith in individual reason or individual conscience; believers in individual liberty or the rational organization of society; reformers and revolutionaries: these are the enemy of the settled order and must be rooted out at all costs. This is '*la secte*,' and it never sleeps; it is forever boring from within."<sup>8</sup>

This sect ought to be annihilated by force, firmly and mercilessly, in the name of the divine order. De Maistre – like any conservative – was convinced that those who launch revolutions in the name of freedom end up as tyrants. Summarizing the Jacobins' doctrine, he remarked sarcastically what people hear from their leaders: "You think that you do not want this law, but we want to assure you that in fact you really desire it. If you dare to reject it, we will punish

8 Ibid., 119.



you by shooting you for not wanting what you want.” And that is what they do, concluded de Maistre.

One ought to agree with this ‘White Jacobin,’ the most distinguished of the Ultras. This is exactly how the Jacobins, the Red Ultras, acted. They proclaimed themselves the emancipation of Freedom and Virtue; they privatized the Revolution in order to privatize the nation. The guillotine caused all the French people to become the property of the Revolution. But the White Ultras privatized God and proclaimed themselves the emancipation of the evangelical teachings, while undertaking, intellectually and practically, an effort to convert the French using the executioner’s axe.

Blanqui accused Robespierre of sending to the guillotine spokesmen of atheism in order to win back the favor of the Church. This is why he presented as an offering to Catholic priests the head of Chaumette, a preacher of atheism. Blanqui wrote: “What a pleasant surprise it was for the sons and heirs of the Inquisition to see that God had again found Himself under the care of the guillotine. The beautiful times of the mightiness of the divine spirit could be reborn as heads rolled to honor the immortality of the soul.” Heretics were made dependent upon the supreme ruler of the torturer. The guillotine had replaced the stake.

Let us set aside the tone of anticlericalism typical of French revolutionary circles, here carried *ad absurdum*, because it is absurd to think that Catholic priests appreciated the cult of the Supreme Being created by Robespierre. Let us emphasize, rather, the well-captured intimate relationship between the guillotine and the stake. The guillotine of the Jacobins was the natural daughter of the Inquisition’s stake. And it doesn’t really matter at this point that it was an illegit-

imate daughter. Both the stake and the guillotine were to serve the Cleansing, Moral Revolution, but they have always served the arbitrary claims of the authorities, convinced that they have Absolute Virtue at their disposal.

And such thinking has always ended badly.

### XIII

The Red Ultras, whether Robespierre or Saint-Just, have legions of defenders. So does the White Jacobin de Maistre.

The defenders emphasize that Robespierre was spotless, incorruptible, indomitable; that Saint-Just, a fascinating dreamer, was a good and pure man; that de Maistre was famous for his personal charm and kindness toward people, and that his apology for the executioner was the result of his horror at the Jacobin terror, a kind of revenge, as he saw in the victim of the executioner either Robespierre or Saint-Just, not just an ordinary mortal.

I gladly agree with the advocates of the Red Ultras and the White Jacobins. But in the rhetoric and mentality of the Red Ultras we can recognize, after all, the early outlines of the rhetoric and mentality of the Bolsheviks; in the icon of Robespierre we can see Lenin and Stalin; and in the terror of the Jacobin guillotine we can see a preview of the platoons of CheKa death squads.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, in the catalog of opponents of the Divine Order prepared by de Maistre we see the same people twentieth-century Fascism added to their enemy list.

“De Maistre’s violent hatred of free traffic in ideas,” wrote Isaiah Berlin,

9 VeCheKa, known better as CheKa, stands for Vserossyckaya Chrezvychainaya Komissiya (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission).

“and his contempt for all intellectuals, are not mere conservatism, . . . but something at once much older and much newer – something that at once echoes the fanatical voices of the Inquisition, and sounds what is perhaps the earliest note of the militant anti-rational Fascism of modern times.”<sup>10</sup>

You will say that those are just words, just ideas, written down on paper. But words are not innocent. They have a life of their own. Words create a system of ethical and intellectual interpretation of the world, an interpretation that allows one to see in the guillotine a gate to Freedom and Virtue and in the executioner’s axe a path to God. The history of the Jacobins and Ultras, Red or White, teaches us that there is a need for ethical knowledge, that there are no honest values that would justify reaching for such peculiarly dishonest means and methods. This is why one cannot put people down in the name of lifting them up; this is why one cannot spread the poison of fear in the name of Virtue and Moral Revolution; this is why one cannot push the drug of suspicion in the name of Truth and Cleansing. This is why one cannot forget that God did not give any person power over any other person; that no one should give up caring about one’s own salvation in caring about someone else’s salvation; that one cannot force anyone into faith either through force or blackmail; and that the cross is the symbol of the Lord’s suffering, not a baseball bat for clubbing adversaries.

## XIV

I already hear the ironic commentaries: those are the nauseating platitudes of an aesthete, empty moralizing that does not

wish to understand that revolution has its rights.

Jacobins and Ultras always reply the same way. After all, to be a Jacobin is to transcend limits. It means to attack the constitution in the name of utopia, and the republic in the name of a perfect republic. It means to criticize the guillotine for being too gentle to enemies; to label the partisans of moderation traitors of the revolution; to be redder than the Reds, more plebeian than the plebeians, more ‘mad’ than the extreme radicals, more vigilant than the tribunals of vigilantism, more suspicious than the lieutenants of suspicion. To be opponents of the death penalty while ordering new executions daily; to be such a relentless hound of the ‘tolerant’ left that one finds oneself to the left of common sense; to be such an enthusiastic defender of the Revolution that one sends other revolutionaries to the guillotine.

“To be ultra,” wrote Victor Hugo,

is to go beyond. It is to attack the scepter in the name of the throne, and the mitre in the name of the altar; it is to ill-treat the thing which one is dragging; it is to kick over the traces; it is to cavil at the fagot on the score of the amount of cooking received by heretics; it is to reproach the idol with its small amount of idolatry; it is to insult through excess of respect; it is to discover that the Pope is not sufficiently papish, that the King is not sufficiently royal, and that the night has too much light; it is to be discontented with alabaster, with snow, with the swan and the lily in the name of whiteness; it is to be a partisan of things to the point of becoming their enemy; it is to be so strongly for, as to be against.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, ch. 3, [http://www.online-literature.com/victor\\_hugo/les\\_miserables/170/](http://www.online-literature.com/victor_hugo/les_miserables/170/).

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, *The Crooked Timber*, 150.

The Jacobin and the Ultra will agree on one thing: when one chops the wood, chips fly. Well, I am such a chip. And before I am treated like such a chip by moral revolutionaries in the name of Virtue and Freedom, in the name of the Divine Order and Revealed Truth, allow me to say, "Without me, ladies and gentlemen. I have already learned this lesson." Then you will ask me, "Do you know, you Malcontent from the sect of the eternally dissatisfied and afraid, any revolution that would be different?" And I would answer, "Well, there have been different revolutions . . ."

The English Revolution of 1689 was called the Glorious Revolution, and not because of heroic acts and victorious battles, nor even because of a victory over a stupid monarch. "The true glory of the British revolution," wrote George Macaulay Trevelyan, "lay in the fact that it was bloodless, that there was no civil war, no massacre, no proscription, and above all that a settlement by consent was reached of the religious and political differences." This settlement stood the test of time; it stabilized freedom in political life and practical compromise in the world of religious passions.

"The men of 1689 were not heroes. Few of them were even honest men. But they were very clever men, and, taught by bitter experience, they behaved at this supreme crisis as very clever men do not always behave, with sense and moderation."<sup>12</sup>

This dangerous situation compelled the bickering Whigs and Tories to make a compromise known as the Revolution Settlement. This was accompanied by the Toleration Act, in which some saw the right to live according to one's con-

science, and others "a necessary compromise with error."<sup>13</sup> That compromise ended "continuous and mass sufferings, hatreds and wrongs."

"After a thousand years," concluded Trevelyan, "religion was at length released from the obligation to practice cruelty on principle, by the admission that it is the incorrigible nature of man to hold different opinions on speculative subjects."<sup>14</sup>

The Toleration Act will be called by this historian "a curious patchwork of compromise, illogicality, and political good sense."<sup>15</sup> Wise Britons, wise Macaulay Trevelyan.

## XV

We, the Malcontents from the sects of the eternally unsatisfied and afraid, dream of something similar. We do not want further moral revolutions; a tightening of the reins; special commissions to track down the enemies of Virtue or the Divine Order; the proscription list of enemies, those who are suspected of animosity. We the Malcontents dream of just such a patchwork of compromise and good sense. We the Malcontents do not want further revolutions in a country that has not yet recovered from the last several . . .

<sup>12</sup> G. Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), 473.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 476.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Cindy D. Ness

## *The rise in female violence*

Whether encountered in the mythos of the Madonna or in the image of the dutiful wife and obedient daughter, females have been regarded over the ages as having a special capacity to reinstate balance where it has been undermined by the excesses of men. While exceptions to this stereotype are easily found throughout history – the young Joan of Arc wreaked havoc against the English for a brief period, and Catherine the Great led the Russian army in many victorious campaigns – women have been celebrated chiefly for their ability to give and nurture life, not their ability to take it away.

It is this hallowed view of feminine nature, evident across cultures, and the extraordinary inner strength associated with it that informed Gandhi's ideas

about womanhood and led him to envision women playing a special role in carrying out his project of *satyagraha* (the search for truth) based on his doctrine of *ahisma* (nonviolence). For Gandhi, *ahisma* was the only viable road, politically or spiritually, upon which to challenge and transform the moral recalcitrance of British rule in India and the injustices that flowed from it; essentially, *ahisma* was a counterforce powerful enough to check blatant aggression without responding to it in kind. Gandhi fully believed that peace came about by changing the heart of one's adversary through moral, not physical, force.

Gandhi's early experiences with *satyagraha* helped shape his thinking about the relationship of men and women to violence. The picketing of liquor and foreign clothes shops in 1921, though successful in achieving many of its goals, was in the end a failure in Gandhi's eyes because the crowd (decidedly male), trained for civil disobedience, instead turned violent. Gandhi's writings of the time suggest that the incident convinced him that men lacked the discipline to carry out nonviolent protest. He saw men as by nature prone to arrogance, easily angered, and thus ill-suited to sustain insult without retaliating. If men came to exercise *ahisma*, he believed,

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they only did so by traversing “a laborious analytical process,”<sup>1</sup> whereas women, given their tendency “toward service and sacrifice,” came to it “naturally and intuitively.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps nowhere more clearly than in his classic message, “To the Women of India in 1921,” does Gandhi articulate his faith in women’s civilizing capacity. In his passionate appeal to women to take up picketing and spinning, he underscores women’s centrality to the cause: “If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women.”<sup>3</sup> Though Gandhi never spelled out a specific agenda for women to carry out, he held that it was they, and not men, who were best suited to awaken the conscience of the world. He wrote, “If Europe will drink in the lesson of non-violence it will do so through its women.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, he believed, “it [was] given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world”; to do so was “her special vocation and privilege.”<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Gandhi’s call for women’s political involvement was at the time nothing short of radical.

Yet, despite the great faith that Gandhi placed in women’s capacity to create widespread peace, there is little evi-

dence that, since his assassination in 1948, the world has become less violent or that women have come close to bringing about its transformation. On the contrary, during the last thirty years, straddling the close of the twentieth century and the opening of the twenty-first, the extent of female participation in violence around the globe has grown as never before. Girls and women now make up 30 to 40 percent of the combatants in numerous ethno-separatist/guerrilla struggles, and they have carried out suicide bombings in several parts of the world. In many Western countries, too, the incidence of females being arrested for violent criminal offenses has increased sharply. One must wonder what accounts for the appearance of this trend across such widely disparate cultural realities. One must also wonder what it means for our world for females, purportedly ‘the better half of humanity,’ to exhibit a strong and ever-growing presence in war, personal violence, and destruction in general.

While we should not lose sight of the fact that girls and women who participate in militancy and terrorism are, at the outset, frequently forced to do so, coercion alone does not account for the mobilization of thousands of girls and women as combatants in guerrilla wars. It would also be inaccurate to perceive females as only following orders when political conflict turns violent. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, the Rwandan national minister of family and women’s affairs, and the first woman to be charged with genocide and crimes against humanity for ordering the rape and murder of countless Tutsi men and women, stands out as an example, albeit an extreme one, of violent leadership by a woman.

Additionally, it is important to note that norms regarding the use of violence by women have undergone a marked

1 M. K. Gandhi, *Non-violent Resistance: Satyagraha* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 330.

2 Ibid.

3 *Young India*, April 10, 1930. Quoted from M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XLIII (Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1971), 217.

4 M. K. Gandhi, *Gandhi on Women: Collection of Mahatma Gandhi’s Writing and Speeches on Women*, compiled by Pushpa Joshi (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1988), 24.

5 Ibid., 26.



shift not only in conflict zones, where the need to defend one's life is acutely felt, and in disenfranchised communities, where life is comparatively hard. They have changed dramatically in mainstream culture as well. In the United States, for example, it has become common to see female heroines and villains committing violence in action movies and on prime-time television.<sup>6</sup> Rather than being portrayed as gender anomalies, violent females have come to be lauded in American media as formidable opponents. Such portrayals fly in the face of the female pacifist Gandhi imagined over three-quarters of a century ago, who was by nature disinclined to do battle.

In fact, it would be fair to say that, in the last few decades, the use of violence by females has become visible and attained categorical significance in an unprecedented way. Concomitantly, a discursive space has opened up in which we can problematize the social basis of, and the symbolic structures associated with, females both acting and being constructed as 'naturally' violent. While the resort to violence by females is not quite the 'new normal,' its increase certainly delivers a blow to the self-sacrificial and pacifistic trope that has widely characterized female behavior for centuries. The matter now at hand is how one should understand that behavior and the variables influencing its evolution.

In this essay, I will argue that, over the last several decades, the use of violence by females has been granted a new degree of legitimacy in *traditional* as well as modern societies. I will consider

some of the structural and cultural changes of the mid-to-late twentieth century that have set the stage for the escalation in violence by females, keeping in mind that violence is also always driven by conditions, context, and language that are unique to the setting in which it emerges. (Indeed, without an accounting of the unique factors that leave females primed to engage in violence in their particular locations, the observation that females today resort to violence in greater numbers than their predecessors did is of little practical value.)

The structural and cultural changes that I believe underwrite this social trend are a fading demarcation between the public and private spheres (particularly in the West), a growing recognition of (and dependence on) the political utility of women, and a significant lessening of the divide between combatant and noncombatant status in war zones. I will attempt to make the case that the three together have contributed significantly to the *democratization of violence*, a phrase first introduced by the editor and commentator, Fareed Zakaria, but used here to reflect an increased access to violence and its instruments by both genders.<sup>7</sup> Not only has violence ceased to be a resource monopolized by nation-states, as Zakaria contends, it has also ceased to reside solely in the hands of men.

It is important to underscore, however, that the changing relationship of females to violence should not, in most instances (if at all), be construed as indicative of progress toward gender equality, whether in a terrorist organization, an ethnoseparatist struggle, or an American

6 See Martha McCaughey and Neal King, eds., *Reel Knockouts: Violent Women in the Movies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), for an extensive treatment of this subject.

7 See Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).

inner city. A review of the literature on women militants in traditional societies reveals a pattern whereby women combatants are viewed as equal to men in issues relating to struggle, but not outside of them.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, it is a commonplace of political violence that, in the name of the cause, traditional mores can be overridden without making a fundamental, or even long-term, alteration in a society's values regarding gender relations. Leila Khaled's observation of more than twenty years ago that nationalism is the first cause seems particularly relevant to the majority of politically violent struggles today in societies that do not have egalitarian gender-role expectations to start with. Where the two collide, nationalist aspirations take priority over feminist ones; the frequently cited reason is that equality between men and women cannot be realized in an environment of oppression. A more candid analysis of the situation would include the reluctance that movement leaders and their surrounding societies feel toward fundamentally challenging the structure of gender relations.<sup>9</sup>

But while the increased numbers of females participating in violence may not indicate gender reform, it does violate conventional notions of gender and

power. With few exceptions, political violence has been an overwhelmingly male arena across most cultures. For this reason, any society, whether traditional or modern, that sanctions female violence must justify the breach of its social order to itself in its own cultural terms. So as not to be dismissed as being 'deviant' and simply marginalized, females who commit violence must in all other ways 'belong' to their social world, the organization of which is predicated on a host of structural arrangements and deeply felt moral beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars typically agree that with the emergence of industrialization in the late eighteenth century, the world of work was gradually separated from family life and, for all intents and purposes, the public sphere became the province of men. Though differing in degree depending on location, social group, and historical period, the virtual exclusion of females from the labor force, politics, voting, and institutions of higher education – and the ideological premises their exclusion rested on – sustained the divorce between public and private life up to World War II.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, however, progressive ideas regarding social and economic equality, in combination with technical innovation, undermined the legitimacy of these divisions, dramatically increasing opportunities for women outside of the home. As large numbers of women in Western societies entered the work force, the public/private binary, which had played a significant role in structuring their behavior, became increasingly blurred and porous, with regard not only to employment but to many realms of public life. The movement from one sphere into an-

8 For instance, discussion of this point can be found in Leila Khaled, "Arm the Spirit," <http://www.pflppal.org/opinion/interviews/khaled/arm.html> (accessed August 6, 2006); and Marieme Heile-Lucas, "Women, Nationalism, and Religion in the Algerian Liberation Struggle," in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*, ed. Nigel Gibson (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1999).

9 For a detailed discussion of gender reform via female political violence, see Cindy D. Ness, "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (5) (September – October 2005): 353 – 373.

10 Ibid.

other raised questions about the inevitability of their separation and the norms that underwrote it.

To begin with, the entry of females into the public sphere via the workplace set in motion a gradual shift in ideas about authority and subordination in gender relations. As females in Western countries began working for wages and gaining professional status following World War II, the financial independence and the psychological empowerment that went along with working rendered women 'new' social actors in many ways. With their expanded role as protectors and enforcers in the workplace, in their communities, and eventually in the collective imagination came the increased likelihood of their becoming real and imagined agents of aggression.

Perhaps the best-known attempt to explain the spike in female criminal activity, some of it violent, in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s was Freda Adler's "female liberation theory."<sup>11</sup> Adler's contention – that the increased rates of female crime, both violent and nonviolent, were an outcome of the greater opportunities that females had access to – struck an emotional chord given the rapid redefinition that gender roles and the institutions that reinforced them were undergoing. On the other hand, many feminist scholars of the day argued that Adler's framing of the 'new' female criminal was little more than a reworking of older arguments that cast female aggression as a move from the feminine to the masculine, rather than identifying the changed sociocultural and economic circumstances particular to females that drove

them to their new behavior.<sup>12</sup> Even more damning were actual studies that debunked the idea that employed females made for more violent ones by showing that arrest rates for females, like those of males, actually decreased during periods of strong economic growth and higher employment.<sup>13</sup>

Yet Adler's inclination to connect the new statistics to the new roles women were occupying was not altogether misguided. Economic trends alone could not explain why, in the 1970s, women of all classes gradually began to mete out violence alongside men in action movies, sometimes preserving law and order and at other times undermining it; why heroines in literature were more readily turning to violent solutions;<sup>14</sup> and why, a decade or so later, female characters who maimed and killed appeared in video games. These images, which would have been taboo a few years earlier, had crossed into the mainstream. What these movies and other popular cultural forms were telling us was that if the contemporary Western female – independent and self-directed – chose, she was capable of aggressing in ways not unlike those of her male counterpart, even for sport.

Essentially, when women gained access to the public sphere, it set certain changes in motion. One, they became physically present in public spaces. As

12 Carol Smart, *Women, Crime, and Criminology: A Feminist Critique* (Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1976), and Ngaire Naffine, *Female Crime: The Construction of Women in Criminology* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), to name two, have written critically of Adler's theory.

13 For instance, see Jane Chapman, *Economic Realities and the Female Offender* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1980).

14 For example, see Gail Goodwin, *Glass People* (New York: Knopf, 1972).

11 See Freda Adler, *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

mothers and caregivers, women were removed from public life and their bodies ‘privatized.’ In the marketplace, however, females were much freer to make use of their physicality, including their physical strength, as they saw fit. No longer were female egotism, rage, and self-hatred destined to be subdued through internalization.<sup>15</sup> Unlike her homebound sister, the female in the marketplace needed both to appear and actually be strong enough to defend herself – if not physically, then psychologically. In tandem, the culture no longer saw strength and aggression associated with women as deviant, but accepted it as a part of modern womanhood.

To put it another way, whereas competitiveness and skills of domination are not highly valued attributes in the private sphere, they are commonly thought to be instrumental in the public sphere. Not only self-defense, but also personal empowerment and retaliatory violence, gradually came to be seen as legitimate forms of expression for females operating in the public sphere. No longer was the female limited to the role of victim – she could also now ‘perform’ the role of aggressor. In essence, by the end of the twentieth century, a space had opened up for women to be both violent and ‘legitimate’ in mainstream culture.

While the entry of females into the public sphere, especially since the 1980s, has been a worldwide phenomenon and not just a Western one, it has been most pronounced in Western nations. Indeed, in conservative societies, where gender roles are extremely traditional, it is that much more incumbent upon women and girls to improvise techniques by

which they take on new roles while still adhering to the gender dictates of the dominant social structure. Yet, surprising as it may seem, in many such societies, females have still come to play a large and growing role in political violence. As we shall see, the usefulness of women as violent political actors increases in proportion to the exigencies of war.

What began before World War II in many parts of the world as resistance to colonial rule became the bloody task of nation building and the clash of ethno-separatist claims in the decades that followed it. During the second half of the twentieth century, separatist guerrilla struggles, and conflicts between ethnically or religiously divided populations, increasingly came to characterize the landscape of collective violence.<sup>16</sup> Never had the world seen the proliferation of so many separatist or intrastate conflicts at the same time, most of them arising in non-Western societies where gender relations and the hierarchies that supported them were extremely traditional.

While women had been involved in separatist struggles before the cold war, in the last decades of the twentieth century, separatist groups pursued an unprecedented policy of deliberately recruiting women and children into their cadres. The introduction of women and girls into combat was a response to logistical demands: the mounting number of casualties, the intensified governmental crackdowns, and the ability of women to escape detection more easily than men can.<sup>17</sup> The turn toward female re-

15 See E. E. Maccoby and C. N. Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), on the internalization of anger by females.

16 See Charles Tilly, “Violence, Terror, and Politics as Usual,” *The Boston Review* 27 (3–4) (Summer 2002).

17 See Ness, “In the Name of the Cause,” 357.

cruitment swept across the continents of South America, Africa, and Asia. The influx of women and girls significantly strengthened groups such as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Ealaam (LTTE), the Shining Path, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), all of which might not have been able to sustain their operations had they not welcomed women. Women actively sought to join these armed struggles – although coercive recruitment is a staple of many ethnoseparatist groups, the widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunity that has historically afflicted third-world nations set the stage for females to join rebel movements *en masse*. Being part of a rebel force ensured that at least one's need for food and shelter would be met.

If women and girls were initially admitted into a wider range of roles based on necessity, their participation gradually became integrated into the organizational structure of many such groups. In essence, the more time women and girls engaged in these less conventional roles, the more conventionality these roles came to assume. In fact, the female militant, over a relatively short period of time, developed a global presence in armed struggle on a scale that was without historical precedent. Rather than an exotic exception, the female combatant was transformed into a familiar figure on the battlefield. News coverage of sectarian strife depicting the female militant with an automatic rifle announced to the world that men were not the only ones who could claim expertise in violence and destruction.

In addition to providing militant groups with increased personnel, females also brought them greater flexibility in carrying out their offensive operations. Both secular and, more re-

cently, religious militant groups were able to trade on expectations that females were adverse by nature to committing violence: as such, women were particularly successful in slipping through tight security arrangements under a number of guises. As part of an overall strategy to inflict maximum damage, females in many groups were called upon to carry out a disproportionate percentage of suicide missions.<sup>18</sup> The female suicide bomber put a new face on the use of lethal force – not in the movies or in the imaginary world of a novel, but in real time.

While the numbers of females engaged in ethnoseparatist struggles had always been much greater than the numbers involved in religious terrorist groups, it is the sensational acts of the latter that brought global attention to female participation in political violence. Indeed, a hallmark of religious terrorism had been its lack of female participation and the specific ideology that deterred it. For example, given the strict gendered demarcation of the public and private spheres in Islam, the resort to violence by women and girls, rather than constituting a restorative act, until recently amounted to a sign of cultural fragmentation.<sup>19</sup> But as religious terrorist groups came under increased pressure and their support base was threatened, they, too, often looked to women to embrace violence and to introduce new vigor into their struggle.

For example, in 2002, at a point when Chechen rebel forces had suffered heavy, demoralizing losses, Hawa Barayev drove a truck into a building housing

18 See Yoram Schweitzer, "Suicide Terrorism: Developments and Characteristics" (lecture, Institute of Computer Technology, Herzliya, Israel, February 21, 2000).

19 See Ness, "In the Name of the Cause," 360.



Russian Special Forces, killing twenty-seven soldiers. Wafa Idris, the first Palestinian female suicide bomber, struck the same day that Yassir Arafat made a speech inviting females to join the armed resistance against Israeli occupation. Arafat's call to women was an attempt to radicalize the fight for independence at a time when his popularity was waning and his control over the Palestinian Authority was in question.<sup>20</sup> Although females have figured prominently in secular groups such as the PKK and the LTTE over the last twenty years, it was the spate of Palestinian female bombers in 2002 and the six attacks by Chechen women in 2003 that truly captured media attention. Since then, Al Qaeda-associated groups have flirted with the idea of using females on a number of occasions, in an attempt to regain the element of surprise they have lost because of the increased government surveillance of their operations.

Clearly, the political necessity for females, in both secular and religious struggles, to engage in violence has come to override the long-standing cultural barriers that have inhibited them from doing so. Militant/terrorist organizations have mastered the rhetoric for leaving intact the sense of what proper gender roles are in normal times, even as they encourage females to break with tradition for specific ends. By placing the representation of female violence within ethically or religiously justifiable frameworks, they have also gone far in redrawing the symbolic boundaries that define who is defending the group and its cause and who is defending his or

herself. In many conflicts, the dividing line between combatant and noncombatant has become increasingly blurred.

Whereas a century ago male soldiers on the battlefield accounted for approximately 90 percent of war-related deaths, in the twentieth century civilians became the main casualties of war.<sup>21</sup> In significant part, the shift was an outgrowth of more powerful weaponry and advanced technologies that made it possible to use lethal force at a distance (the aerial bombardment of cities, rocket grenades, etc.). Strikes specifically aimed at fixed military targets (i.e., airfields, suspected ammunition sites), while in one sense delivered with great precision, were not sufficiently exact to avoid causing 'collateral' or civilian damage. That intrastate conflicts over the last half-century were routinely fought in the spaces where people lived also placed civilians on the frontlines. Not surprisingly, when battlefield and civil arena occupy the same geographical space, the distinction between civilian and soldier is compromised, if not entirely obliterated.

Advances in weaponry and the 'localizing' of the battlefield left women and children particularly vulnerable to attack, especially since, all too frequently, they were left behind in the villages from which men were either killed or taken by force, or which the men had abandoned in anticipation of being killed. As Carolyn Nordstrom describes the situation, political violence moved "from the trenches to the backyards," putting women at the epicenter of war. In her analysis of how females live and survive

20 See Barbara Victor's case study of the female Palestinian suicide bombers that struck in Israel beginning in 2002. Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers* (Philadelphia: Rodale Press, 2003).

21 See Ted Gurr, *People Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000), for a discussion of this and related issues.

in war zones, she concluded, “Women and girls do not have an option about fighting in wars of the 21st century.”<sup>22</sup>

No longer exempt from being a military target by dint of being female (the concept of noncombatant immunity has historically not been as sparing as the term suggests), women were placed in the position of having to protect and provide for themselves and their children in any way that they could. To be certain, in many hostilities the rape and killing of women and children became the preferred weapon to destroy the enemy – by targeting what an enemy holds sacred one could strategically undermine his or her morale and ultimately weaken him or her. Avoiding capture and persecution sometimes meant that a woman had to move her family from place to place, while at other times it required the direct defiance of government or rebel orders to survive. It could mean, for example, running food shipments, carrying medical supplies to a remote part of the countryside, or shooting a rebel or government soldier in self-defense.

Thus, while not formally combatants, given the reality of their everyday existence, women and children in conflict zones have had to become ‘actors’ in their own defense, meeting violence and its threat not through males but directly. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the new forms of insecurity and violence, including terrorism, which have come to characterize the majority of armed conflict in the late twentieth century, and which by definition do not allow for preparation, challenge the assumption of the traditional protector/protected relationship that historically

has been laid down along gender lines – danger is no longer limited to a physical challenge that can be reserved for males.

The dismantling of this relationship has dealt a serious blow to the construction of the feminine, which to a large extent rests upon the necessity (and supposed naturalness) of the protector/protected binary. No longer can the female exist in her state of ‘innocence’; thus, humanity can no longer be assured of her ‘civilizing’ capacity, as Gandhi conceived of it, since she is now herself a party to destruction on the world stage. And so, as she experiences herself and the world around her differently, the world must see her differently, too.

Gandhi never lived to see the realization of the culture of nonviolence that he envisioned, nor have women disavowed the use of violence as a means to an end as he anticipated. Rather, over the last several decades, the assumption that women are innately nonviolent has undergone major revision. Our collective ideas about who does and who does not possess the potential to be a violent actor have been changing. Depictions of females as violent figures are no longer considered the exception but have become mainstream cultural representations.

If we are to understand the rise in female violence, it is essential that we move away from a belief, like Gandhi’s, in the determinative force of human, and especially female, ‘nature,’ and that we acknowledge the contributions made by social forces. These underlying conditions – poverty, religious and ethnic rivalries, and the techniques of modern warfare, as well as the perception that females are valuable assets to the functioning of such organizations – drive females into armies of liberation and best explain their voluntary participa-

22 Carolyn Nordstrom, “Gendered War,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (5) (September – October 2005): 399.

tion. Moreover, in conflict zones that rely on lethal force from a distance or guerrilla hit-and-run tactics, the doctrine of noncombatant immunity – that civilians who do not participate in the operations of any armed force are granted protection from attack – is rendered meaningless. As the concept of ‘danger’ becomes something that an individual cannot anticipate with any certainty, traditional gendered notions of protection also become far less instrumental and, therefore, less relevant.

During the closing decades of the twentieth century and the opening ones of the twenty-first, the violent female has become a category with new options of behavior and representation – both heroic and antiheroic. No longer can females simply be thought of as the observers or witnesses to ‘evil’: the will to violence, rather than being a male characteristic, is gender-neutral and dependent on a host of contextual factors. As the roles of protector and predator – real and imagined – become more open to them, the likelihood of females acting as agents of aggression is sure to increase.

# Mia Bloom

## *Female suicide bombers: a global trend*

Ever since Muriel Degauque, a Belgian convert to radical Islam, blew herself up in Iraq last November, questions have surfaced about the growing role of women in terrorism. Degauque's attack occurred on the same day that Sajida Atrous al-Rishawi's improvised explosive device (IED) failed to detonate at a wedding in Amman. This apparent growing trend of women bombers has the general public and counterterrorism specialists concerned because of its implication that women will be key players in future terrorist attacks.

Yet the recent focus on female suicide bombers neglects the long history of female involvement in political violence. In reality women have participated in insurgency, revolution, and war for a long time. Women have played prominent roles in the Russian Narodnaya Volya in the nineteenth century, the Irish Republican Army, the Baader-Meinhof organization in Germany, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Historically, howev-

er, women have mostly played supporting roles. "Society, through its body of rules and its numerous institutions, has conventionally dictated [women's] roles within the boundaries of militancy. Assisting in subordinate roles is welcomed and encouraged. Actually fighting in the war is not."<sup>1</sup> Most often, the primary contribution expected of women has been to sustain an insurgency by giving birth to many fighters and raising them in a revolutionary environment.

Women are now taking a leading role in conflicts by becoming suicide bombers – using their bodies as human detonators for the explosive material strapped around their waists. The first female suicide bomber, a seventeen-year-old Lebanese girl named Sana'a Mehaydali, was sent by the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP/PPS), a secular, pro-Syrian Lebanese organization, to blow herself up near an Israeli convoy in Lebanon in 1985, killing five Israeli soldiers. Of the twelve suicide attacks conducted by the SSNP, women took part in six of them. From Lebanon, the incidence of female bombers spread

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Frazier, "Abandon Weeping for Weapons: Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers," <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/keefe/joe/frazier.html> (accessed November 21, 2003).

to other countries – Sri Lanka, Turkey, Chechnya, Israel, and now Iraq. Out of the approximately seventeen groups that have started using the tactical innovation of suicide bombing, women have been operatives in more than half of them.<sup>2</sup> Between 1985 and 2006, there have been in excess of 220 women suicide bombers, representing about 15 percent of the total.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the upsurge in the number of female bombers has come from both secular and religious organizations, even though religious groups initially resisted using women.

Their participation in suicide bombings starkly contradicts the theory that women are more likely to choose peaceful mechanisms for conflict resolution than men are – that women are inherently more disposed toward moderation, compromise, and tolerance in their attitudes toward international conflict.<sup>4</sup> (In fact, most existing notions of women in the midst of conflict portray them as *victims* of war rather than as perpetrators.) Complicating these notions of femininity further is the fact that the IED is often disguised under a woman's clothing to make her appear pregnant, and so beyond suspicion or reproach. On April 25, 2006, Kanapathipillai Manjula Devi, used such a tactic to penetrate a military hospital in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Posing

as the wife of a soldier on her way to the maternity clinic, she gained access to the high-security facility.<sup>5</sup> She had even visited the maternity clinic for several weeks prior to her attack to maintain her cover.<sup>6</sup> The advent of women suicide bombers has thus transformed the revolutionary womb into an exploding one.

Why do women become suicide bombers? Motives vary: to avenge a personal loss, to redeem the family name, to escape a life of sheltered monotony and achieve fame, or to equalize the patriarchal societies in which they live.

In many instances, the women are seeking revenge. Consider, for example, the women who join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is based in the Tamil areas, in the northern and eastern provinces, of Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup> According to anthropologist Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, the government has committed organized violence against the Tamils through a systematic campaign of disappearances, rape, checkpoint searches, and torture – as well as the elimination of whole villages in remote areas.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in the midst of conflict, the government forces have not been mindful to differentiate civilians from combatants and militants.

These oppressive tactics, along with civilian deaths, have soured the Tamil

2 “From Jerusalem to Jakarta and from Bali to Baghdad, the suicide bomber is clearly the weapon of choice for international terrorists.” Quoting Don Van Natta, Jr., “Big Bang Theory: The Terror Industry Fields its Ultimate Weapon,” *New York Times*, August 24, 2003, sec. 4, 1.

3 Yoram Schweitzer, ed., *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Memorandum 84, August 2006, 8.

4 Emile Sahliyeh and Zixian Deng, “The Determinants of Palestinians’ Attitude Toward Peace with Israel,” *International Studies Quarterly* 47 (4) (December 2003): 701.

5 Arjuna Guwardena, “Female Black Tigers: A Different Breed of Cat,” in Schweitzer, ed., *Female Suicide Bombers*, 87.

6 Tamil sources, interview by Mia Bloom, July 2006.

7 In July 1997 three national human rights commissions established in 1994 found that there had been 16,742 disappearances since July 1988.

8 Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, interview by Mia Bloom, Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 25, 2002.



population on the government's assurances of devolution and equal rights, which in turn has emboldened the LTTE and solidified their control of Jaffna.<sup>9</sup> Rajasingham-Senanayake explains, "In this context militant groups who infiltrate camps have little difficulty in recruiting new cadres from deeply frustrated and resentful youth, men and women, girls and boys."<sup>10</sup> In fact, the atrocities need not even hurt a Tamil woman directly for her to join the LTTE, as long as they affect the Tamil community as a whole:

Witnessing rape ... hearing about rape from other villagers and the Army's killing of Tamil youth (girls and boys arrested by the Sri Lankan Army) ... and the feeling of helplessness in not being able to defend against the Sri Lankan Army are the main reasons for the girls joining the LTTE.<sup>11</sup>

As the example of the Tamil women demonstrates, women generally become involved, at least initially, for personal, rather than ideological, reasons. In Chechnya, to give another example, the female operatives are called 'Black Widows,' because many were the sisters, mothers, or wives of Chechen men killed in battles with federal troops.<sup>12</sup>

Zarema Muzhikhoyeva was one such widow. On July 10, 2003, she was arrest-

ed carrying a homemade bomb on Tverskaya-Yamskaya Ulitsa.

Muzhikhoyeva [admitted to having been] recruited by Chechen rebels as a suicide bomber, in exchange for \$1,000 in compensation to her relatives to repay for jewelry she had stolen from them ... When the rebels sent her to Moscow to carry out her mission, she changed her mind and got herself arrested by police.<sup>13</sup>

Muzhikhoyeva was the first bomber to be captured alive. When the court sentenced her to the maximum of twenty years despite the fact that she had opted not to explode her cargo, Muzhikhoyeva shouted, "Now I know why everyone hates the Russians!" – adding that she would return and "blow you all up."<sup>14</sup> This powerful image resonated throughout the Chechen community. Even though Muzhikhoyeva had done the right thing, the Russian court had not granted her any leniency, radicalizing her even more in the process.

However, while women usually become suicide bombers in response to a personal tragedy, some may also believe they can change their society's gender norms through militant involvement. According to Clara Beyler, a counterterrorism analyst in Washington, D.C., and formerly a researcher for the International Policy Institute for Counterterrorism in Herzliya, Israel,

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been a product of societal forces predisposing and molding them to become militants as an expression of Ayat, traditional Chechen mores (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cincinnati, forthcoming).

9 Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation* (Cambridge, Mass.: World Peace Foundation and the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 1999), 9.

10 Rajasingham-Senanayake in *ibid.*, 62.

11 Tamil sources, personal correspondence with the author, November 26, 2003.

12 There is some dispute about whether the Black Widows are in fact widows. Irina Bazarova argues that many are not widows but have

13 Anatoly Medetsky, "Court Tries Alleged Tverskaya Bomber," *St. Petersburg Times*, March 30, 2004.

14 Steven Lee Meyers, "From Dismal Chechnya, Women Turn to Bombs," *New York Times*, September 10, 2004.

There is a difference between men and women suicide attackers: women consider combat as a way to escape the predestined life that is expected of them. When women become human bombs, their intent is to make a statement not only in the name of a country, a religion, a leader, but also in the name of their gender.<sup>15</sup>

Again, the Chechen Black Widows provide strong support for this idea. Historically, a woman's most relevant role in Chechen society was to raise children, form their characters, and make them strong so that they became warriors for the Islamic faith (*mujahideen*) when they grew up. Even after they were allowed to be a part of battles, female insurgents were initially used merely to supply medical aid, food, and water to the men; they also carried weapons and ammunition across enemy territory and maintained the guerrillas' morale. At the Dubrovka theater siege, for example, the men took care of the explosives and intimidation, while the women distributed medical supplies, blankets, water, chewing gum, and chocolate. Though the women allegedly toyed threateningly with their two-kilo bomb belts, they did not control the detonators – the men retained control of the remotes.<sup>16</sup>

The Black Widows, on the other hand,

choose to die as a bomber in order to show the strength of the resistance. They can wear kamikaze bomb-belts, or drive a truck that is full of explosives. Chechen guerrillas are inspired with the image of Khava Barayeva – the first to walk the way

of martyrdom. Chechen rebels... write poems and songs about her.<sup>17</sup>

The use of female operatives, especially by a religious militant organization like the Chechen Al Ansar al-Mujahideen, is significant. Until recently, a female bomber was almost certainly sent by a secular organization. In effect,

[t]he growth in the number of Chechen female suicide bombers signaled the beginning of a change in the position of fundamentalist Islamic organizations regarding the involvement of women in suicide attacks – a change that [has since] become devastatingly apparent.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of violence empowering women had already spread through the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. On January 27, 2002, Wafa Idris became the first Palestinian woman to perpetrate an act of suicide terror. A twenty-seven-year-old aid worker for the Palestinian Red Crescent Society from the Al-Am'ari refugee camp near Ramallah, she was carrying a backpack with explosives:

The bomb in her rucksack was made with TNT packed into pipes. Triacetone triperoxide, made by mixing acetone with phosphate, is ground to a powder. In a grotesque parody of the domestic female stereotype, it is usually ground in a food mixer, before being fed into metal tubes.<sup>19</sup>

On the way to delivering it to someone else, she got stuck in a revolving door, detonating the explosives.<sup>20</sup> She killed

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Clara Beyler, "Messengers of Death: Female Suicide Bombers," <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=470>.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists," in Schweitzer, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 63–90.

<sup>18</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, "A Fundamental Change in Tactics," *Washington Post*, October 19, 2003, B03.

<sup>19</sup> Giles Foden, "Death and the Maidens," *The Guardian*, July 18, 2003.

<sup>20</sup> *Agence France Presse*, April 12, 2002.

one Israeli civilian and wounded 140 others.

Though her death was allegedly accidental, it instantly transformed her into a cult heroine throughout the Arab world. The military wing of Fatah, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, took responsibility for the attack three days later. Birzeit students appealed for more women to emulate Idris. Commenting on Idris's death, female students stated, "The struggle is not limited strictly to men .... It's unusual [for a Palestinian woman to martyr herself], but I support it .... Society does not accept this idea because it is relatively new, but after it happens again, it will become routine."<sup>21</sup> And in an editorial entitled, "It's a Woman!" *Al-Sha'ab* proclaimed:

It is a woman who teaches you today a lesson in heroism, who teaches you the meaning of Jihad, and the way to die a martyr's death. It is a woman who has shocked the enemy, with her thin, meager, and weak body .... It is a woman who blew herself up, and with her exploded all the myths about women's weakness, submissiveness, and enslavement .... It is a woman who has now proven that the meaning of [women's] liberation is the liberation of the body from the trials and tribulations of this world ... and the acceptance of death with a powerful, courageous embrace.<sup>22</sup>

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade even set up a special unit to train female suicide bombers and named it after Wafa Idris.<sup>23</sup> "We have 200 young women from the Bethlehem area alone ready to

sacrifice themselves for the homeland," bragged one Al-Aqsa leader.<sup>24</sup> Matti Steinberg, a former special advisor on Arab affairs to the Israeli government, described how a Hamas bimonthly publication – dedicated to women – was replete with letters to the editor from Palestinian women asking for permission to participate directly in the conflict and asserting their right to be martyrs.<sup>25</sup>

Palestinian women have torn the gender classification out of their birth certificates, declaring that sacrifice for the Palestinian homeland would not be for men alone; on the contrary, all Palestinian women will write the history of the liberation with their blood, and will become time bombs in the face of the Israeli enemy. They will not settle for being mothers of martyrs.<sup>26</sup>

This participation of Palestinian women in violence had global reverberations. In 2002, Indian security forces twice went on high alert, in January and again in August, to guard against possible attacks by female suicide bombers. The suspects sprang from two Pakistan-based Islamic organizations, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, both associated with Al Qaeda. In March 2003, *Asharq Al-Awsat* published an interview with a woman calling herself 'Um Osama,' the alleged leader of the women *mujahideen* of Al Qaeda. The Al Qaeda network claimed to have set up squads of female suicide bombers – purportedly including Afghans, Arabs, Chechens,

<sup>24</sup> Graham Usher, "At 18, Bomber Became Martyr and Murderer," *The Guardian*, March 30, 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Matti Steinberg, interview by Mia Bloom, September 2002.

<sup>26</sup> According to Dr. Samiya Sa'ad Al-Din, *Al-Akhbar* (Egypt), February 1, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> *Kul al-Arab* (Israel), February 1, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> *Al-Sha'ab* (Egypt), February 1, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Sophie Claudet, "More Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers Could Be On The Way: Analysts," *Middle East Times*, March 1, 2002.

and other nationalities – under orders from bin Laden to attack the United States:

We are preparing for the new strike announced by our leaders, and I declare that it will make America forget ... the September 11 attacks. The idea came from the success of martyr operations carried out by young Palestinian women in the occupied territories. Our organization is open to all Muslim women wanting to serve the (Islamic) nation ....<sup>27</sup>

The involvement of Palestinian women in suicide bombings has also had an extreme impact on the cultural norms of Palestinian society. Palestinians have long had a set of rules that describe and limit gender roles (although Palestinian women have been mobilized politically since the 1960s). These rules have dictated the separation of the sexes and restricted women to the private sphere – particularly in rural areas. Through violence, women have placed themselves on the frontlines, in public, alongside men to whom they are not related. This has resulted in a double trajectory for militant Palestinian women – convincing society of their valid contributions while at the same time reconstructing the normative ideals of the society.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, it is difficult to ascertain whether terrorist organizations are actually employing women out of a heightened sense of gender equality. According to Farhana Ali, an international policy analyst at the RAND Corporation:

The liberal door that now permits women to participate in operations will likely

close once male jihadists gain new recruits and score a few successes in the war on terrorism. At the same time that a Muslim woman is indispensable to male-dominated terrorist groups and the war effort, she also is expendable. The sudden increase in female bombers over the past year may represent nothing more than a riding wave of al-Qaeda's success rather than a lasting effort in the global jihad .... [T]here is no indication that these men would allow the mujahidaat to prevail authority and replace images of the male folk-hero.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the drive to recruit women as suicide bombers may actually be little more than a tactical response to the need for more manpower. Besides adding women to their numbers, insurgent organizations can shame the men into participating, in the style of right-wing Hindu women who goad men into action by saying, "Don't be a bunch of eunuchs."<sup>30</sup> This point is underscored by the bombers themselves. A propaganda slogan in Chechnya reads: "Women's courage is a disgrace to that of modern men."<sup>31</sup> And in the martyrdom video Ayat Akras – an eighteen-year-old Palestinian woman who set off a bomb in the Supersol supermarket in Jerusalem – taped before she blew herself up, she stated, "*I am going to fight* [emphasis added] instead of the sleeping Arab armies who are watching Palestinian girls fighting alone" – an apparent jab at Arab

29 Farhana Ali, "Muslim Female Fighters: An Emerging Trend," *Terrorism Monitor* 3 (21) (November 3, 2005).

30 Amrita Basu, "Hindu Women's Activism and the Questions it Raises," in Patricia Jeffrey and Amrita Basu, eds., *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998).

31 Dimitri Sudakov, "Shamil Besaev Trains Female Suicide Bombers," *Pravda*, May 15, 2003.

27 "Bin Laden Has Set Up Female Suicide Squads: Report," *Arab News*, Dubai, March 13, 2003.

28 Frazier, "Abandon Weeping for Weapons."

leaders for not being sufficiently proactive or manly.<sup>32</sup>

It appears that insurgent organizations in Iraq are similarly inspired. Although women form a very small number of the bombers in Iraq, the message is that men should not let women do their fighting for them. On March 29, 2003, within weeks of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, two women (one of whom was pregnant) perpetrated suicide attacks against the Coalition forces. Then, on April 4, 2003, Al-Jazeera television played a video of two Iraqi women vowing to commit suicide attacks: "We say to our leader and holy war comrade, the hero commander Saddam Hussein, that you have sisters that you and history will boast about." In a separate video, another woman, identified as Wadad Jamil Jassem, assumed a similar position: "I have devoted myself [to] Jihad for the sake of God and against the American, British, and Israeli infidels and to defend the soil of our precious and dear country."<sup>33</sup>

Terrorist groups may also find women useful as suicide bombers because of the widespread assumption that women are inherently nonviolent. Women can bypass, for example, Israel's restrictive checkpoints and border policy, which has proven fairly effective against Palestinian insurgent organizations inside the occupied territories. Since the mid-1990s, it has been almost impossible for unmarried men under the age of forty to get permits to cross the border into Israel. Women don't arouse suspicion like men and blend in more effectively with Israeli civilians: "Attacks perpetrated by

women have tended to be those where the terrorist planners needed the perpetrator to blend in on the Israeli 'street.' These female terrorists ... westernize their appearance, adopting modern hairstyles and short skirts."<sup>34</sup> This is reminiscent of the ways in which women in Algeria transformed their appearance to participate in the FLN revolution against the French occupation during the Battle of Algiers in the early 1960s. The use of the least likely suspect is the most likely tactical adaptation for a terrorist group under scrutiny. Terrorist groups have therefore looked further afield for volunteers, to women and children.

A growing number of insurgent organizations are also taking advantage of the fact that suicide bombing, especially when perpetrated by women and young girls, garners a lot of media attention, both in the West and in the Middle East. Attacks by women receive eight times the media coverage as attacks by men, again largely because of the expectation that women are not violent. Realizing this, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades have drawn propaganda mileage from their female bombers.<sup>35</sup> The image of women defying tradition to sacrifice their lives for the Palestinian cause has drawn more attention to the despair of the Palestinian people. "Suicide attacks are done for effect, and the more dramatic the effect, the stronger the message; thus a potential interest on the part of some groups in recruiting women."<sup>36</sup>

32 Libby Copeland, "Female Suicide Bombers: The New Factor in Mideast's Deadly Equation," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2002, C1.

33 Cited by Roman Kupchinsky in "'Smart Bombs' with Souls," *Organized Crime and Terrorism Watch* 3 (13) (April 17, 2003).

34 Yoni Fighel, "Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Female Suicide Bombers," October 6, 2003, [www.ict.org](http://www.ict.org).

35 Scott Atran argues that as a result of Akra's martyrdom, Saudi Arabia sent 100 million dollars to fund the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

36 Claudet, "More Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers Could Be On The Way."



This tactic also makes the terrorists appear more threatening by erasing the imagined barriers between combatants and noncombatants, terrorists and innocent civilians. This is the underlying message conveyed by female bombers: terrorism has moved beyond a fringe phenomenon; insurgents are all around you. For secular militant Palestinian groups at least, Akras's death demonstrated that they are not all religious fanatics who believe that God will grant them entrance to Paradise or reward them with seventy-two virgins (*houris*). Nor are the leaders all gripped by a burning desire to see all females locked behind black veils. For them, the involvement of women is meant to signal that they are waging a political war, not a religious one – and the suicide bombings are a carefully planned and executed part of a precise political strategy.<sup>37</sup>

Degaque's attack raises an added element of female converts, of which there are thousands in Europe, married to Muslim men and willing to make the sacrifice. Increasingly, bombers in Iraq have been female converts to Islam and not Arab women. On June 2, 2006, a woman known only as Sonja B, a German convert to Islam, was seized in Germany, foiling her planned attack in Iraq. After his arrest last November in Morocco with sixteen other militants suspected of terrorist activities, Mohamed Reha, a Moroccan Belgian affiliated with the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (GICM), claimed, "The partners of several suspected terrorists being detained in Belgium are ready to carry out suicide attacks in Morocco."<sup>38</sup> He continued: "Many Muslim women

whose husbands were arrested in Belgium would like to become involved in Jihad, the holy war. [I was asked] to help them by finding someone to train them and supply them with explosives." According to Belgian sources, an Algerian named Khalid Abou Bassir, who claims to be the coordinator for Al Qaeda in Europe, was designated to lead a team of female suicide bombers.<sup>39</sup>

Converts are a particularly dangerous group, not only because they can evade most profiles, but also because they carry European passports. Also, like in most faiths, converts may feel the need to prove themselves and can be more radical in their views than are people born into the faith – thus making them more susceptible to extremist interpretations of Islam. Converts, male as well as female, may very well be a key resource in the future for terrorist organizations. Pascal Cruypennick was arrested in Belgium for sending suicide bombers to Iraq; other converts, like Richard Reid and Jose Padilla, are also in custody. In Belgium, as in many other countries in Europe, it appears converts are leading the charge to jihad in Iraq.

Are women suicide bombers portents of gender equality in their societies?

Unlikely. Fanaticism and death cults generally do not lead to liberation politics for women. Women may exhibit courage and steely resolve as terrorists, but if they are part of a system that af-

39 The use of women remains a point of contestation among different streams of Salafism in Al Qaeda Central. The recently killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi certainly had no qualms about using women in Iraq or Jordan, but other militants, like Samir Azzouz, have thus far refused. As long as the majority of suicide bombers in Iraq come from the Gulf, the numbers of women will remain low since neither the Saudis nor other more conservative Wahabis will permit women to go on jihad.

37 Usher, "At 18, Bomber Became Martyr and Murderer."

38 AFP report, cited by *De Standaard*.

fords them unequal status, then feminism doesn't apply.<sup>40</sup> It is telling that the women who participate in suicide bombings are usually among the most socially vulnerable: widows and rape victims. In fact, in several instances, the women were raped or sexually abused not by representatives of the state but by the insurgents themselves. As such they are stigmatized, and thus easily recruited and exploited.

Those who send these women do not really care for women's rights; they are exploiting the personal frustrations... of these women for their own political goals, while they continue to limit the role of women in other aspects of life.<sup>41</sup>

The evidence that males in terrorist organizations exercise control over the women is also strong. Palestinian female cadres are not welcomed into the paramilitary terrorist factions, which remain dominated by men. Even in the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, women are not welcomed by the ranks of the male fighters. And in Sri Lanka, where women constitute 30 percent of the suicide attackers and form crucial conventional fighting units, few women are among the top leadership. Beyler remarks:

It is mostly men who govern this infrastructure.... Women are rarely involved in the higher echelons of the decision-making process of these groups. Women may volunteer, or... be coerced to conduct a murderous strike, but the woman's role is ultimately dictated by the patriarchal hierarchy that rules Palestinian society and its terrorist groups.<sup>42</sup>

40 Foden, "Death and the Maidens."

41 Ibid.

42 Clara Beyler, "Using Palestinian Women as Bombs," *New York Sun*, November 15, 2006.

In fact, the LTTE has attempted to compel married Tamil women, including retired female cadres, to adopt more traditional and conservative forms of dress (the sari and head coverings) and not wear trousers in LTTE-controlled areas.

However, some may argue that there is a difference between the lower-ranking female operatives in terrorist groups and the women who are planners and leaders, such as Ulrike Meinhof, who provided the intellectual backbone of the Baader-Meinhof organization. The assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 was also organized by a woman, and many other nineteenth-century revolutionaries were female. Nevertheless, in many cases, women's participation in violence did not lead to their equal status in the societies that formed subsequent to the revolutions. It is interesting to note that the women who played violent roles in revolutionary movements in Iran, Palestine, and Algeria were not included in the leadership of the successor regimes.

The problem lies in the fact that these women, rather than confronting archaic patriarchal notions of women and exploding these myths from within, are actually operating under them. These include a well-scripted set of rules in which women sacrifice themselves; the patriarchal conception of motherhood, for example, is one of self-denial and self-effacement. In a sense, martyrdom is the ultimate and twisted fulfillment of these ideals. So, the spectacle of female suicide bombers doesn't challenge the patriarchy as much as provide evidence of its power. The message female suicide bombers send is that they are more valuable to their societies dead than they ever could have been alive.

Robert H. Mnookin

*Ethnic conflicts: Flemings & Walloons,  
Palestinians & Israelis*

Because of mass demonstrations objecting to the presence of any franco-phone curriculum within a university situated in Dutch-speaking Flanders, the Belgian government negotiated a deal in 1968 that split the five-hundred-year-old Catholic University of Leuven into two institutions. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (K.U. Leuven) remained in the old college town and became an entirely Dutch- (and English-) speaking university. A completely independent French-speaking Université Catholique de Louvain (U.C. Louvain) was formed and moved to a brand-new campus in Louvain-la-Neuve, a new town created in the Walloon (or French-speaking) region, about an equal distance from Brussels.

With the split, the existing library had to be divided. The disputants negotiated a typically Belgian compromise: those volumes with even call numbers went to

U.C. Louvain and those with odd call numbers went to K.U. Leuven.

When I arrived in Leuven in February 2006 as a visiting scholar,<sup>1</sup> I was aware of this history and knew about Belgium's language cleavage and linguistic frontier.<sup>2</sup> But I thought the conflict between the Flemish and Walloon peoples was a thing of the past, of little contemporary relevance to my interest in ethnic conflicts in general and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular. Two experiences were soon to suggest I might be wrong on both counts.

1 I am grateful to the Francqui Foundation for the opportunity to have spent a semester at K.U. Leuven as the holder of the International Francqui Chair. This essay reflects my ongoing collaboration with Alain Verbeke, my host at K.U. Leuven, to whom I am deeply indebted. I would also like to acknowledge the research assistance of Ariel Heifetz, Columbia College 2004, and Eli Schlam, Harvard Law School 2009.

2 See Kenneth D. McRae, *Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies: Belgium* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 17. In the south – Wallonia – nearly everyone speaks French; in the north – Flanders – the language is Dutch. In a population of 10.5 million, about 44 percent speak French and about 56 percent speak Dutch. In one small area obtained from Germany after World War I, with a population of about fifty thousand, German is the principal language.

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The first relates to the controversy concerning the “Manifesto for an Independent Flanders within Europe.”<sup>3</sup> The argument of the 252-page manifesto can be easily summarized:

1) Flanders and Wallonia have divergent needs and goals because they have profound differences – political, economic, social, and cultural.

2) The two regions are artificially held together only by a “maladjusted and inefficient” federal governmental structure with antimajoritarian restrictions and a “chaotic distribution of powers.”

3) As a result of this structure, rational and efficient policymaking is impossible, and Flanders is unable to adopt those policies necessary to maintain economic competitiveness and ensure future economic growth in the face of the socio-economic challenges of an aging population, ever-growing globalization, and increasing international competition.

4) A further result of this structure is that, at the national level, bad compromises are negotiated, which require the Flemish people to make “exorbitant and inefficient” financial transfers amounting to over 10 billion euros per year (about 1,734 euros for each Fleming) to Wallonia and Brussels. If Flanders remains part of Belgium, these subsidies are only likely to increase.<sup>4</sup>

3 In de Warande, “Manifesto for an Independent Flanders within Europe,” Brussels, Belgium, November 2005. The report was ‘drawn up’ by the ‘Reflection Group’ – sixteen Flemish businessmen and academics who had studied Belgium’s problems at the ‘Warande,’ the elite Flemish men’s club in Brussels located next to the residence of the American ambassador to Brussels. The manifesto also carries the names of an additional fifty people who “subscribe[d] to [its] conclusions . . . and principles.”

4 Ibid., 155. See, generally, *ibid.*, 132 – 177. The amount of transfers, as well as the reasoning of the “Manifesto,” is contested in Giuseppe

5) The only durable solution is the full independence of Flanders. Because of its economic and social development since World War II, Flanders has the identity and self-sufficiency to be a full-fledged national community with all the characteristics of an independent member state of Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The manifesto was neither shrill nor highly rhetorical. Nor was it created and endorsed by persons thought to be extreme Flemish nationalists, such as the leaders of the Vlaams Belang, a political party on the far right that is hostile to immigrants and has long called for Flemish independence. Instead, people who can best be described as Flemish members of the business and academic establishment, including Herman de Bode, the president of the Harvard Club of Belgium and the chairman of McKinsey and Company in the Benelux, were responsible for the document.

The manifesto provoked an immediate outcry from the francophone community. Because of a francophone client’s protest, de Bode was forced to resign as chair of McKinsey. Naturally, this controversy piqued my interest in learning more about the conflict between the Flemish and the Walloons,

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Pagano, Miguel Verbeke, and Aurélien Accaputo, “Le manifeste du group In de Warande,” *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* 8 – 9 (1913 – 1914) (2006).

5 Recently, Rudy Aernoudt, a prominent former Flemish public servant, wrote a book with both Dutch and French editions, suggesting policies that might improve the national economy and hold the country together, contrary to the “Manifesto.” See Rudy Aernoudt, *Vlaanderen Wallonië. Je t’aime moi non plus* (Roeselare: Roularta Books, 2006); Rudy Aernoudt, *Wallonie. Flandre. Je t’aime moi non plus* (Roeselare: Vif/Roularta Books, 2006). On his website, [www.aernoudt.com](http://www.aernoudt.com), over three hundred persons, including many prominent Flemings, endorsed his perspective.

the present institutional structure of Belgium, and the prospects for the nation's survival as a single state.

The second experience relates to interviews I conducted during my visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories in late February 2006. It had never occurred to me that the conflict between the Flemish and the Walloons, and Belgium's governmental structure, would be thought relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. But on two different occasions, after learning that I was temporarily residing in Belgium, Palestinian intellectuals stated that the resolution of the conflict should involve the creation of a single secular state modeled after Belgium's – with language communities and largely autonomous regions that would give both Jews and Palestinians substantially independent control over their own destinies within the framework of a single binational, federal state.<sup>6</sup> The irony of this suggestion did not escape me.

I have since discovered some surprising similarities between these obviously very different ethnic conflicts. As it turns out, the size of Israel and the Palestinian territories combined is almost exactly the same as Belgium, both in terms of square miles and population.<sup>7</sup> Both can be seen as conflicts between two

peoples – with roughly equal numbers – where the issue can be framed as whether the appropriate resolution should involve two states or only one. Finally, in both disputes, if there is to be a two-state solution, a contentious and complicated issue is the fate of the capital – Brussels or Jerusalem.

Yet what makes the comparison fascinating is not these similarities but a conspicuous difference. Belgium presents a remarkable example of an ethnic conflict without a single death or any mass violence over a thirty-year period. During that time, a Belgian political elite on opposing sides of the language divide stitched a series of compromises into a complex federal system. This new federal regime may not be sufficient to hold the Belgian state together, but no one believes the conflict between the Flemings and Walloons will become violent. This stands in striking contrast to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where during the same period negotiations have repeatedly failed and thousands have died. Many believe that the outline of a two-state solution that would better serve the interests of most Israelis and most Palestinians is reasonably clear. President Clinton outlined its basic terms in 2000. But since the collapse of the Oslo peace process at the end of 2000, more than one thousand Israelis and three thousand Palestinians have died in this seemingly intractable conflict.

The contrast with Belgium poses two general questions: Why do some ethnic cleavages with territorial dimensions lead to violent breakups or civil war (e.g., Yugoslavia) while others are resolved peacefully through negotiations (e.g., Czechoslovakia)? There obviously is not a single answer to this question,

6 See Victoria Tilley, *The One State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). This seems to have been the favored resolution of the late Edward Said. See Edward Said, "Truth and Reconciliation," in *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 318.

7 Belgium is 11,787 square miles; Israel and the Palestinian territories are 10,548 square miles. Belgium's estimated 2006 population is about 10,500,000, while that of Israel and the Palestinian territories is approximately 11,100,000. Population Reference Bureau, 2006 *World Pop-*

*ulation Data Sheet*, <http://www.prb.org/pdf06/06WorldDataSheet.pdf>.



but the study of Belgium and the contrast with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can suggest some useful hypotheses and inform speculation.<sup>8</sup>

A second general question relates to federalism and the extent to which, through institutional design, a nation with ethnic cleavages can be created or held together. Here the study of Belgium leads me to somewhat more pessimistic conclusions. The Belgium case suggests that federal structures allowing for decentralized decision making may exacerbate centrifugal forces. Moreover, consociational safeguards, which give each ethnic group veto power over policies and changes, may lead to policy deadlocks that hasten the eventual breakup of a nation. If this is so in Belgium, is there any hope that such a structure can provide a solution for the Israelis and the Palestinians, or in other countries (such as Iraq or the Congo) with ethnic cleavages that have territorial dimensions and where there is a long history of violence?<sup>9</sup>

Belgium only became a nation in 1830, and its creation was not the culmination of a single people, with a shared sense of Belgian identity, achieving nationhood.<sup>10</sup> Before that year, the territory

that makes up Belgium (with the exception of Liege) consisted of an amalgam of separate provinces – some francophone and some Flemish – controlled first by the Spanish, later by the Austrian Hapsburgs, then by the French, and finally by the Dutch. The nation's founding was thus not a love match but an arranged marriage between spouses who had little in common – the product of a nineteenth-century compromise among great powers interested in creating a neutral buffer state. In 1831, the Belgian National Congress wrote a 'liberal' constitution that contemplated a strong unitary parliamentary state with a constitutional monarch. A German noble closely related to both the British and French royal families was invited to become the first King of the Belgians.

When Belgian independence was declared, language reflected social-class differences more than a cultural cleavage. French was the language not simply of the Walloons but also of the Flemish elite. Although the Flemings always outnumbered the French speakers, the francophone Belgians dominated the new country culturally, politically, and economically. While the Belgian constitution contained words suggesting language liberty, the new parliament, dominated by this elite, made French Belgium's "single official language" – the only language to be used in the national legislature, in governmental administration, and in the courts. It was contemplated that French could be imposed in Flanders and that the entire country would eventually become francophone

8 James Fearon and David Laitin have done important, systematic empirical work on ethnicity and violence. See James Fearon and David Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97 (1) (January 2003): 75–90; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," *International Organization* 54 (4) (Autumn 2000): 845–877.

9 See Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Berneo, eds., *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004).

10 This is not to say that after the creation of Belgium, some historians did not attempt to

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reconstruct a Belgian history demonstrating the prior existence of some sense of peoplehood. See Louis Vos, "Reconstruction of the Past in Belgium and Flanders," in *Secession, History and the Social Sciences*, ed. Bruno Coppieters and Michel Huyseune (Brussels: VUB Brussels University Press, 2002).

through “a policy of assimilation,” using “legal and economic influence.”<sup>11</sup>

For more than a century after Belgium’s founding, Wallonia was much richer than Flanders. With large coal reserves, Wallonia was among the earliest parts of Europe to industrialize, and it experienced rapid economic growth during the nineteenth century. Flanders, on the other hand, relied on subsistence agriculture. It had no modern industry: its famed textile facilities never became fully mechanized and floundered in the nineteenth century. Crop failures led to a famine and contributed to massive unemployment and severe economic hardship. Many Flemings emigrated, to Wallonia and to America.

Throughout this period, there was rampant social and economic discrimination against those who could not speak French. State-supported elementary and secondary education was predominantly francophone, as was all university-based instruction. Francophone Belgians viewed the Flemish majority who could not speak proper French as uneducated, backward peasants, suited to do manual labor but little else. Because upward social mobility required knowledge of French, many Flemings learned French. Few Walloons ever bothered to learn Dutch.

Needless to say, many Flemings resented the discrimination, especially the prohibition against using their own language in their dealings with the government. In the late nineteenth century, the laws on the books were changed in the direction of official bilingualism, al-

though actual practices changed much more slowly.<sup>12</sup> Between 1890 and 1920, contemporaneous with the extension of suffrage, a mass ‘Flemish movement’ emerged.<sup>13</sup> Its major focus was language and cultural rights. During World War I it was claimed that thousands of Flemish enlisted men had died unnecessarily because their francophone officers issued commands that the men could not understand. A 1921 law envisioned a bilingual regime of sorts, in which government officials would use both languages. Nevertheless, the Walloon region remained francophone, and even in the Flemish areas, many government officials spoke only French.<sup>14</sup>

A critical change with respect to language policies occurred in 1932 and 1935, when legislation established a regime of *dual monolingualism* that remains to this day. Reversing the bilingual law of 1921, this legislation created two monolingual regions on the basis of a *territorial line*

12 McRae, *Conflict and Compromise*; Huysmanns, “The Flemish Question”; Liesbet Hooghe, “Belgium: Hollowing the Center,” in *Does Federalism Matter? Political Institutions and the Management of Territorial Cleavages*, ed. Nancy Bermeo and Ugo Amoretti (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 62–76, 58.

13 In 1893, the Belgian constitution was amended to give all men over twenty-five one vote, with additional votes (up to a maximum of three) going to older men who owned homes, had sufficient savings, or held a university degree. A 1920 amendment created universal *male* suffrage where all had a single vote. Suffrage was not extended to women until 1948. There is a vast literature on the Flemish movement. See François Nielsen, “The Flemish Movement in Belgium After World War II: A Dynamic Analysis,” *American Sociological Review* 45 (1) (1980); Huysmanns, “The Flemish Question”; Theo Hermans, Louis Vos, and Lode Wils, *The Flemish Movement: A Documentary History, 1780–1990* (London: Athlone Press, 1992).

14 See McRae, *Conflict and Compromise*, 28.

11 Kris Deschouwer, “Kingdom of Belgium,” in John Kincaid and C. Alan Tarr, eds., *Constitutional Origins, Structure and Change in Federal Countries*, vol. 1 (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 2005), 49. M. Camille Huysmanns, “The Flemish Question,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 9 (5) (1930).

dividing the country. The language used in administrative matters, primary and secondary education, and judicial matters was to be based exclusively on location – not the mother tongue of the individual citizen. In Flanders, Dutch became the only official language; and in Wallonia, the official language was exclusively French. Only Brussels and certain border areas were to remain bilingual.

After World War II, there was a striking reversal of economic fortunes for the two regions. In Wallonia, the coal and steel industries declined. In Flanders, the port of Antwerp was modernized; foreign investment poured in; and new plants were built for petrochemicals, car assembly, and shipbuilding. Today, the Flemish region of the country is substantially richer than the Walloon region. The per-capita GDP of Flanders now exceeds that of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, while that of the Walloon region is similar to that of the poorer regions in France and Italy.<sup>15</sup>

Since 1970, contemporaneous with the economic rise of the Flemish region, five sets of constitutional revisions have transformed Belgium's governmental structure from a strong unitary national system into a federal structure of mind-boggling complexity, in which substantial power has devolved to monolingual subnational governmental units.<sup>16</sup>

15 GDP per capita in Flanders is approximately \$33,500, while it is about \$24,500 in Wallonia. Eurostat Regional Database, [http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?\\_pageid=0,1136162,0\\_45572076&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=0,1136162,0_45572076&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL). The 2005 estimate for the United Kingdom and Germany is approximately \$30,100; in France it is \$29,600, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>.

16 See Hooghe, "Hollowing the Center." The November 2006 issue of *West European Politics* is

Today, Belgium's constitution allocates power and responsibility to governments for each of three *territorially based regions* (Wallonia; Flanders; and Brussels, the capital) and three *language communities* (French, Flemish, and German). The regions and communities have directly elected, parliamentary-style legislatures and a legislatively accountable executive body.<sup>17</sup> They also have broad and *exclusive* responsibility and authority in specified areas.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of these changes, political life in Belgium is now conducted along linguistic lines. There is no longer any major political party that operates on both sides of the linguistic frontier. By reason of internal conflicts relating to language and cultural autonomy, the traditional parties – the Catholic or Christian Democrats, the Liberals, and the Socialists – have all now split into separate French-speaking and Dutch-speaking parties. Today, there are two distinct party systems in Belgium, one francophone and one Flemish.<sup>19</sup>

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devoted to Belgian politics and has the transformation of Belgium from a unitary state to a federal system as its connecting theme.

17 Flanders decided early on to combine the language-based 'Flemish community' parliament with the Flemish regional parliament. The result is that there are a total of six, rather than seven, parliamentary-style elected legislatures, each of which has a government.

18 The authority of the communities includes matters relating to education, language, and culture, including support of the arts. The regions have authority for a broad range of policies relating to economic development, environment, agricultural and housing policy, water, energy, and transport.

19 Lieven De Winter, Marc Swyngedouw, and Patrick Dumont, "Party System(s) and Electoral Behavior in Belgium: From Stability to Balkanization," *West European Politics* 29 (5) (November 2006): 933–956.

At the national level, there are a variety of mechanisms to ensure that neither the Flemish nor the francophone parties, acting on their own, can impose decisions on the other language group. A governing majority in parliament always requires a coalition government, and the Belgian constitution requires that the cabinet must have an equal number of ministers from each language group, apart from the prime minister. This means that the coalitions necessarily cross language lines, and typically include at least four of the six major parties.<sup>20</sup> The current government is a coalition of the Flemish liberals (VLD), the Flemish socialists (SP.A-Spirit), the francophone liberals (MR), and the francophone socialists (PS). Because of what is known as the *cordon sanitaire*, the six major parties have agreed with each other never to include the Flemish nationalists (the Vlaams Belang) in any governing coalition.

Belgium's present-day federal structure can best be understood as a complex set of compromises, the product of a series of protracted political negotiations that sought to deal with four problems, none of which has been put to rest.

*Language and the quest for autonomy.* The Flemish movement was originally concerned primarily with language rights and cultural equality. In the 1930s, the combination of Flemish pressure, on the one hand, and resistance to a bilingual regime that would require French-

speaking government officials to learn Dutch, on the other, resulted in the scheme of territorial monolingualism. Over time, however, the concerns of the Flemish movement broadened: "[I]t became gradually more nationalist and autonomist in response to the slow adaptation of the Belgian-Francophone institutions and growing anti-Flemish sentiment among French-speaking politicians."<sup>21</sup> Between 1970 and 2001, the Flemish parties succeeded through negotiations in creating a federal system that gives the Flemings the power to make policy for a broad range of issues. The conflict today relates to Flemish pressure to go further. Many within Flanders want still greater autonomy: some seek devolution to a confederal system, others independence. Francophone Belgians object to both.

*'Minority' protection versus majority rule.* Belgium democracy is not based on majority rule but instead provides an example of a 'consociational democracy,' of which proportional representation, executive power sharing, elite bargaining within grand coalitions, and minority vetoes are key elements.<sup>22</sup> At the na-

21 Hooghe, "Hollowing the Center," 59.

22 Brendan O'Leary, "Debating Consociational Politics: Normative and Explanatory Arguments," in Sid Noel, ed., *From Power Sharing to Democracy: Post-Conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies*, Studies in Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Brendan O'Leary, "An Iron Law of Nationalism and Federation: A (Neo-Diceyan) Theory of the Necessity of Federal Staatsvolk and of Consociational Rescue," *Nations and Nationalism* 7 (3) (2001); Kris Deschouwer, "And the Peace Goes On? Consociational Democracy and Belgian Politics in the Twenty-First Century," *West European Politics* 29 (5) (November 2006): 895–911; Kris Deschouwer, "Falling Apart Together: The Changing Nature of Belgian Consociationalism, 1961–2001," *Acta Politica* (37) (1–2) (Spring –

20 See also Liesbet Hooghe, "A Leap in the Dark: Nationalist Conflict and Federal Reform in Belgium," Occasional Paper 27, Western Societies Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., 1991. Since 60 percent of the population is Flemish, the unstated presumption has been that the prime minister will be Flemish – not since the 1970s has a Walloon had the top position.



tional level, in response to the Francophones' fear that they might be constantly outvoted by the Flemish majority, Belgium has put in place institutional mechanisms that prevent Flemish domination through majority rule. By reason of the alarm-bell procedure, the requirement of concurrent majorities for special laws, equal representation in the national government, and a multi-party political system that requires coalitions, the francophone political parties have considerable leverage in the national parliament to ensure that their interests are taken into account in any negotiated deal. Many Flemish resent these antimajoritarian elements, which they often characterize as antidemocratic.

*Brussels.* The Brussels metropolitan area presents a special problem for Belgium because of its physical location, its history, and its growth. Brussels is physically situated in Flanders, and in the mid-nineteenth century a majority of the city's inhabitants were Flemish. Today, Brussels is no longer a Flemish city. In fact it has become overwhelmingly francophone. The negotiated compromise was to make the nineteen municipalities of Brussels into a separate, bilingual Brussels-Capital Region that is not part of either Flanders or Wallonia. Moreover, in order to protect the Flemish minority within Brussels from francophone domination, the governmental structure of the Brussels-Capital Region has several antimajoritarian rules akin to those in the national government. Flemish residents of Brussels are guaranteed the right not only to use their language

in administrative dealings, but also to have Dutch-speaking schools. Brussels remains a point of political contention, though, because metropolitan Brussels extends well beyond the nineteen municipalities in the Brussels-Capital Region, and over the years an increasing number of French speakers have acquired homes in the surrounding areas. The Flemish fear and resent what they see as the creeping 'Frenchification' of these Flemish areas. The flash point today concerns the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde electoral district, which includes both the officially bilingual Brussels-Capital Region as well as the nominally monolingual Dutch Halle-Vilvoorde areas that surround it.<sup>23</sup>

*Regional economic differences: internal transfers.* A potentially explosive conflict relates to the control and allocation of governmental resources. In Belgium today revenues for all levels of government are primarily generated by taxes levied at the national level. Because Flanders is now much richer than Wal-

23 In 2002 the Belgian high court ruled that having Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde as a single electoral district was inconsistent with certain provisions of the present Belgium constitution that contemplate territorially based electoral districts, and remanded the matter to the national parliament for remediation. The result has been a deadlock. The Flemish parties insist that the borders of the Brussels-Capital Region remain fixed, and that the electoral district be split so that voters in the Halle-Vilvoorde areas are no longer attached to the Capital Region for any voting purposes. The francophone parties oppose the split, and also ask that six communes with a number of francophone residents be given language facilities and be added to Brussels proper. While the conflict has substantial symbolic importance on both sides of the language divide and might be used for purposes of political mobilization, its practical importance is minor. With respect to national electoral power, little turns on how the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde electoral district is reformed.

Summer 2002); Rudy B. Andeweg, "Consociational Democracy," *Annual Review of Political Science* 3 (2000): 509–536; George Tsebelis, "Elite Interaction and Constitution Building in Consociational Democracies," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2 (1) (January 1990): 5–29.



lonia, it proportionately pays more of these taxes. In past negotiations at the national level, the leaders of the francophone parties have exercised their leverage to extract and protect what the Flemish parties see as disproportionate internal transfers from the Flemish region to the Walloon region and Brussels. A good portion of these transfers occur because unemployment insurance, health insurance, and social security (old age retirement benefits, disability) remain national, and not regional, programs.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Flemings pay more into these programs than they receive. The major Flemish political parties now regularly call to varying degrees for the regionalization of these national entitlement programs. Such changes are vehemently opposed by the francophone parties, especially the Socialist Party, which sees these national entitlements as vitally important to its political base and at the core of the party's political ideology.

**I**n light of these conflicts between the Flemish and the Walloons, what can hold Belgium together, especially given the centrifugal pressures generated by the existing federal regime?

King Albert I, early in the twentieth century, was told by a Walloon political leader: "You reign over two peoples. In Belgium there are Walloons and Flemish; there are no Belgians."<sup>25</sup> This is an overstatement if it is meant to suggest that a Belgian identity counts for *nothing*.

24 Bea Cantillon, Veerle de Maesschalk, Stijn Rottiers, and Gerlinde Verbist, "Social Redistribution in Federalised Belgium," *West European Politics* 29 (5) (November 2006): 1034–1056.

25 This quote comes from a published letter to the Belgium king written by J. Destree, a Walloon Socialist. A. Alen, "Nationalism – Federalism – Democracy: The Example of Belgium," *REDP/ERPL* 5 (1) (1993): 47.

I was regularly told that people on both sides of the language divide share many values, including a pragmatic willingness to compromise and skepticism of government. They also take pride in the restaurant scene throughout Belgium (which is said to have more Michelin stars per capita than France). Nevertheless, survey evidence suggests that Belgian identity is thin, particularly for Flemings, at least in comparison to their local or regional identity.<sup>26</sup> No one knows the words of the national anthem, and Belgium is one of least nationalistic countries in the world.

Belgians are quick to suggest that there are real cultural differences between the Walloons and the Flemish. Stereotypes paint the Flemish as more disciplined and harder working, like those of the Northern European, Germanic cultures, while the Walloons take after the more fun-loving Latins in Southern Europe.<sup>27</sup> Ideologically there are some conspicuous differences as well: the socialist tradition is much stronger in the Walloon region; the Flemings are much more committed to a market economy. While nearly everyone throughout the country is nominally Catholic, the proportion of observant Catholics is thought to be higher in Flanders.<sup>28</sup>

26 Hooghe, "Hollowing the Center," 65; See J. Billiet, B. Maddens, and A-P. Frogner, "Does Belgium (Still) Exist? Differences in Political Culture Between Flemings and Walloons," *West European Politics* 29 (5) (November 2006): 912–932.

27 On the cultural clichés and stereotypical perceptions, see Aernoudt, *Wallonie. Flandre. Je t'aime moi non plus*, part I.

28 For a recent study suggesting that these differences in religiosity are being eroded, and that the entire country is becoming more secular, see Billiet, Maddens, and Frogner, "Does Belgium (Still) Exist?"

What seems uncontested today is that the language cleavage has been embedded into a governmental structure that reinforces the sense of ‘two peoples’ who are likely in years to come to drift farther apart, and not be brought closer together. Ordinary citizens may participate in the political process only among their own language group. There are no mass media – i.e., national newspapers, television stations, or radio stations – aimed at both the French- and Dutch-speaking communities. The daily newspapers are exclusively Dutch, French, or German. Television and radio stations have been separate in Flanders and Wallonia since 1960, and each community has its own public broadcasting organization regulated by its language community, not the national government. “As a result of this media gap, two cultures have gradually emerged, with diverging social sensitivities, fashions and customs.”<sup>29</sup>

While Belgium is a small country, there is surprisingly little social interaction between Flemings and Walloons. The number of mixed Flemish-Walloon marriages is very low.<sup>30</sup> And the degree of residential and workplace segregation in the Flemish and Walloon regions is stunning. Very few Dutch-speaking people reside or work in Wallonia, and very few Walloons live in or commute to Flanders. Flemish businessmen in prosperous southwest Flanders complain that because even unemployed Walloons are unwilling to commute to Flanders, they often hire workers from neighboring France. Within Brussels (where 85 percent of the population speaks French

at home and 15 percent speak Dutch), there is a modest degree of residential integration. The Brussels workplace also tends to be more integrated because 350,000 Flemish people who live in Flanders work in Brussels.<sup>31</sup>

Millions of Belgians literally are unable to communicate because they cannot speak each other’s language. The degree of linguistic segregation in the schools – from the elementary level through the universities – is striking. The curriculum of any particular school is typically taught exclusively either in French or Dutch. While some families intentionally cross-enroll their children so that they might better learn the other language, these are the exception.

Nor is there a shared national commitment to make Belgians bilingual. While elementary schools, on both sides of the language divide, do offer a few hours a week of language instruction in the other language beginning in the fourth grade, few Walloons ever learn to speak Dutch with any degree of fluency. In 2000, researchers found that, in Wallonia, 17 percent know Dutch in addition to French. The proportion of bilingual Flemish people is much higher: 57 percent know French and Dutch, and 40 percent know English as well. In Wallonia, only 7 percent are trilingual.<sup>32</sup> My strong impression, however, is that compared to a generation ago, fewer Flemish speak French fluently because of the increasing dominance of English.<sup>33</sup>

31 W. Swenden and M. Jans, “‘Will It Stay or Will It Go?’ Federalism and the Sustainability of Belgium,” *West European Politics* 29 (5) (November 2006): 890.

32 Victor Ginsburgh and Shlomo Weber, “La Dynamique Des Langues En Belgique,” *Regards Economiques* 42 (June 2006).

33 “The youngest generations of Flemings, unlike their parents and grandparents, have

29 Ibid, 914.

30 Ibid., 915. Citing F. Bartiaux and C. Watterlar, “Nuptialiteit,” *Algemene Volks-en Woningtelling op 1 maart 1991*, Monograph n. 5A (Brussels: National Statistical Institute, 2002).

So what 'glue' is there to hold the country together, particularly in the face of a serious economic or political shock? While the two groups have shared a national history since 1830, much of it has not been happy. Two devastating World Wars were fought on Belgian soil, and during each there was a German occupation that led to divisive and bitter postwar accusations, in which many Flemish felt unfairly accused of collaboration. Although the Flemish region is now more prosperous and has substantial autonomy, psychologically many Flemish still feel resentment over language slights and what they see as ongoing francophone condescension. Meanwhile, some in the francophone community are very quick to characterize Flemish politics as fascistic – because of the electoral strength of the *Vlaams Belang* – and to condemn Flemings generally for selfishness and lack of solidarity because of their expressed desire to reduce the entitlements of the welfare state.

Some say only soccer and the monarchy provide glue – not good news, since the national team is mediocre and Prince Philippe, the francophone heir apparent to the throne, is regularly characterized in the Flemish press as a bumbling dimwit.

The factors that are more likely to hold the country together, besides inertia and conventional concerns about the economic costs of a divorce, are Flemish fears that Brussels might be lost, a culture that supports pragmatic compromise, and the interests of a national political elite that is experienced at problem-solving negotiations.

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grown up and become socialized in a monolingual Dutch environment . . . . They are much more focused on the Anglo-Saxon world, which means that French has become a foreign language." Billiet, Maddens, and Frogner, "Does Belgium (Still) Exist?"

For those Flemings pressing for independence, Brussels presents a real political stumbling block. Today, Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium and often characterized as the capital of Europe – it is the capital of the Flemish regional government and community. Although Brussels is located within what was historically Flanders, it is highly unlikely that a majority of this overwhelmingly francophone city, if given a choice, would elect to dissolve Belgium to become part of Flanders. Nor would its residents necessarily prefer to become part of a new francophone nation over maintaining the status quo: francophone residents of Brussels do not identify with the Walloon region and its separate culture so much as with the broader, more cosmopolitan French culture. They also have economic reasons to prefer the status quo to dissolution: Brussels is not a rich city, and it benefits from transfers from Flanders – both direct and indirect.

The manifesto suggests that, after the dissolution of Belgium, Brussels should become a condominium of sorts, a shared responsibility of the two new nations as well as the European Union. Others have suggested that Brussels might become a 'free city,' part of neither new country but instead the capital of Europe, presumably subsidized by the EU. While such alternatives would presumably be acceptable to those pressing for Flemish independence, the manifesto fails to describe the process by which any of these alternatives can be achieved. Flanders lacks the capacity to solve the Brussels problem unilaterally. Instead such arrangements would have to be created through negotiations, with the agreement of the national francophone parties and the EU, and presumably with some sort of ratification by the residents of Brussels as well. But why

would the francophone parties or the EU agree to such arrangements, which they would surely see as smoothing the path to Flemish independence? And why would a majority in Brussels prefer such alternatives to the status quo?

Suppose Flemish independence could be achieved only if Brussels became part of a new francophone state. How likely is it that a majority of Flemings would support independence if, in the process, Flanders risks 'losing' Brussels? In answering this question, we must acknowledge that many Flemings have ambivalent feelings toward Brussels. They often express pride in this cosmopolitan city and its Flemish roots. But many Flemish – especially those who live and work outside the city – also feel Brussels has become a foreign metropolis filled with immigrants. They often express resentment that Brussels is only nominally bilingual – in reality, Dutch is not much used or even understood in many shops and restaurants. Nonetheless, Brussels is an important part of the glue that holds the country together. Like a father who never files for divorce because he is unwilling to give up custody of a child, many Flemings – who might otherwise favor independence – would prefer to stay in an unsatisfying Belgian marriage, where the spouses are leading separate lives, than give up Brussels.

Another important factor that holds Belgium together is shared cultural commitment to pragmatism and compromise. Both Flemings and Walloons use the expression 'Belgian compromise' to describe a deal in which difficult issues are resolved because each party in a conflict has made some concessions. While a Belgian compromise is typically messy, inefficient, and ambiguous – and no one may understand its long-term implications – it allows ordinary life to go on without undue disruption or violence.

The history of Belgium is replete with such compromises.

Finally, the leaders of the major political parties are masters at negotiating such Belgium compromises, across both language and ideological cleavages. In these negotiations the leaders have a great deal of power because the leaders can speak for their parties. Belgium is sometimes called a 'partitocracy' because of the power of political parties within the Belgian system.<sup>34</sup> Party discipline is total; in parliament, deputies vote as their party leaders dictate because it is the leaders who substantially influence whether someone is a candidate and, subsequently, their position on the electoral list. Party leaders are not directly accountable to the electorate.

Moreover, the need for coalitions in order to form a government, when combined with the various antimajoritarian rules, creates pressure to forge some sort of working consensus across party lines. Stalemates do occur, sometimes leading to the fall of the government and the call for new elections. But the typically protracted negotiations often result in log-rolling compromises, sometimes with further devolution of authority to the regional or community level combined with various side payments subsidizing the Walloon region. Complaints about Belgium's 'democratic deficit' relate to the fact that these leaders can negotiate deals without much public input or dialogue. Leaders are often accused of 'selling out' and accepting arrangements inconsistent with assurances given during election campaigns. Nevertheless, over the years, this political elite has helped hold the country together.

34 See Lieven de Winter and Patrick Dumont, "Do Belgian Parties Undermine the Democratic Chain of Delegation?" *West European Politics* 29 (5) (November 2006): 957–976.

In thinking about negotiations concerning the future of Belgium, I have identified four conceptual possibilities:

- 1) The national government might be strengthened and policies adopted to mitigate the language-based cleavage and reinforce Belgian national identity.
- 2) The status quo might be maintained.
- 3) There might be further devolution of authority to the regions, perhaps leading to a confederation.
- 4) Flanders might gain independence.

The first outcome strikes me as extremely unlikely. In theory, the engine of history might be 'run in reverse,' and Belgium might adopt policies to make the entire country bilingual, strengthen the national identity, and augment the powers of the national government. Because the separate language communities control the schools and language policy, though, the national government lacks the authority to require bilingual education. Nor does it have a major political party on either side of the linguistic divide advocating the return of more authority to the national government. Path-dependency often means one cannot simply retrace one's steps once decisions are made.

The other three scenarios are all possible, and each has its advocates. The three mainstream Flemish parties have all indicated they would prefer some further devolution of authority to the regions, particularly with respect to economic and social welfare policies. The Flemish Socialist Party would prefer modest changes in the existing federal system, while the Flemish Liberal Party and the Flemish Christian Democratic Party have suggested going much further and creating a 'confederal' state. In such a state, through a common constitution, the regions would cede only defined and limited powers to the national government. Belgium would continue to exist,

but its institutional importance would be substantially reduced, perhaps retaining responsibility only for national defense and aspects of foreign affairs. Presently, only the Vlaams Belang and one small conservative Flemish party (the NV-A) advocate the creation of an independent Flemish republic. This might result either from the negotiated dissolution of the Belgian state or successful unilateral secession by Flanders. Meanwhile, all of the francophone parties prefer the status quo, vehemently opposing further devolution, much less a confederation or Flemish independence.

The negotiations concerning the future of Belgium are coming to resemble a game of 'chicken.' In that dangerous game, two teenagers drive down a single lane toward each other. The driver who stays in the lane wins the game; the driver who swerves is the 'chicken.' If neither swerves, a collision occurs. Each player would like to win, but each player would prefer swerving to colliding.

In the case of Belgium, the Flemish parties will argue for further devolution. The francophone parties will resist. The Flemish political elite at the national level will probably suggest that the francophone parties' refusal to compromise risks eventual Flemish secession. Given the problem of Brussels and the various legal impediments to secession, though, the francophone parties may not find the threat of secession credible. Moreover, they may believe that in the end the leaders of the mainstream Flemish political parties would not support Flemish secession because it might not serve their personal political interests or those of the Flemish unions and the Flemish NGOs that administer elements of the national entitlement programs.

A stalemate might well lead to escalation on the part of the more mainstream



Flemish parties to put greater pressure on the francophone parties. In the face of francophone intransigence, the Flemish Christian Democratic Party and the Flemish Liberal Party might come to favor independence unless there is further devolution. The Flemish parliament might take actions to signal that a majority there would support secession if the francophone parties remain inflexible. For example, resolutions might be proposed advocating an advisory referendum within Flanders on the question of Flemish independence.

Whether or not a majority in Flanders would vote for independence in such a referendum is hardly clear, especially in light of the Brussels problem. More fundamentally, a unilateral declaration of independence by the Flemish parliament is of dubious legality. Nothing in the Belgian constitution allows secession. And it is difficult to imagine that the constitution could be amended to allow it over the opposition of the francophone parties. If the Flemish parliament proposed holding a referendum in Flanders as a prelude to a unilateral declaration of independence, those opposed to Flemish independence would no doubt challenge its legality on a variety of grounds in the Belgian constitutional court.<sup>35</sup> There is no provision in the constitution providing for a referendum, much less one to be held in Flanders alone. Moreover, they would claim that, whatever the outcome of such a referendum, Flanders lacks the power to declare its independence unilaterally. It is likely the Belgian

court would follow the Canadian ruling in *Secession Reference*. That case ruled that a referendum in favor of secession in Quebec could not be the basis for unilateral secession; instead it could do little more than create an obligation for Quebec and the other provinces in Canada to negotiate in good faith. Applied to the Belgium case, good-faith negotiations would not require the francophone parties to agree to Flemish independence.

External international pressures might also discourage Flemish secession. International law strongly discourages unilateral secession because it violates state sovereignty, which is at the center of the international system. It is conceivable that the issue of Flemish secession might be brought before the European Court of Justice, but here, too, the probability of Flemish success is low. While those seeking Flemish independence would no doubt claim that as a people they have a right to self-determination, this claim is not very persuasive. Because of the substantial autonomy the Flemings presently have within Belgium, they cannot credibly claim they are prevented from participating in the political, economic, and social decision-making processes of the state. They are not an oppressed minority but instead a majority that is, on average, richer than the francophone community.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, any attempt at Flemish secession must be examined in the context of the European Union. The EU would probably see the dissolution of Belgium

35 Called the Court of Arbitration, this court has ultimate responsibility for adjudicating jurisdictional conflicts between various levels of government and ruling on the allocation of governmental authority within the federal system. By law, this twelve-person court must have an equal number of French-speaking and Dutch-speaking judges.

36 Principle VIII of the Helsinki Final Act adopted by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 states: "The participating States will respect the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination, acting in all time in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and with the relevant norms of international law, including those relating to the

as a threatening precedent, given the internal cleavages in other EU countries, most notably Spain. Moreover, Belgium plays an integral role in the stability of the EU because Brussels is the home of many European Community institutions. The EU and many member states would probably apply a great deal of pressure on the parties to negotiate a resolution of the conflict short of Flemish independence.

However, despite all these impediments, a hard-nosed realist would recognize that if the Flemish parliament ever declared independence after a referendum in which a substantial majority of the Flemish people voted in favor of that outcome, Flanders – like Slovenia – could probably secede and ultimately secure international recognition of its independence. There would be no civil war, and Flanders would no doubt become a member of the EU.

This outcome is highly unlikely, though, given the preferences of all of the mainstream political parties on both sides of the language cleavage. With the exception of the Vlaams Belang and one small party (NV-A) presently in a coalition with the Flemish Christian Democrats, all of them would prefer further devolution to Flemish secession. Secession would represent a collision, in which neither player swerves.

In this game of chicken, the francophone political parties have an advantage because the negotiations are occurring in the shadow of a legal regime in

which changing the structural status quo requires francophone assent. The francophone parties may refuse to swerve from their insistence on the status quo because they believe that the major Flemish parties cannot credibly commit to staying on the path toward Flemish independence. The dilemma for the Flemish negotiators is that, without credible Flemish moves in the direction of secession, the francophone parties may not be willing to make any significant concessions in the direction of devolution or entitlement reform.

My own best guess is that the probable outcome after the 2007 national elections will be a ‘Belgium compromise’ – a complex and obscure deal that perhaps couples a resolution of the controversy over Brussels-Halle Vilvoorde electoral district with some small entitlement reform. The deal might include a modest devolution of some welfare policies coupled with transitional transfer payments from Flanders to ease the impact in the Walloon region and Brussels. Unilateral secession seems highly unlikely unless the francophone parties refuse to make any concessions and a substantial Flemish majority finds a protracted stalemate intolerable because of the perceived consequences for the Flemish economy.

Studying the ethnic conflict between the Flemish and the Walloons hardly provides a sufficient basis to develop a full-blown theory of why some conflicts are violent and others are not. But by contrasting this conflict with that of the Israelis and Palestinians, one can suggest some intriguing factors that might make the peaceful resolution of an ethnic conflict more challenging. These relate to the history, the stakes, the geography, the economics, and the institutional context (both domestically and internationally) of the conflicts.

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*territorial integrity of States*” (emphasis added). The “right of self-determination” for purposes of this Act has not been interpreted to give an internal minority people the right to secede. For further analysis, see Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 278 – 292.

*History.* The *history of the relations* between ethnic groups – the intensity of past discrimination and past violence – surely matters. History shapes both competing ethnic narratives and ethnic group identity. While the Flemish narrative speaks of social discrimination and condescension, it does not include stories of francophone Belgians attacking, wounding, or murdering Flemings. All of this stands in sharp contrast to the narratives of victimization and the historically based identities of Israeli Jews and Palestinians. The Israeli narrative embodies a historical sense of victimization based on centuries of anti-Semitism as well as the comparatively recent Holocaust and its relationship to the founding of the Jewish state. Among Palestinians, the historically based sense of victimization is equally profound. It is based on a narrative of territorial displacement through foreign colonization, the trauma of al-Nakba, and now nearly forty years of a humiliating Israeli military occupation during which thousands of Palestinians have been imprisoned, wounded, or killed.

*The stakes of the conflict: ideological, religious, political, and material.* Both Israelis and Palestinians tend to see the stakes of their conflict as existential: Will Israel survive as a Jewish state? Will the Palestinian people be able to secure a homeland? Decades of Arab enmity lead Israelis to believe that the Jewish state faces extermination unless Israeli Jews are prepared to engage in armed defense. Many Palestinians believe that an armed struggle is indispensable if the Palestinian people are to secure their own state. Moreover, religious differences enormously complicate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not only are there conflicts between the parties concerning the control of sacred sites, but also within each community there are profound internal

conflicts<sup>37</sup> concerning the role religion should play in governance. By comparison, the stakes of the conflict between the Flemish and the Walloons seem to be small potatoes. Their cultural identity and survival are not at stake. Francophone and Dutch-speaking Belgians have both achieved linguistic and cultural autonomy, and they control a broad range of governmental policies. Moreover, given the existence of the EU, many policies will be set at the supranational level regardless of whether or not Flanders stays a part of Belgium.

*Geography.* Dividing Belgium into two linguistically homogeneous independent nations – a Dutch-speaking Flanders and a French-speaking Wallonia – is a comparatively simple matter. Few francophone Walloons live in the Flemish region, and not many Dutch-speaking Flemings now live in the Walloon region. Leaving Brussels to one side, a two-state solution does not create a significant ‘minority’ problem in either state. In the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, no existing border neatly separates the two peoples. A two-state resolution would not create ethnically homogenous nations unless hundreds of thousands of families are relocated. Without relocation, each state would have a substantial ethnic minority who live on the ‘wrong’ side of the line. Today, aside from Jerusalem, which only complicates matters further, more than a quarter million Jew-

37 I have written about the importance of these internal conflicts. See Robert H. Mnookin and Ehud Eiran, “Discord ‘Behind the Table’: The Internal Conflict Among Israeli Jews Concerning the Future of Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 1 (2005): 11–44; and Robert H. Mnookin, Ehud Eiran, and Sreemati Mitter, “Barriers to Progress at the Negotiation Table: Internal Conflicts Among Israelis and Among Palestinians,” *Nevada Law Review* 6 (Winter 2006): 299–366.

ish settlers reside in the Palestinian territories and more than a million Palestinian Israelis are citizens of the Jewish state.

*Economics.* The average per-capita income of the Walloons is about three-quarters that of the Flemings: now about \$24,500 in comparison to a Flemish average of \$33,500. By international standards both groups are prosperous. In comparison, the economic disparity between the Israelis and the Palestinians is enormous: the average per-capita GDP for Israelis is about \$25,000 while that of Palestinians living in the territories is only \$1,000.<sup>38</sup>

*Political context.* The conflict between the Flemish and the Walloons has no irredentist element. The Flemish movement does not receive financial support from Holland, and the Walloons receive none from France. Palestinian groups, on the other hand, receive external support for their struggle, both in dollars and arms, from Arab countries, Iran, as well as members of the Palestinian diaspora. Israel receives substantial external financial support from the Jewish diaspora, and substantial military aid from the United States. Moreover, Israel and the Palestinian territories, unlike Belgium, are not embedded in a powerful supranational community. Belgium also has effective national and regional governmental institutions and the capacity to control internal violence. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the Palestinians lack well-developed and stable governmental institutions of their own and have been unable to control violent elements.

For Israeli and Palestinian leaders, negotiations have always occurred in the

shadow of armed conflict, where each side has shown a willingness to use force or violence. Within Belgium, leaders have never used even the threat of force. Instead, political leaders on both sides of the language divide, supported by a shared culture that appreciates pragmatism and compromise, have had a long history of dealing with one another to create Belgian compromises, which though often messy and complex have permitted the disputants to muddle through. This has never been the case in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the internal conflicts among Israeli Jews, on the one hand, and among Palestinians, on the other, have made it extremely difficult for leaders on either side to build a consensus behind the table in order to support a concession across the table.

All of these differences make negotiating a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enormously challenging. These differences suggest an important, if obvious, lesson: a single-state solution – with some sort of consociational federal, or confederal, regime – does not provide a model for a stable long-term solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even assuming (as I do not) that it would somehow be acceptable to the parties. In circumstances where there has been a protracted history of ethnic violence between two peoples of roughly equal population, where their economic circumstances are profoundly different, where there are deep internal divisions within each community, and where there is no cadre of experienced leaders with constituents willing to accept collaborative problem solving, such a regime is unlikely to provide an arrangement for an enduring peace.

38 Eurostat Regional Database; *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>.

# James G. Blight & Janet M. Lang

## *Robert McNamara: then & now*

But only in time can the moment in the  
rose-garden  
.....  
Be remembered; involved with past and  
future.

– T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton” (1991)<sup>1</sup>

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A singular fact about the twentieth century is this: roughly 160 million human beings were killed by other human beings in violent conflict. It was the bloodiest century in human history. Errol Morris’s Academy Award-winning documentary, *The Fog of War*, challenges us to look closely at that tragic century for clues as to how we might avoid a repetition of it, or worse, in this century.<sup>2</sup>

The film takes the form of a one-on-one conversation between Morris (who is behind the camera) and former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara (who is on camera). The conversation traces McNamara’s experiences from the end of World War I, through the course of World War II, and the unfolding of the cold war in Cuba, Vietnam, and around the world. We are encouraged to experience pivotal moments in the twentieth century vicariously, as the filmmaker and his subject walk us through the decisions of the leaders involved in these seminal events. Archival

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909 – 1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1991), 178.

<sup>2</sup> See also James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang, *The Fog of War: Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).



footage and recently declassified tape recordings of presidential conversations help the viewer place McNamara, who was eighty-five years old when Morris interviewed him, in the chapters of history he discusses.

Two prerequisites made *The Fog of War* possible. The first is McNamara's central role, as U.S. secretary of defense, in two momentous events of the twentieth century: the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and the escalation of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The second is McNamara's intense involvement, over the past twenty years, in research projects involving not just former colleagues but also former *enemies* – such as the Russians, Cubans, and Vietnamese who were his counterparts at the time – as well as top scholars from the relevant countries. He has reexamined his decisions and actions as a government official to a degree and in ways that we believe are unprecedented; and he has done so by exposing himself time and again to former enemies who have not been shy about telling him exactly where they believe he was *wrong* and, therefore, why he should be held culpable for decisions and actions they and others regard as regrettable, even criminal.

At the heart of his evolution as a researcher is what we call the phenomenon of the 'two McNamaras': this peculiar spectacle of an octogenarian discovering and analyzing with the greatest intensity, often with new and compelling data from unusual sources, the mistakes – always focusing primarily on the mistakes – that he made as a public official decades earlier, and then drawing lessons from his experience for the world of the twenty-first century. Morris captured the 'two McNamaras' brilliantly in his film. As the principal organizers of the research projects within which

McNamara engaged many of his former enemies, we have become familiar with the 'two McNamaras' phenomenon.

Reviewers and audiences responded to both the performance of the 'two McNamaras' and Morris's ability as a filmmaker to render the two fully alive on the screen. However, many were not only engaged by Morris but also *enraged* by McNamara. What seemed to irritate skeptics most was not something specific that McNamara said or didn't say, but rather the mere fact of having the 'two McNamaras' confront them yet again: the black-and-white images of the supremely confident young man in power, and the color images of an elderly man admitting to mistakes made by that same young man. To these skeptics, there was and is only one McNamara – the arrogant know-it-all who appeared on the nightly news throughout his tenure as defense secretary to mislead the American public about the Vietnam War. In their view, McNamara was and remains (in the useful phrase novelist Geoffrey Wolff used to describe his father) a "duke of deception" – who in the 1960s lied about the war in Vietnam, and who now pretends to have taken an interest in identifying mistakes he made then, solely to try to rescue his tattered reputation.<sup>3</sup>

Although we have worked with Bob McNamara for twenty years, we profess no knowledge of his deep psychological processes or his allegedly 'hidden' agendas. We regard such speculation as distractions from appreciating his achievement over the past two decades. The issue of McNamara's veracity in the 1960s with regard to the war in Vietnam is both interesting and important but also, in our view, more complicated than Mc-

Robert McNamara:  
then & now

3 Geoffrey Wolff, *The Duke of Deception: Memoirs of My Father* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

Namara's critics typically admit. Much remains to be said about this issue, but it is not our purpose to do so here. Suffice it to say that there are similarities and differences among the ways of evaluating the truthfulness and deceptiveness of individuals and governments. Within this context, it is possible for reasonable people to differ in their assessments of how McNamara compares with other public figures in the way he personally dealt with the inevitable trade-offs between personal belief and public responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

We are not going to undertake psychological analyses of McNamara's purported motive to rescue his flagging reputation. Nor will we try to refute those who for the most part, we believe, simply refuse to come to grips with his historical work at all because of their long-standing and apparently unshakeable belief that 'he lied then and so he must be lying now.' Our objective is less emotionally charged but ultimately more important. We want to provide an introduction to the research process in which McNamara has been involved. In addition, we want to summarize what the man has been up to and what he has accomplished during the past two decades, and illustrate why we need to pay attention to the results of his efforts.

We lay our own cards on the table in the form of two propositions: First, each of the 'two McNamaras' is genuine. In *The Fog of War*, an eightysomething researcher named McNamara, chastened and humbled by a good deal of what he

has learned about the mistakes he made while holding high office, really is interrogating a fortysomething public official, also named McNamara. Second, the phenomenon of the 'two McNamaras,' if it were emulated by other former officials, is potentially an important means – one of the few currently available – for reducing the risk of war and other disasters caused by mistaken assumptions and faulty decision making.

It may be asked: is it possible to raise the odds of human civilization surviving a twenty-first century already as bloody as, and arguably becoming even more dangerous than, the twentieth century? Many are pessimistic, and not without reason.<sup>5</sup> We would personally be more optimistic if we believed more former officials might be convinced to follow McNamara's lead. The signs are not encouraging, however. But we are not ready just yet to yield to this negative line of thinking. Thus, we urge our readers to resist their own cynical proclivities as well, at least until they have explored the evolution of the 'two McNamaras' and given some thought to our conclusion: *it is desirable for more public officials to emulate the 'two McNamaras' because this process can yield tangible and useful clues to how we might reduce conflict and enhance peace.*

In the 1980s, we studied the problem of nuclear danger. Nuclear war was said to be 'unthinkable,' since (it was assumed) no sane leader would knowingly initiate a global nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. But while nuclear catastrophe might be in

4 A good place to begin to evaluate McNamara's veracity is in the paperback edition of his Vietnam memoir, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage, 1996). In an appendix, McNamara reprints many reviews of the hardback edition of the book, which range from admirably positive to scathingly negative.

5 This is a central question in Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing and Catastrophe in the 21st Century*, expanded, post-9/11 pb. ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003).

this sense ‘unthinkable,’ it was not impossible. If it was not impossible, we wondered, as did many others, how might it happen?

One hazardous route that interested us, as scholars whose background was in cognitive psychology, was a deep *crisis* between heavily armed nuclear nations. The world had traveled this route only once – during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Though a great deal had been written about the missile crisis, when we first took up the issue, many authors who were, as we were, concerned with policy issues – that is, with the reduction of nuclear risks – did not believe the crisis had much, if any, relevance to the world of the mid-1980s. The global political situation, the U.S. and Soviet weapons systems, the command and control capabilities of both Moscow and Washington – all had changed dramatically since the missile crisis. Many believed these changes rendered the missile crisis little more than an historical oddity – fascinating, maybe even a little scary, but irrelevant to the contemporary world.

On the contrary, it seemed to us that another look – from a more human angle – had the potential to yield information with contemporary policy relevance. While weapons, and command and control systems, had changed markedly since the 1960s, human nature hadn’t. And so, our principal research question was straightforwardly psychological: “What was it *like* to be a decision maker during the crisis when, literally, ‘the fate of the earth’ hung on the decisions of a few leaders in Washington, Moscow, and Havana?” Decision makers became, and remain, the focus of our research. They are the people who have a special kind of knowledge that comes from participating in an event, with significant responsibility on their shoulders and with no clear idea of the outcome.

We soon found out that this question – what does nuclear danger really look and feel like? – is more complex, and more interesting, than we initially anticipated. Kierkegaard, we discovered, understood the main outlines of the difficulty long ago. We live life forward, he wrote, groping in the dark, unaware of its ultimate outcome, yet we are forced to understand events in reverse, working our way backward from outcomes to their supposed causes. This creates a profound disconnect between lived experience and our understanding of that experience.<sup>6</sup> Caught in the moment – in the riveting and scary Cuban missile crisis, for example – decision makers may feel exhausted, confused, unsure, and afraid. But in the scholarly study of decision making, as we encounter it, the confusion and fear seem to have been largely omitted. Rather than explore the experience of this and other events, scholars have tended to focus on theory-driven explanations that attribute outcomes to this or that ‘variable.’

We developed *critical oral history* to bridge the confusion and immediacy of raw experience and the relatively cut-and-dried explanations of the outcomes of that experience after the fact. It does so by combining, in structured conferences, (1) decision makers, who lived the events ‘forward,’ (2) scholars, who understand the events ‘in reverse,’ and (3) declassified documents, which provide added accuracy and authenticity to the conversation. We held our first critical oral history conference on the Cuban missile crisis in 1987. Most of the officials who advised President Kennedy

6 Kierkegaard’s perspective provides the organizational scheme for understanding nuclear danger in James G. Blight, *The Shattered Crystal Ball: Fear and Learning in the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1989).

during the crisis participated, along with eminent scholars of the crisis.<sup>7</sup> Since then, we have organized five more critical oral history conferences on the missile crisis, broadening our inquiry to include the look and feel of nuclear danger not just in Washington but also in Moscow and Havana. Robert McNamara participated in all of them; many of his colleagues from the Kennedy administration, and their Russian and Cuban counterparts, participated in one or more of the conferences.<sup>8</sup>

Encouraged by the significance of what he (and we) learned in these meetings about the missile crisis, McNamara suggested, in early 1995, that we apply the method of critical oral history to the war in Vietnam. We did, with similarly surprising and productive results, which he summarizes effectively in *The Fog of War*. McNamara participated in three of the five conferences on the war: in Vietnam (1997), Italy (1998), and the United States (1999). Former North Vietnamese officials and Vietnamese scholars participated in all these conferences as well.<sup>9</sup>

As a former decision maker, McNamara is interested in using historical

insight to determine whether, or how, he might have made better decisions. His interest is in comparing *then* with *now*. Historians, aided by declassified documents, generally want, on the contrary, to focus strictly on *then*, stripped of exactly the kind of hindsight – inherent in comments such as ‘if I knew then what I know now’ – that often makes history come alive to former officials. This is another reason we created critical oral history – to bridge this gap in a way that encourages a productive conversation between officials and historians and other academics, who may have read the same documents in their briefing notebooks, but who have different reasons for becoming involved in the inquiry. When critical oral history works well, the former decision makers gain insight into their mistakes and those of former adversaries, allowing them to glean lessons that we can apply to present-day issues. At the same time, historians are often able to learn some of the fascinating *unwritten* history of an event, which was previously unknown to them in spite of their having studied the event’s paper trail for years or even decades.

The central concept in critical oral history is *empathy*. Empathy is not sympathy or agreement, but the capacity to understand reality as someone else understands it – to articulate accurately the story others tell themselves, even though it may be unflattering or even threatening to you. The first lesson in the *The Fog of War* is *empathize with your enemy*. And for good reason. The absence of empathy, as McNamara has discovered via critical oral history, leads straightaway to misperception, miscommunication, and misjudgment – and to actions that, in turn, are likely to be misunderstood by an adversary, thus initiating or deepening a downward spiral into

7 This early phase of the Cuban missile crisis project is recounted in James G. Blight and David A. Welch, *On the Brink: Americans and Soviets Reexamine the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989).

8 The basic source is James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis and the Soviet Collapse*, expanded 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

9 These critical oral history conferences are presented and analyzed in Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, with Thomas J. Biersteker and Col. Herbert Y. Schandler, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999).



crisis and toward conflict. Sometimes, as in the period leading up to the Cuban missile crisis and during the escalation of the war in Vietnam, when one side carries out actions for what it believes are defensive reasons, the other side may feel threatened, believing its adversary has gone on the offensive and made a conscious decision to escalate the confrontation, crisis, or war. When empathy is present, however, as it was during the climactic phase of the Cuban missile crisis – when the United States and Soviet Union locked onto the same wavelength in the nick of time to avert war – even a seemingly imminent and unavoidable disaster can be averted.

When critical oral history works, empathy exists between former enemies – and sometimes even between former colleagues – that was not there during the events under scrutiny. But for the process to yield results, the curiosity of former decision makers must overwhelm their fear of entrapment by the other side. More importantly, it must overcome their fear of being exposed as having made mistakes that render them culpable, to some degree, for disastrous decisions and actions.

*Courage* is fundamental: the willingness to put yourself and your reputation at risk in order to get nearer to an accurate understanding of what happened, and why. Courage is the *sine qua non* in a critical oral history setting. It is the engine that empowers participants to empathize as fully as possible with former enemies – to explicitly or implicitly assume a viewpoint famously embodied in a comment attributed to the radical English Puritan, Oliver Cromwell. “I beseech you,” said Cromwell, “think it possible you may be mistaken.” Having dealt by now with hundreds of participants in critical oral history settings over nearly twenty years, we feel that on this

key dimension of courage – the willingness to face the possibility that you, as well as your former enemy, might have been mistaken – Robert McNamara has often led the way. He has taken risks: to identify mistakes, empathize with former enemies, and learn something from them. For people who take the process seriously, as McNamara has, critical oral history is a risky and uncertain business. Yet, as is evident in *The Fog of War* and the research on which it is based, there can be substantial rewards for those willing to take the risks.

At the beginning of *The Fog of War*, Robert McNamara says something that is so commonplace it might escape our attention. “The conventional wisdom,” he says, “is don’t make the same mistake twice – *learn from your mistakes*. And we all do.” True enough, but hardly news, we may think. He then adds another brief comment that can be easily missed and that we want to emphasize here. “In my life,” McNamara says, “*I’ve been part of wars*.” Again, while true, it is hardly newsworthy, if we fail to connect the “conventional wisdom” with his experience of having been “part of wars.” But if we make the connection, we may begin to see that he is saying something quite profound.

We have been present on many occasions when McNamara learned how deeply he was mistaken; how dangerous were the consequences of his mistakes, with regard to the Cuban missile crisis; and how his mistakes contributed significantly to the tragedy of the war in Vietnam. Of course, he (and we) learned of the mistakes of others as well – Americans, Russians, Cubans, Vietnamese. We may find it easy to dismiss such findings if we have never had anything like the responsibility that McNamara bore as secretary of defense from 1961 – 1968, if we have not, as McNamara has, been



“part of wars” in a position of significant responsibility. We may instead be tempted to conclude: “The guy made mistakes, and via this critical oral history process, he discovered what they were. Good. Better that he learns late rather than not at all, I guess.”

What is missing in this cavalier attitude is an appreciation for the *emotion* – the powerful feeling of personal responsibility for events that can be very difficult even to articulate. As we have seen and heard time and again, for those who *have been* “part of wars,” the discovery that one was mistaken in crucial situations can be shattering – not just to one’s reputation or historical legacy, but also in a personal and immediate way.

Here is a rule of thumb in the conduct of critical oral history: the more significant the revelation and the greater the subsequent need to revise our understanding of history, the bigger the mistake made at the time. In confronting such revelations, scholars and former decision makers necessarily part company. What to participating scholars is often the most dramatic and exciting tends also to be, to one or more former decision makers sitting at the same table, disturbing, even devastating, as they begin to see how their mistakes became part of the causal chain leading to danger and/or disaster. In an effort to provide a sense of this process, we will summarize some things that McNamara has learned over nearly two decades of participating in the critical oral history projects on the Cuban missile crisis and the war in Vietnam.

Here we ask *you* to practice what we preach: we want you to empathize, in this case, with Robert McNamara. Imagine, in each case, that *you are McNamara*, as the revelations are made by former enemies. *You* are the eightysomething

participant in the critical oral history conferences, and the fortysomething decision maker who participated in the events under discussion. You oscillate, in other words, between the ‘two McNamaras.’<sup>10</sup>

*Destroying Castro’s regime*: Cubans and Soviets tell you in Moscow in January 1989, that, fearing an imminent invasion of Cuba following the Bay of Pigs fiasco of April 1961, they agreed to the deal to put nuclear missiles on the island. Yet you know that after the Bay of Pigs disaster, no invasion was intended. So you and your colleagues in Washington, via continuing threats to intervene and via a program of covert operations meant to destabilize modestly (in your view) the situation in Cuba, inadvertently but unmistakably were instrumental in causing the most dangerous crisis in recorded history.

*Nuclear danger*: You and your colleagues believed that Soviet nuclear warheads never reached Cuba; thus, a U.S. air strike and invasion of the island were unlikely to pose direct danger to the American homeland. Yet you learn in Havana in January 1992, from the Soviet general who directed the missile deployment in Cuba, that the warheads *were* present, ready to be used. So the attack and invasion of Cuba, which you and your colleagues may have come within hours of ordering, would likely have escalated immediately to nuclear war, killing millions of people, including many Americans. If that had happened – and you eventually conclude that it was mainly *luck* that prevented it, as you/McNamara emphasize in *The Fog of War* – you would have borne some of the responsibility for a tragedy so im-

10 This section is based on the documentation and oral testimony in Blight et al., *Cuba on the Brink*.

mense and horrible that it seems ripped from the pages of an apocalyptic science-fiction thriller.

*How close was Armageddon?*: You firmly believed in October 1962, during the crisis, that no leader of the three involved countries would seek a nuclear war under any circumstances. Yet Fidel Castro tells you, face to face in Havana in January 1992, that he did in fact ask the Soviets to launch an all-out nuclear strike on the United States, if Cuba were to be attacked and occupied by the Americans with the intent of destroying the Cuban Revolution. So now you know that you and your colleagues had so cornered Castro, so stripped him of viable options, that he believed nuclear war was his least worst option in a contingency he felt was increasingly likely. In the event of an American invasion during the crisis, there is no doubt in your mind that the Cuban leader would have done everything in his power to provoke the Soviets into launching a nuclear attack on the United States. Moreover, you also learn that the more than forty-three thousand Russians stationed in Cuba at the time, including their field commander, would have agreed completely with Castro: they would have tried to kill as many Americans as possible, using short-range nuclear-armed weapons, even though their military defeat at the hands of the Americans was virtually assured.

*This Cuban missile crisis*, which you are learning about twenty-five to thirty years after the event, is far from Kennedy's and your (i.e., McNamara's) 'finest hour,' as it is often portrayed in lore. In fact, you (remember: you are still in character, as McNamara) nearly participated actively, if unwittingly, in the total destruction of your society and, but for 'luck,' would have been partially responsible for the worst disaster in history. Be-

cause you/McNamara agreed to go to Moscow in January 1989 and to Havana in January 1992 to try to empathize with, by listening carefully to, Cuban and Russian officials about the events of October 1962, *this* Cuban missile crisis becomes part of your legacy to history – *this* Cuban missile crisis will help define the way future generations will remember you. Because of mistakes you and your colleagues made, the world was nearly blown up. Significant Russian and Cuban mistakes were also revealed in those conferences, but those revelations do not assuage the personal impact of what we have learned about *your* mistakes.

The June 1997 critical oral history conference in Hanoi was psychologically very difficult for, and even threatening to, the former U.S. officials who participated. It was tenser than even the January 1992 confrontation with Castro and his Russian allies. Two simple statistical facts help to explain why. First: in the missile crisis, so far as is known, one American pilot was killed, flying a U-2 spy plane over eastern Cuba. The danger to the world was without precedent, but, thankfully, the outcome was benign. Second: in the American war in Vietnam, more than two million Vietnamese and more than fifty-eight thousand Americans lost their lives. In agreeing to come to the conference table in Hanoi, the participants knew that any mistakes that might be revealed in the course of those discussions would immediately and irrevocably link those found to be in error even more closely than before to all the death, destruction, and suffering implied in this 'second fact.'<sup>11</sup>

Here are three of the most significant findings:

<sup>11</sup> This section is based on McNamara et al., *Argument Without End*.

*Casualties and punishment:* You (you are now back 'in character,' as McNamara) firmly believed that some upper bound, some threshold of casualties and sheer punishment, must exist, beyond which the Vietnamese Communist adversaries would seek to negotiate an end to the war and their U.S.-inflicted misery. Yet you are told by credible interlocutors in Hanoi in June 1997 that the Vietnamese Communists, in both North and South Vietnam, had firmly resolved to accept a level of punishment far beyond that which they actually received, including nuclear attacks and a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam. They not only resolved to accept such punishment, but they had made detailed plans (which they revealed at the conference) for surviving and fighting until they won. You must reluctantly conclude that all the bombing you ordered, all the troops you deployed, and all the death and destruction your forces inflicted on the people of Vietnam were pointless. Your strategy, you are told and told convincingly, would *never* have worked. The 'threshold of pain' of the Vietnamese Communists, which was much discussed by U.S. officials at the time, existed only in your minds. It had no reality whatsoever to your Vietnamese enemies.

*Civil war:* You believed that, fundamentally, the Vietnam conflict exemplified the cold war between East and West. Hanoi, therefore (so you had assumed), exerted tight control over its allies, the National Liberation Front (NLF, or 'Vietcong') in the South. You also assumed that Moscow and Beijing similarly directed Hanoi's actions 'like a puppet on a string.' Yet you now learn from declassified Vietnamese documents, and from discussions with officials in Hanoi, that North Vietnam had great difficulty controlling the war in the South – that the NLF in fact often fiercely

resisted control from Hanoi. Those doing the fighting and dying in the South wanted to control their own destiny, not take orders from presumed leaders in Hanoi, who, many believed, did not understand the reality of the war being fought in the South. If you had believed this, you conclude, it would have been clear that the United States need not get involved in Vietnam. The outcome at the conclusion of this civil war in the South would have likely been the same – a unified Vietnam under Hanoi's leadership, but without much impact on whether other so-called dominoes in the region would fall to Communism. The difference, obviously and tragically, is that millions of people would have been spared, including many of those for whom you feel especially responsible: the more than fifty-eight thousand Americans killed in action, and the more than three hundred thousand wounded.

*Missed opportunities:* You initiated many probes of Hanoi between 1965 and 1967, each of which was a serious attempt, in your mind, to end the killing and move to a negotiated political settlement. All of them failed. Hanoi blamed you and your colleagues for refusing to agree to stop the bombing *first* before talks could begin, whereas the U.S. position was that Hanoi must first cease supplying their allies in the South, whereupon the United States would then halt the bombing of North Vietnam. Now you learn from well-placed sources in Hanoi of detailed plans drawn up in the early 1960s by the North Vietnamese government to respond favorably to an American overture, *if* you and your colleagues would only agree to stop the bombing first. These sources say their government could not, as the militarily weaker nation, risk being thought weak, by appearing to capitulate to the American demand to halt supplies to the South

*first.* Ultimately, neither side ‘went first,’ and the war went on, year after year, unnecessarily and tragically, as you now see it.

The Vietnamese Communists had a name for what U.S. officials called the bombing ‘campaign’ against North Vietnam. They called it the ‘war of destruction’ because its purpose, as they understood it, was simply and only to destroy North Vietnam, its Communist government, and its people, if necessary. Their basic assumption was that the United States was willing to commit *genocide* against North Vietnam, if that’s what it took to ‘win.’ When you heard statements to this effect in the 1960s, attributing such repugnant, unthinkable genocidal motives and objectives to the U.S. government in which you served, you were inclined to regard them as propaganda. Now, however, you begin to see the logic behind their name for that war. As you begin to empathize with the North Vietnamese government and people, you ask yourself: from their point of view, what other purpose could such bombing have, other than ‘destruction’? It begins to seem to you that, among the North Vietnamese, only the naive would have believed the actual truth of the matter, which is that the bombing was meant to force the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table by making it too painful for them to continue to persevere on the battlefield. Back inside the ‘time machine’ of critical oral history, you remember the responses you gave at the time to accusations that you had undertaken a ‘war of destruction.’ On the contrary, you said, you were stopping Communists, upholding non-Communists, protecting the ‘Free World,’ and establishing the conditions for negotiating from a position of strength. But these responses begin to ring hollow to you, once you become convinced by

your Vietnamese interlocutors that you were mistaken in the ways just listed.

[*You are now free to assume your actual identity. You can exchange your ‘two McNamaras’ for your more unitary self.*]

Do you see now why former decision makers and scholars have different reactions to the process of critical oral history as it unfolds? As scholars, we don’t have to factor in the personal cost of obtaining the knowledge. Scholars, who had no significant responsibilities in the events in question, can extend empathy to former enemies free of charge. But for former officials like McNamara, the act of empathizing with former enemies requires that you think it possible that *you* may have been mistaken, and that your enemies may therefore have been justified in thinking and acting as they did. To scholars, all the new information is interesting and some of it genuinely fascinating. To the former decision makers, it may well be interesting, but it can also be potentially incriminating. This is because every former decision maker participating is, in effect, ‘two’ participants: an elderly former official sitting at the conference table in front of a huge notebook full of declassified documents, on a psychological journey deep into the virtual ‘time machine’ of critical oral history; *and* a much younger decision maker, with the same name, who wrote and read those documents in real time.

We conclude by discussing, first, the process by which we extract from *history* an accurate understanding of why wars and conflicts have occurred in the past; and second, how we might actually reduce the risk of conflict and war now, *in real time*. Both focus on *the courage to empathize with our enemies* – something that takes more courage than one might think. Former *New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg noted in a review of

Robert McNamara:  
then & now



*The Fog of War* that McNamara's decision to appear in the film took "a kind of courage, for he knew that by coming forward at all he was offering himself up for the slaughter."<sup>12</sup> And in a fine essay that deals in part with public reaction to the 'two McNamaras' who appear in the film, Harvard scholar Samantha Power draws this conclusion: "Since Mr. McNamara seems to have generated more scorn than those who never acknowledged error – e.g., Dean Rusk, Henry Kissinger, and three American presidents – it is unlikely that other officials will be willing to follow his example."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whose fabrications about his career in government are both multitudinous and well documented, but who never admits to having made mistakes, remains a much less controversial figure than McNamara. McNamara, in fact, has the dubious distinction of having alienated those on the left and those on the right of the political spectrum. On the left, the 'two McNamaras' arrived much too late to elicit admiration or even approval; on the right, the 'two McNamaras' phenomenon is an unseemly, retrospective capitulation to the enemy. Yet the way forward – the way to learning valuable lessons from the mistakes of former leaders that led to crisis, war, and tragedy – is McNamara's way, not Kissinger's.

Can we imagine witnessing, in the near future, 'two Rumsfelds,' or 'two Cheneys,' or 'two Powells,' or 'two

Bushes' coming to grips with their own deeply mistaken mind-sets regarding the so-called war on terror following the attacks of September 11, 2001? Or should we expect each to crank out the usual self-justifying memoir after leaving office – claiming not to have made any significant mistakes, thus permitting neither them nor us to learn anything useful from the exercise? If they do produce memoirs in the 'one Kissinger' vein, our understanding of how to prevent war and promote peace will not be advanced one iota. If 'one Rumsfeld,' 'one Cheney,' 'one Powell,' and 'one Bush' made no mistakes, but still the outcome was tragic, well, what more can be done? Given the growth in the number and magnitude of ways the human race has developed to inflict violence on itself, we believe the world will grow steadily more dangerous for there being few, or no, true heirs of the 'two McNamaras.'

As difficult as it is, and likely will be, to learn the lessons of history, mustering the courage to empathize with our enemies *in real time* is even more difficult. Quoting Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Fog of War*, McNamara says that officials in charge of foreign and defense policy need to ask this question each time a decision is called for: "How much evil must we do, in order to do good?" Since 9/11, it seems to us that this question, which has rarely, if ever, been a favorite mantra of foreign policymakers, is asked even less often than it was before. Empathy is in short supply these days in U.S. foreign and defense policy. The same goes for the kind of humility Niebuhr (and McNamara) believe are appropriate: it is nowhere to be found. Rather, we are subjected to endless repetitions of this message: *they* do all the evil deeds; *we* respond as we must to prevail over a thoroughly evil enemy.

12 Sydney H. Schanberg, "Soul on Ice," *The American Prospect* 14 (10) (November 2003): 61 – 63. Reprinted in Blight and Lang, *Fog of War*, 200 – 202, 201.

13 Samantha Power, "War and Never Having to Say You're Sorry," *New York Times*, December 14, 2003, Sec. 2, 1, 33. Reprinted in Blight and Lang, *Fog of War*, 208 – 214, 212.



Neither we, nor anyone else of whom we are aware, has an easy solution to the problem of how to encourage decision makers *now* to rally the courage to empathize with their enemies. Given the shrillness with which many have criticized the ‘two McNamaras’ of *The Fog of War* for endeavoring to do so, it is hardly surprising that, for example, neither members of the Bush administration nor their supporters or opponents in Congress have dared to do so. Lacking the power to enforce the equivalent of a twelve-step program of empathy enhancement among the world’s power brokers (beginning in Washington, where the greatest power is concentrated), we consider instead an evocative excerpt from a poem by W. H. Auden that suggests part of the process that Robert McNamara has gone through to produce the ‘two McNamaras’:

...all he did was to remember  
like the old and be honest like children.

He wasn’t clever at all: he merely told  
the unhappy Present to recite the  
Past...<sup>14</sup>

It is admittedly difficult to envision the emergence of ‘two Rumsfelds,’ ‘two Cheneys,’ ‘two Powells,’ or ‘two Bushes,’ any one of whom suspects that his own actions contributed to the cycle of violence in which we find ourselves. But perhaps we are being too pessimistic. For who in 1967 – 1968 – with the war in Vietnam escalating, and with Robert McNamara almost daily claiming that “we are winning” and predicting a successful conclusion to the war – would have predicted the evolution of the ‘two

McNamaras’ through twenty years of research and their dramatic depiction in *The Fog of War*? Who would have believed that McNamara would, in the formulation of Hannah Arendt, be “drawn out of hiding” in his retirement and become, in his way, a trenchant, antiestablishment scholar and an apostle of empathy?<sup>15</sup> Not us.

*New York Times* film critic Stephen Holden wrote this in October 2003, after the March U.S. invasion of Iraq but before the December release of *The Fog of War* in theaters: “If there is one movie that ought to be studied by military and civilian leaders around the world at this treacherous moment, it is *The Fog of War*, Errol Morris’s portrait of former United States Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara.”<sup>16</sup> We agree that the ‘two McNamaras’ should be studied – by all of us. But it is far more important for military and civilian leaders to *emulate* McNamara’s example. Is this possible? Is the ‘two McNamaras’ phenomenon a fluke, never (or hardly ever) to be repeated? Or are ways available to us as scholars and as citizens by which we can raise the odds that others might be “drawn out of hiding” to identify their mistakes, so that others may learn from them without all of us having to pay such a heavy price?

14 W. H. Auden, “In Memory of Sigmund Freud,” in Edward Mendelson, ed., *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1976), 215 – 218, 216.

15 Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, in Peter Baehr, ed., *Portable Hannah Arendt*, vol. 1 (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 414.

16 Stephen Holden, “Revisiting McNamara and the War He Headed,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2003, B9, B17, B9.

# Annals by David Jewitt & Jane X. Luu

## *Pluto, perception & planetary politics*

Last summer, in Prague, members of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) voted to remove Pluto from the list of planets. It is not a major planet like our own Earth, or Mars, or Jupiter, they declared; it is instead a 'dwarf planet' along with several other diminutive but approximately round bodies in orbit about the sun. Apparently adding insult to injury, the IAU's Minor Planet Center promptly assigned Pluto a num-

ber, as they routinely do for run-of-the-mill asteroids. From now on, Pluto is 134340.

Pluto's loss of planetary status, while pleasing to the many astronomers who have long viewed Pluto as a planetary usurper, has enraged others. Dark rumors of a revolution at the IAU swirl on the Internet, and pro-Pluto political action groups have formed. Pluto's reclassification has also bemused science writers and the general public, many of whom believe planethood is Pluto's right, not to be cruelly snatched away by mean-spirited astronomers. The dusty world of the IAU has never been racked by so much controversy.

Astronomers will study Pluto just the same whatever it is called: a planet, an ex-planet, or a dwarf – it doesn't matter. In this sense, Pluto's removal from the list of planets is inconsequential. So what is behind the abnormally high level of interest and, in some quarters, the almost pathological passion aroused by Pluto's reclassification?

It turns out that the answer to this question is deep. The reaction to Pluto's demotion tells us little about Pluto, but a lot about the public perception of science, and about the role of politics and public relations in modern planetary astronomy.

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Astronomers have known since 1992 that Pluto is not alone. It orbits the sun along with a vast number of cohorts in the frozen realms beyond Neptune. This region, now widely known as the Kuiper Belt, contains bodies consisting mostly of ice and rock, like dirty snowballs trapped in the solar system's deep freeze. More than a thousand Kuiper Belt objects (KBOs) have been identified as a result of prodigious search efforts. Based on these discoveries, we can predict some seventy thousand KBOs larger than 100 kilometers in size, and tens, even hundreds, of millions of KBOs measured down to 1 kilometer in size. The new discoveries show that the Kuiper Belt is a ring-like assemblage of bodies extending roughly from Neptune's orbit at 30 astronomical units (AU; 1 AU is the average distance between the Earth and the sun) to at least 1000 AU.

The Kuiper Belt has immediately emerged as a new frontier in astronomy, scientifically important on several different levels. It turns out that the Belt is the source of many of the comets that intermittently grace Earth's skies. More significantly, it is a vast repository of icy bodies left over from the solar system's formation 4.5 billion years ago, and its study promises to tell us much about the way in which the solar system formed and evolved. With the discovery of the Kuiper Belt, it became clear that Pluto was more usefully viewed as a large KBO than as a planet. Most astronomers have recognized since 1992 that Pluto's earlier classification as a planet was a mistake, but the message has been poorly received by the wider public.

The first objects discovered in the Kuiper Belt were a few hundred kilometers in diameter, tiny compared to Pluto, which is 2300 kilometers in diameter. But it did not take long for larger bodies to be identified. By the turn of the centu-

ry, objects fully 1000 kilometers in diameter were being discovered with regularity. Starting in 2000, press reports began to tout the applicability of the term 'planet' to these objects with 2000 WR106 (Varuna; some 600 to 900 kilometers in diameter); then 2001 KX76 (Ixion; 800 kilometers); then 2002 LM60 (Quaoar), 2004 DW, 2003 EL61, and 2005 FY9 (all 1000 to 1300 kilometers). The straw that broke the planetary camel's back was 2003 UB313 (Eris), a KBO whose diameter is the same as Pluto's within the uncertainties of measurement. The point of all these discoveries was clear: Pluto is not alone. The press release announcing Eris, however, advertised it as "the tenth planet," a label that many in the press and the public accepted uncritically. But describing Eris as the tenth planet presupposes that Pluto is the ninth planet – and this had already been a controversial assertion for many years.

The history of how Pluto came to be labeled the ninth planet is well known. Astronomers in the early twentieth century noted that Uranus's position deviated from its predicted ephemeris by a small but significant amount. Since these deviations could not be attributed to Neptune, astronomers supposed that they must be due to the tug of an unseen planet. Urbain LeVerrier and John Adams had successfully used a similar argument in the previous century to predict the existence and location of Neptune, which led to its discovery in 1846 by Johanne Galle. Percival Lowell named the unseen disturber of Uranus "Planet X." He calculated its position from the perturbations on Uranus, then instigated an observational search at his private observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. In 1930, fourteen years after Lowell's death, Clyde Tombaugh indeed found Pluto near the predicted position and

announced Planet Pluto to an awestruck world.

But things began to unravel quickly. Physical measurements showed that Pluto was too small to perturb the other planets measurably: its mass is only one-fifth of 1 percent of Earth's mass, six times less than even Earth's moon. Pluto did happen to be near in the sky to Lowell's predicted location, but it had nothing to do with a Uranus-tugging "Planet X." Even worse for Percival Lowell (if not for Pluto), the deviations in the position of Uranus he used to infer the location of Pluto are now known to be observational errors, not real deviations due to an unseen planet. Thus, Pluto is not "Planet X" – not because it does not have enough mass to cause deviations in Uranus's orbit, but because those deviations are not even real!

We have to conclude that Tombaugh discovered Pluto not because of the quality of Lowell's predictions, but simply because he was looking when nobody else was. These facts, however, did not distract astronomers at Lowell Observatory from advancing Pluto as a planet; and, in the absence of much public discussion until the discovery of the Kuiper Belt, these facts made little impression on the public. For all the wrong reasons, the 'planet' label stuck.

It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened had Pluto been properly described as a large KBO upon its discovery in 1930. Most likely, our understanding of the solar system would have been advanced by many decades. The next-brightest KBOs after Pluto are fainter by a factor of fifteen or twenty. They would have been difficult for Tombaugh to locate, but astronomical sensitivity increases almost yearly and additional objects could have been identified within a decade or two. Indeed, some of the bright KBOs found in recent years

were also recorded in photographic observations from the 1950s and 1960s, but they went undetected. One of the main reasons for this is psychological: humans are not very good at perceiving things they do not expect to see. With Pluto entrenched in our minds as the 'last planet,' nobody was able to see even the bright KBOs until this population had been firmly established in the 1990s. (This is an oft-repeated story in astronomy. Pluto was recorded photographically decades before Tombaugh discovered it, but went unnoticed because it was not sought. Amazingly, Neptune was recorded by none other than Galileo, but he paid no attention to it, delaying Neptune's discovery for two hundred years.)

If Pluto had been immediately recognized as the 'tip of the Kuiper Belt iceberg,' we would have known soon after World War II – and certainly before the space age – where comets come from and where to go in the solar system to find our most primitive materials. Our understanding of the dynamics and origin of the solar system would also have been much less biased by observations of the rocky planets and the inner solar system than it has been. The damage done by the mislabeling of Pluto as a planet, in this sense, has been considerable.

So what is behind the public fascination with Pluto as a planet? Nostalgia, mostly. Pluto was always a planet in the past, how could it not be a planet now? This is the essence of the so-called cultural defense of Pluto's planethood advanced by astronomer Mike Brown at Caltech. The argument is that the definition of a planet is determined by collective beliefs rather than by any scientific metric. We can draw an analogy with the continents. There is no serious, scientifically based definition of what

constitutes a continent, just a set of accepted continents that we, as children, more or less commit to memory. This analogy is good because, as with planet-hood, the definition of 'continent' we are familiar with plays no important role in understanding the geology, geophysics, geography, or even politics of the world. It is a socially accepted construct. But this doesn't mean that anything goes. For example, it would be unacceptable to most people to suddenly declare Long Island or Florida a continent: it doesn't help scientifically, and it clearly subverts the intent of the 'continent' label, which is to point to a substantial, coherent land mass. Likewise, labeling tiny Pluto as a planet implies that it is in the same league as Earth (which is 500 times more massive), Uranus (7,500 times), and even Jupiter (140,000 times). This doesn't make sense.

More deeply, we believe that the public attachment to Pluto-as-planet reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the evolving, self-correcting nature of science. This misunderstanding stems from a confusion between memorization and comprehension that seems inherent to educational systems worldwide. Those of us who teach undergraduate classes often see students to whom the lectures are merely an exercise in memorization. Every detail of every lecture is written down and memorized, with the idea being that to 'pass the test' one needs only to remember everything and regurgitate it upon demand. While memory is an important part of learning, this is clearly taking it too far. If we teach children the names of the planets and do little or nothing to explain their fundamental significance, of course they will react negatively when membership in the planet club is revoked. Since they have little idea of what the solar system means in any broader context, their

main impulse is to cling to the status quo, whatever that might be.

Astronomers have a different view (hopefully). The important and essentially uncontested fact is that modern research clearly reveals Pluto as a large but otherwise unremarkable KBO. Even the strongest advocates of Pluto's planet-hood cede this fact. Calling Pluto a planet adds nothing to our understanding of its nature, properties, or origin, and in fact obfuscates its position as one of a group of many bodies in the ring of debris in the outer solar system. Nevertheless, a vocal minority of scientists is expressing outrage, partly in sympathy with the public confusion but more obviously for reasons of self-interest.

There are two main groups in this latter category. First, those connected in some way to the discovery of Pluto and other large KBOs have a vested interest in asserting planetary status. We all know that planets are discovered by historical luminaries such as William Herschel and Urbain LeVerrier, whereas KBOs are already a dime a dozen. Discovering a 'planet' is perceived as better than discovering a big KBO because it garners more press attention. Second, those involved in NASA's 'Horizons' mission to 'the last planet' suddenly find their spacecraft on its way to a seemingly less important body. We see no intrinsic problem with this. The Horizons mission is no less impressive, and the loss of the planet label does not diminish scientific interest in Pluto. But there is undoubtedly a degree of unease in having to explain to hard-nosed NASA administrators why they have spent \$700 million on a ten-year mission to an ex-planet. This is a matter of planetary politics.

Lastly, what was the motivation of the International Astronomical Union? This body had its heyday in the cold war, when it provided almost the only regular



opportunity for Western astronomers to meet their counterparts from the other side of the Iron Curtain. Since then, it has taken responsibility for apportioning names to asteroids and to geological features observed on solid bodies in the solar system, and for fighting light- and radio-frequency pollution of the skies on behalf of astronomers worldwide.

Unfortunately, in the 'what is a planet' debate, the IAU trapped itself between the irreconcilable positions of the public, which was overtly interested in having the IAU pronounce Pluto a planet, and of the astronomers, most of whom were more interested in clearing the air by reversing a seventy-six-year-old mistake. Worse, the IAU allowed its deliberations to drag on, mostly in secret, for years, so magnifying the impression that a weighty and complicated scientific issue was under study. They could have, and should have, declared that Pluto was first and foremost a big KBO, and that calling it a planet was an unhelpful and ultimately unjustifiable matter of public relations and planetary politics, not science. Instead, they waffled, struggling for years in a doomed quest to find a compromise that would keep all sides happy. While the IAU in the end reached the right decision (except for the unnecessary invention of the 'dwarf planet' class), the public perception of the process, and of astronomers and astronomy, has been soiled. Millions of people now think of astronomers as having too much time on their hands, and as unable to articulate the most basic definitions or clear positions in a coherent way. Even the nature of science was muddied: do scientists really make progress democratically, by voting, as they did on the status of Pluto? Should we vote on the value of the gravitational constant? None of this is good for astronomy.

On the brighter side, one cannot buy the level of public interest that has been triggered by the planethood debate. The IAU and astronomers everywhere have the potential to use this interest to focus the public toward more fundamental, more scientific issues, such as the origin of the solar system and even the nature and purpose of science. As a result, the public, especially children, might care more about how our solar system came to be, how collisions and aggregation of solids and gas led to the emergence of distinct types of planets: the Earth-like rocky planets in the inner solar system, and the gas- and ice-rich giant planets in the outer regions. And it might wonder how the process of planet accumulation produced the leftovers that litter the region beyond Neptune. Let's hope that what ultimately comes out of the planethood debate is a better understanding of what science is about, rather than hollow mourning for the Icy Body Formerly Known as a Planet.

# Annals by Owen Gingerich

## *Planetary perils in Prague*

For astronomers, Prague is a singularly nostalgic city. It was here, in February of 1600, that the young, starry-eyed Johannes Kepler met the imperious, eccentric Tycho Brahe. Brahe brought a priceless trove of precise observations of the planets and stars, the likes of which the world had never seen – singlehandedly he raised the astronomical data bank a hundredfold. As Kepler would later reflect, Brahe had the building materials for cosmology, but he lacked an architect. Kepler became that architect. It was a conjunction fated to alter the course of astronomy.

Last August, Prague was teeming with astronomers, roughly two thousand of them. They came to evaluate an astronomical data bank that in the past few

years has increased by orders of magnitude, an immense expansion factor that only the observations of Tycho Brahe rival in their comparative impact. Telescopes in mountain observatories, plus spacecraft above the atmosphere combined with modern electronics, have reaped a bounteous harvest of exciting new results.

But as seen from the Prague press office of the International Astronomical Union (IAU), the world was fixated on two far more mundane questions: would little Pluto, in the frigid realm beyond Neptune, still be considered a planet; and if so, would some of his icy playmates in that remote zone also be ushered into the exclusive planetary club?

The IAU had gotten itself into this feeding frenzy by a procedural question of nomenclature that only indirectly involved Pluto's status. For this is one of the things international unions do. They follow in Adam's footsteps by credentialing names. The International Union of Biological Sciences, for example, oversees a committee that establishes the rules for the naming of birds and shells and other animals. And the International Astronomical Union, in its very first General Assembly, in Rome in 1922, established the list of eighty-eight constellations accepted today. Committees

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under its aegis assign names to comets, to minor planets, to planetary satellites, and to features on these moons or planetary bodies.

But as for planets, the IAU has never had an opportunity to name one. In 1930 the Lowell Observatory announced the discovery of a planetary body beyond Neptune, and they were delighted when an eleven-year-old schoolgirl in Oxford suggested the name Pluto, because its first two letters were the initials of the observatory's founder, Percival Lowell. The IAU held General Assemblies only every three or four years and didn't have one until 1932, so by then the name was *a fait accompli*.

In 1930 Pluto was assumed to be at least as large as Earth, and maybe a few times larger, for Percival Lowell had presumably predicted its approximate position by its gravitational perturbations on the giant planets Neptune and Uranus. In the decades that followed, however, observations showed that not only was Pluto much smaller – indeed, smaller than our moon – but also the apparent perturbations stemmed largely from the use of an erroneous mass for Neptune in the celestial mechanical computations. Thus, Pluto's planetary status was in some jeopardy. In 2000, when the planet walk was constructed for the new Rose Center and Hayden Planetarium in New York, Pluto was conspicuous by its absence.

Matters came to a head in 2005 when an icy ball discovered far beyond Neptune proved to be as large as or slightly larger than Pluto. Was it, or was it not, a planet? Which committee had the naming rights? Meanwhile, it suffered under a technical designation, 2003 UB<sub>313</sub>, or the nickname Xena from a popular fantasy television show.

As far as the Executive Committee of the IAU was concerned, the situation

would not have been so fraught, except that in 1999 my colleague Brian Marsden, who was directing the IAU's Minor Planet Center, had reached a nice round number in tabulating the asteroids, 10,000, and he suggested it might be reserved for Pluto. Unexpectedly, his rational, practical suggestion created a firestorm, and the IAU officers were bombarded with protests at the apparent threat of Pluto's demotion. Hence, they were understandably nervous. After a large committee from their Planetary Systems Sciences Division not only failed after many months to find a solid consensus, but also seemingly had not considered the public-relations aspects in their debates, the Executive Committee decided to appoint a broader-based 'Planet Definition Committee.' Since I had credentials in both astrophysics and the history of astronomy, I was tapped to lead the way across the minefield.

Many suggestions poured in via the Internet about how to define the word *planet*. Someone suggested it was already defined by its Greek origins: *wanderer*. If it moves against the starry background, let it be a planet. Considering that orbits are already known for approximately three hundred thousand asteroids, not to mention comets, the suggestion was straightaway tossed into the obsolete ideas bin. Others appealed to history: freeze the status quo with its nine planets. But history is a fickle guide, for throughout the ages the number of planets has varied both with cosmology and with discovery.

Meanwhile, the committee had conferred for two days in Paris to craft a scientific, but culturally sensitive, definition. There were two ways, not completely independent, to define a planet scientifically: either by *what* it is, or by *where* it is, that is, by its relationship to its neighbors. Planetary scientists and

geologists are keen on studying planets as physical bodies. Some of them would even cheerfully think of the giant satellites – Jupiter’s Ganymede and Callisto, and Saturn’s Titan, objects that rival or exceed Mercury in size – as planetary bodies. They are definitely in the *what* camp. The dynamicists, on the other hand, find the dominating relationship of a planet on its neighbors particularly fascinating, and for them, *where* is of prime significance.

While these alternative approaches to defining a planet had ramifications for the status of Pluto, its standing was not a major consideration in the negotiations, and we never inquired where the seven members of the committee stood on that issue. So while Pluto remained the elephant in the parlor, the members pretty much stayed in the kitchen. For my committee, defining a planet as an object seemed simplest and more open-ended, especially considering the current discoveries of large numbers of exoplanets, that is, planetary bodies orbiting distant suns. Furthermore, rather than establishing an arbitrary cut-off in size, we chose the most obvious physical characteristic as the dividing line. If a body had enough mass and therefore enough gravity to pull itself into a ball, let it be a planet. Naturally, there would be an ambiguous boundary zone, but science and scientific taxonomy are full of such debatable cases.

We immediately understood that a *what* definition would open the gates to a dozen more solar-system planets, and maybe as many as thirty or even forty, and that these would primarily be dirty iceballs of the Pluto class, and not major planets like Uranus or Neptune. I therefore proposed that we should describe Mercury through Neptune as ‘classical planets,’ and make Pluto the prototype of a new class of

trans-Neptunian objects, with a name such as ‘plutons’ to recognize the historical role of Pluto. In this way, Pluto would be promoted while being demoted, which, as some analysts smugly noted, was worthy of political solutions inside the Beltway.

The frenzy of the IAU press room in Prague was at first exhilarating, but in retrospect I realize it was a prime source of strategic error. The chief press officer was convinced that reporters would want to know two things: Is Pluto a planet? And how many planets are there? The committee had never counted because we all knew that the number in August would not be the same as the count in December. I tried in vain to convince him that the press release should say, ‘eight classical planets and a growing number of plutons.’ The press, which feeds on controversy, easily found critics who declared the number of twelve planets ridiculously complicated because it included the round asteroid Ceres as well as Charon, a satellite of Pluto that had snuck in through a footnote that wasn’t part of our proposed resolution.

Our recommendations met with enthusiastic approval from the Division for Planetary Sciences of the American Astronomical Society, the largest international group of planetary scientists. Where our proposed resolution ran into vehement and raucous opposition was from the dynamicists, who believed they hadn’t been consulted and who felt stabbed in their psyches because we had not given primacy to their favored *where* definition. Feeding on the discontent of those who felt uneasy about admitting too many dwarfs into the club, they marshaled support for a hastily worded alternative definition.

Our committee met with the leaders of the opposition, and I showed them an

alternative compromise resolution that began:

The predominant part of the solar system is a dynamically linked suite of eight mutually-interacting planets, Mercury to Neptune. Each of these produces observable perturbations on at least one of its neighbors. The hundreds of thousands of lightweight bodies individually have no observable dynamical effects on the heavyweight planets. We retain this group of classical planets as the essential definition of "planets."

Alas, they would have none of it, claiming that even the asteroid Ceres could perturb Earth by a few centimeters and that eventually our instruments would be sensitive enough to detect that minuscule amount. In the end, somehow, the confusing but defining phrase that a planet was a body large enough "to have cleared its zone" was added to the resolution and was adopted by the final assembly. Appropriately, they voted that Pluto would be considered the prototype body of an unnamed class of dwarf planets, but which by the new definition would not be planets. And by the narrowest of votes they failed to give the name 'plutonians' to the new class of objects for which Pluto stands as the prototype.

In their zeal for science, the voting astronomers in Prague seemed to forget that for the most part they don't own the telescopes, the space probes, and the instruments on which they depend for their researches. It is the taxpayers who own them. And it was American taxpayers who felt they owned the Hubble Space Telescope so much that they made an outcry when NASA officials decided to abandon it. It was our public constituency who forced a change in their plans. It behooves us to pay attention to public relations. The new presi-

dent of the IAU and a member of the Planet Definition Committee, Catherine Cesarsky, made an impassioned and statesman-like plea to this effect, but unfortunately brilliant floodlights blinded those on the stage, and they did not see and recognize her until *after* the vote had been taken. As Kepler wrote to his teacher, Michael Maestlin, "Experts cannot live off themselves or on air. Therefore, let us act in astronomical affairs in such a way that we hold on to supporters of astronomy and do not starve."

Unfortunately, one becomes too soon old and too late wise. I realize in retrospect that the IAU should never have attempted to define the word *planet*. It is too culturally bound, with elastic definitions that have evolved throughout the ages. What the IAU could legitimately have done in its role of naming things was to have defined some subclasses, such as 'classical planets,' leaving the planetary door open not only for plutonians and cereans but for the exoplanets as well. These terms would be eminently teachable and would help students understand the complexity and richness of the solar system that modern science is revealing. And astronomers could have left Prague without muddle on their faces.

In the aftermath of Prague, the IAU committees joined forces to accept an appellation proposed by Mike Brown, the leader of the team that discovered 2003 UB<sub>313</sub>: it is now Eris, appropriately named after the classical goddess of discord and strife.



# Poem by John Kinsella

## *Into the Sun*

The film of moisture on the eyeball sizzles  
though it's not really hot outside: sun the other  
side of gold and occasional cloud umber to gravitational black;  
all surfaces are reflective from early morning rain,  
and into the sunlight is bitter-sweet  
and difficulty lifts from the asphalt; a twisted strip  
of salmon gum bark laminate and the waste  
from Blake's tree-angel – all angels excrete – has  
you swerve away as if life depends upon curve  
and intersecting line of shadow, long shade  
permeating your semi-reflective exterior,  
lull in crows' late life, startling your blind spot  
navigating broken white line then double solid  
strips of nuclear activity, eternal chain reaction  
running aground past wooded cemetery, creeks leached  
from Lover's Leap, a panorama of district occasionals,  
keepsakes;

I dreamt as you dreamt of a screen full of triangles  
gone suddenly blank – seemingly in an instant, imagining  
a flash though its opposite is incandescence sucked dry,  
as sun visor is angled and head lifted above the straight  
and narrow, roll of the downward slide, pyramid or prismatic  
slip from apex to base, a scrunching effect: that's what's left,  
and I've no proof beyond an evening dullness, a late dusk  
comparative: it's less harsh on the eyes but less  
invigorating, less exposed to prayed for end result,  
an aftermath left to keep the flocks  
in order: so many cattle moving into sheep territory;

top-

    dressing they use their spray pods, liquid fertiliser  
like a coagulated mirage in cooler weather, seed-drilling  
a sun-rippled pasture, a bearing taken  
from the eye's corner, these indulgences  
of a light so overloaded we'd never risk  
staring it down if free choice

  could change gravity

to a variety more sublime;

  to the glint of immensity

in-foliate, like carbons in triplicate  
when protogine, quick steps to levity.

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*John Kinsella is professor of English at Kenyon College and adjunct professor at Edith Cowan University, where he is a principal of the Landscape and Language Centre. He has published numerous volumes of poetry, including "The Silo" (1995), "The Hierarchy of Sheep" (2001), and "Peripheral Light" (2003). He has also written novels, short stories, and four verse plays (collected as "Divinations"). Kinsella is the editor of the literary journal "Salt" and serves as international editor of the "Kenyon Review."*

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# Fiction by Peggy Shinner

## *Life is Adequate*

Sheep, milk, TV. He's tried everything, but she never believes him. She thinks it's a joke that he can't sleep. She thinks if only he tried harder. If he really wanted to he could. All he has to do is close his eyes. It's that easy. What does she know about trying to sleep. She's young, she wants to go to sleep, she sleeps. He used to be like that. Time was he slept like a baby. He shut his eyes and went to sleep.

That was a long time ago. Lately, he can't *buy* a good night's sleep.

Sometimes she thinks he's lying. Or at least not telling the truth. He's fabricating. Exaggerating. He can hear her telling her friends. *Embellishing*. She says embellishing just so she can say a big word. He knows a big word or two. His vocabulary isn't so small.

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*Peggy Shinner is the recipient of several Illinois Arts Council Fellowships, an Ausable Press Fellowship, and a Pushcart Prize Special Mention. Her work has appeared in "Alaska Quarterly Review," "Bloom," "The Chicago Reader," "Tri-Quarterly," "Western Humanities Review," and other publications. She also has essays forthcoming in "Fourth Genre" and "The Gettysburg Review." Currently, she is at work on a book of essays about the body.*

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So she thinks he's lying. He can tell by how, when he says he can't sleep, she goes on to the next subject. She doesn't skip a beat. By the way she says *yes* and *mm-hmm*. She's humoring him. All those naps, she's thinking. Old people always say they can't sleep. They want you to feel sorry for them. But you add it up, an hour here, an hour there . . . The morning always comes, she's thinking. He can tell.

The thing was she woke him up. He was almost sleeping. He was dozing off.

The news was on, Walter Jacobson talking about a fire on the South Side. He'd punched up a couple pillows, and from underneath him he felt them give way. His foot twitched. You could see the smoke for miles, he thought he heard an onlooker say. He reached out his hand, blinked his eyes. Faces flickered on the screen. No one was injured in the fire. Is it too late? she said. Did I wake you up? At first he didn't know who it was. He moved the receiver to the other ear. I'm returning your call, she said. He got the feeling she was repeating it. *I'm returning your call*, like he was some kind of business establishment.

He shook his head. The room was dark, except for the light from the TV. He pressed the remote a few times to

turn down the sound. His call? Oh yeah, he had to call once a week to remind her he was her father.

Nah, he said, sitting up on the edge of the bed. His zipper'd come open, but he didn't even bother to give it a tug. On the floor was a copy of *People* magazine with Lady Di on the cover. He'd been reading about the nuptials. In the mirror above the dresser he caught a glimpse of himself. He had to look a couple times. The guy he saw had eyes looking up from the grave; his face was gray. You wouldn't look so good either, he thought, taking a quick peek around like he was daring someone to disagree with him. Boy, he'd been just about to slip under. Already that felt like a while ago. He pressed his thumbs over the bridge of his nose, the phone hunched between his ear and shoulder. I'm wide awake, he told her. My eyes are glued to the TV.

Because if you want to go back to sleep . . . Her voice trailed off as if she might disturb him.

Then she mustered it up again. We can talk tomorrow.

Is there a ration?

Walter Jacobson mouthed some words he couldn't make out, then the picture switched to Vice President Mondale's daughter selling a car. Straining forward, he thought she said the word *deal*.

Dad, she said.

He waited for her to dispute him.

Cut it out.

She was starting to sound a little huffy. She had a tendency in that direction. He gulped some water from the glass on the nightstand, swiping the back of his hand across his lips. Should he tell her what happened?

After another swallow, he put the glass back.

I had a little incident. He looked down at his feet, plastered by the podiatrist, on

the carpet. Those specimens belonged to him.

A little incident?

I couldn't keep it in.

What are you talking about? she said, and then it must have dawned on her. In the receiver he heard her draw in a breath.

A weather map filled up the TV screen, and he saw the five-day forecast. Rain at the end of the week, but he didn't look that far ahead.

When did this happen? she finally said.

What does it matter when it happened. It happened. I had a little drip.

Did you call Dr. Lowenstein?

What, he's going to turn off the spigot?

Dad. She said it again.

So now you know. He braced the heel of his palm on the bed.

Know what?

All she did was repeat what he said.

I want you to have the whole picture.

Why are you talking as if I know what you're talking about? Just tell me. Her voice reached another pitch.

The light from the TV went black for a second before it lit the walls again. I'm not going to live forever, he said, with his mouth right next to the receiver.

Now he can't sleep a wink. She's at home sleeping, her head on a nice big fluffy pillow, and he's watching the shadows for entertainment. The street-light flickers in the tree. The shade slaps against the screen. Two sixteen, and the clock radio makes no effort to candy-coat it. Time was she cried at night. She woke up crying. Muriel staggered out of bed, to the crib, jiggling her back to sleep. He'd drift in and out of sleep. He'd hear the floor creaking, Muriel traipsing up and down the hallway. That was the apartment on Independence Boulevard,

a one bedroom, the crib crammed against the wall in the dining room. She asleep? he'd say when Muriel came back to bed, but most nights he'd be asleep before she answered.

He throws back the covers. Lie here all night, or lie here till morning. Those are his choices. Or take a stroll through the premises. He drags his plastered feet to the window. Exercise is good for you, she likes to tell him. Window, crapper, refrigerator, bed. All the exercise he can get. Pulling up on his boxers, he leans against the ledge. In the dark he looks at his real estate. A swatch of grass, a plot of dirt for his tomato plants, the tree his son grew from a pit. On either side a chain-link fence. Is this what it all amounts to? In spite of the rumor about stars, he doesn't spot any. They've closed their eyes; they're taking a nap. Ha-ha, but the joke's on him. Outside the crickets join in. The shadows shift. Something rustles in the bushes by the alley. Just because he doesn't believe in ghosts doesn't mean they're not out there. He flattens his forehead to the screen. A line of perspiration creases his chin. There are twenty-four hours in a day, but most of them, he concludes, searching the darkness for anything that might jump out at him, occur after midnight.

In the morning he goes to the cleaners because he can't keep anything clean. Eat, make a mess, put his money in escrow with the Chinaman, that's his routine. Last night, after Cheryl called, it was sauerkraut, but he doesn't discriminate, ha-ha. Ketchup, coffee, sour cream – he gives everything an opportunity to land on his pants.

After Cheryl called, Jack reminds himself, backing the car out of the garage, he couldn't get to sleep. Johnny Carson, then a western, a movie called *Shane*.

*Shane*, the boy cried to the man who might have been his father. *Come back. Shane*. With his arm draped around the passenger's side, he drums his fingers on the seat. Last night's shadows dart across the windshield. He almost slams on the brakes.

The cleaners opens at seven, and he waits for the Chinaman to unlock the door. Over the radio Wally Phillips drones on about the Variety Club charity cruise. *Sail with the stars, and for a good cause, too*. He switches the station. Everybody's got an angle, but who's going to help him?

Can you answer that?

A guy in a five hundred dollar suit whisks by, on the way to a breakfast powwow with other LaSalle Street minions who look just like him. But the rise is a little short, Jack decides, sizing up the pants.

Finally the laundryman's face appears at the door.

Jack lifts himself out of the car.

Sam, he says, dropping the bundle on the counter. He stops for a second to catch his breath. If you opened earlier maybe you'd do more business. He doesn't know the Chinaman's name but figures *Sam* is a good guess.

Business is adequate, Mr. Kamin.

He gives the Chinaman, already sorting through the pile of clothes, a closer look, and unwads last week's ticket out of his pocket. The guy's a big shot.

Five and a quarter he owes, pushing four ones and the rest in change across the counter.

You been here long, Sam? he says.

Pardon me, Mr. Kamin.

U.S.A. America. When did you come over? He lays his hands on the counter.

The Chinaman doesn't even raise his head. He's too wrapped up adding his money to the till before he scurries to the back to look for the cleaning.



Jack eyes the box. How much can the guy bring in? Not much, for sure; you can't eat bonbons laundering other people's clothes. He shakes his head, agreeing with himself, and looks around. The Chinaman's got geranium plants in the window, to spruce things up. Well, he lived in a place like this, a three-room apartment behind the store. *TAILOR*, the sign said. His father, after forty years of hemming up suit coats, had the smell of mothballs in his hands.

A hanger clangs to the floor.

What's going on back there? Maybe Sam can't find his cleaning. His fingers tap the counter. He doesn't have all day although his only plans are to count sheep and take a nap. He smirks at his own joke. Maybe he'll go to the David Noyes brokerage firm and watch the stock returns.

A fly buzzes past. He takes a swipe at it but misses, and while his hand is out there – is that all? that simple? – he reaches over and quickly counts the money in the box.

Fifty and change, he adds it up. A twenty, two fives, a stack of singles with George staring up at him, lips sealed in collusion. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Ha-ha. Limp, dirty, torn, taped, how many hands have *these* passed through?

Not to make a disturbance, he eyeballs the coins.

You'd think he was a thief.

Yeah, you'd think so, but to prove he's not he puts his empty paws back where they belong on the counter. The only thing that glints on them is his wedding band.

14K gold, that's what it is.

Thirty-three years, and now she's been gone almost another.

Not even a chisel could remove it.

Sam, he shouts, rearranging his stance.

The skin's puckered around his knuckles like it's about to fall off.

I haven't got all day, but, for all he knows, Sam's skipped out and he's alone in the place, him and the dry cleaning. Should he go up to a bag and start talking? Yak about the ghosts on the graveyard shift? You can hear the steam hissing the joint is so dead. He checks the white-faced clock on the wall with the second hand skittering around like something's wrong with it. Seven fifteen, and only if he stretches it. He shakes his wrist to see if his watch jumps ahead. A quarter after, seven fifteen – any way you read it, the day's just begun.

Bang, bang. Gotcha.

He jerks his head.

Loaded up with the cleaning, there's the Chinaman, pushing aside the curtain, and a scrawny kid slipping by, with a gun in his hand.

Sure it's a toy, but at first Jack can't help it, he takes a step back.

David, the Chinaman says, pointing to the curtain, go back in there, but the boy acts like he can't hear. The laundryman raises his eyebrows, as if to say *kids*.

You're dead, the boy says, shooting again.

The cap gun pops, and a string of smoke curls in the air.

Jack considers what the smart aleck said.

*You're dead.*

Why not, he shrugs, he'll pretend, and in slow motion he leans forward, grips the edge of the counter, and sinks his head in the pile of dirty laundry, the clothes that ten minutes earlier he brought in.

On the phone Cheryl asks him to dinner, and he can't think of a reason to refuse her.

Where do you want to go? she says an hour later, pulling up to the curb in the car he helped finance. The title, at his

insistence, is in both her name and his. Chinese? Pekin House?

He wants to give her a dirty look but why waste it.

They decide to go for Italian.

After a few half-hearted attempts at the seat belt he lets it slip. How often do you get the car washed? he asks, settling back. The floor mats, he's noticed, could stand to be vacuumed. He scans the dashboard. He'd wanted her to get a Chrysler, but she bought a foreign model instead.

Apparently not often enough, is her answer. Stopping at the corner, she casts him a glance.

The trade-in value will be higher, he continues, if you keep up the maintenance.

I just bought the car, she says with a tone in her voice, I'm not thinking of trading it in.

She puts on her blinker to make a left.

That's the problem, he says, fumbling to adjust the seat for more legroom. You can't always think about the present. You have to think about the future. You have to look ahead. Finally he gets the lever to slip into place, and the seat slides back.

In the silence that follows, he realizes something has gotten into him.

Put on your seat belt.

Without protest he does what she says.

The belt cuts across the shoulder of one of the shirts he got back from the cleaners. Now his daughter's the one telling him.

On the right they pass Pedian Carpet, shag on sale, \$9.50 a yard, installed. On the left the Mercury Bowl, where he used to belong to a league. He shifts in his seat. The alley stretches out before him; he can hear the pins crash. *Welcome Back Bowlers*, the sign says.

Didn't you bowl there? her voice comes up at him. A strand of hair falls in her face; she pushes it back.

His hands sit in his lap. A sixteen-pound ball is what he used to throw. Once he got a turkey, three strikes in a row. In the closet there's a shirt with his name. *Jack*.

I liked the cokes, she says. They had a fountain. Cokes on draft, and she gives a little laugh.

When he looks, he's rubbing the place on his thumb where the ball gave him a callus.

They pull into the lot at Malnati's. The place is jammed. Over there, he points to the space vacated by the Lincoln. Coming from the opposite direction, a guy gives his horn a blast. She inches forward. Can they fit? Yeah, she'd beg him for quarters, and after he emptied his pockets, she'd pick the silver out of his hand. Keep the change, he'd tell her as she ran back to the fountain, the pins crashing again.

The rib eye's good tonight, the lanky redhead outside the window is saying as she sidles into her car with a doggy bag.

Are you hungry? he turns to Cheryl. As for him, he has a taste for the spaghetti with Italian meatballs. Get whatever you want, he adds.

Thanks, she says, as if, before he offered, it hadn't been her intention. Maybe I'll have an antipasto salad. She runs her fingers through her hair.

Is that all? Aren't you hungry? Order whatever you want, he urges again. The seat belt snaps. Before she opens her door, he licks his thumb and reaches over to rub the spot he's just noticed on her slacks.

The audience laughs but Jack hardly catches Carson's monologue. Slipping out the belt from his pants, he lies in bed

and prepares to think about what happened instead. He puts his hands behind his head. Change from his pocket falls on the spread. Next door, the Solomons' porch light goes on, the back door creaks open an inch. Go on, go on, he hears Louie Solomon say in a growl. Jack can picture him nudging the little mongrel, prodding it with his toe. What would you want with an animal like *that*? Into the night the dog yaps.

The spaghetti was good; it always is. He'd carefully cut up the meatballs, the way he did. Cheryl'd gone ahead and ordered the salad, but he insisted she get garlic bread. Lasagna? How about lasagna? You like lasagna, he'd tried again. Eggplant parmesan? Because he knew she liked vegetables, but when she declined he couldn't blame her. Eggplant wasn't for him. Really, the salad is fine, she said, but to make her old man feel better she ate a piece of the bread.

When the waitress came around for coffee, he said yes. Yeah, yeah, I know, he admitted, trying to head his daughter off; but he had a desire for something strong. You're always complaining you can't sleep, Cheryl leaned across the table, going after him like a dog. Don't be so smart, he advised her, but topped it off with a grin. Then he laid up his palms as if to say *hey*?

Herbal tea, she ordered, when the waitress got around to her.

He lets his eyes slide back to the TV. The monologue's just about over, Carson lifts his trademark golf swing. We have a great show tonight, the comedian promises, and Jack finds himself repeating it. A great show. Next door the porch light goes off.

Down the hall, across the olive green shag, faded he's recently noticed, he makes his way to the kitchen. A heel of salami hangs from a hook; a few straggly plants still try to make it on the window

ledge. At the sink he fills up a glass. No, no, it's not a glass he wants, it's a cup, a coffee cup, like the one at Lou Malnati's.

At Malnati's it was a cup.

His tongue rolls across his lips. Again he turns on the tap.

He follows the water down the drain. Did you ever think, he asks whoever's listening, that you'd end up here? And shakes his head in disbelief. Here, and he's insulted by his reflection in the window over the sink, with your stomach hanging over the lip of the counter, your hairy shoulders slumping out of the dago t-shirt you still insist on wearing. He slings a dish towel around his neck. Johnny Carson chortles from the other room, or so he imagines. Over the water Doc Severinsen and the *Tonight Show* band plays. Buddy Rich is the special guest.

He stares at the cup.

*Fill it up.*

For insurance he tightens his grip.

The refrigerator buzzes. From the basement the furnace revs up. The whole house is getting in on it. Even Louie Solomon's runt, across the passageway, adds his two cents. Jack, Jack, it yaps.

*Fill it up.*

*Just to see if it happens again.*

Instead, he ducks under the faucet and lets the water pour over his head. He stays under as long as he can.

When he comes up, dripping wet, there's a guy in the window with a dish-towel over his head. It doesn't take much to know who he is.

At first he sipped his coffee; it was hot. A splash of cream, two sugars, then a third, the works. He'd watched the cream sit on the top. The market's down today, he told her. Silver's up. She looked at him with what she hoped passed for interest; he knew that trumped-up look.

Soon there wasn't much left in the cup. A beat came at him from the jukebox; under the table she moved her foot. How's Solitron doing? she asked, going back to the market. She must've remembered he owned some stock. I got out, he said, lifting the cup to his lips, just before it went under.

She raised hers too, a swig of herb tea as a toast, ha-ha, to getting out before you get under.

Then she drilled him a look over the top.

But he didn't tell her how much he'd lost. A couple grand was his original guess but that was a lowball estimate.

I switched to municipal bonds, he hurried on, and the towns, in dollar signs, marched out in front of him. Chicago Heights, Milwaukee, some swamp in Florida on a tip from his broker. They're tax-free and low risk, he was about to add, a sucker for his own P.R., when his hand, like a remark cut off in the middle, went numb and he dropped the cup.

It thudded across the carpet. Dad, a boy at the next table whispered loudly, that man made a boner.

Someone laughed.

*Chicago Heights, Milwaukee, Pasco County...*

Kevin, the boy's father said.

The waitress came running up.

Dad, Cheryl chided, shaking her head at his pants.

But his forehead was clammy. He heard his breath.

She looked at him again. With one hand he pulled the other back and put it in his lap.

I'll get it, the waitress said, bending over for the cup. There, the boy pointed.

The checks on the tablecloth were changing places. He rubbed his eyes to see if he could get them to clear up. From the jukebox the bass thumped.

It's nothing, he said even though no one asked.

But right away he knew it was another mechanical failure.

He waved the waitress, who was showing him with napkins, away, and made a pass at the nonchalant. Your old man needs to be towed, he said to his daughter.

She said the only thing she knew how. Dad? she said.

Didn't she have a bigger vocabulary than that?

At this rate he'll miss all of Carson. He'll miss the world-class drummer, Buddy Rich.

A low rumble comes from the bedroom. Carpeted with the dishtowel, he lifts his head. He spots the green plants, trailing along the ledge. They don't stand a chance. The world, he knows, is a jungle. It's a jungle out there, he says, brushing past the table, and his lips come together as if to underline what he's said.

In the bathroom he empties his bladder. He's had to go for a while, but now he can't hold it in. The rumble sounds again. Be right there, he thinks, just a minute. Buddy Rich, calling him.

He watches the drummer knock something out on the screen. Working hard, Rich sweats. Sticks fly, cymbals tip. With the dish towel Jack mops his head.

He's more than tired; he's dead.

What's that tune called? Carson asks when it's over.

*Moment's Notice*, Rich says.

Jack flicks off the light and shuts his eyes just as Carson pumps the drummer's hand.

In the dark, *Moment's Notice* rolls through him. We'll be right back, Carson says. Jack turns from side to side, his feet pushing the covers. The wind buckles the screen. Someone's laying

on the horn, a whistle of air escapes his lips, and his eyelids lift themselves open. He doesn't know a thing. Out the window the light – or is it the moon? – wavers behind the trees. Sam's sallow face rises before him; oh, the man in the moon, now he's Chinese. Life is adequate, Mr. Kamin; is that what he said? The face hovers in the breeze. Eleven twenty, and Carson's still guffawing on TV. Behind the shop, does Sam get a little sleep? Does his adequate life give him rest?

Jack pushes up from the pillow and sits, leaning on his hands.

Maybe he'll go outside and howl at the moon. He juts out his head at the mirror as he staggers past.

When he gets to the yard, he scours the sky, but the moon's ducked out, leaving behind a few stars to taunt him with their cut-rate light.

Even nature's trying to conserve.

Jack, is that you? What are you doing out there . . . taking a leak?

Jack swivels around. Caught like a robber in his own backyard. Next door, the screen door's swung open and Louie Solomon's poked out his egg-shaped head. One of his Havana cigars hangs from his mouth.

Just like that mutt of yours, Jack says, trying to recover. He pictures himself lifting one leg to go along with the joke even though it's not very funny. Woof, woof, he might bark, like a dog pleased with itself, trotting away when he's finished.

I'm having a chat with nature. What's your excuse, Louie? Protecting my property? Making sure nobody steals those plums? He points to the tree his son planted from a pit. Go back to sleep.

Louie bites off the end of his cigar and spits it onto the sidewalk. Don't stay out here too long. You might see a ghost, he snorts, closing the door.

Jack shrugs him off, but to play it safe, gives the yard a quick once-over. For the moment anyway, the wind's at a standstill. Does Louie know something he doesn't?

Then he heads over to the plum tree and leans against the trunk, the closest thing out here for support. Every year the tree makes a few puckery plums, and every year he's reminded how much he dislikes them. It's hardly worth the effort, he wants to tell it, but like a dumb dog the tree keeps on trying. He cranks his neck to the sky; the moon's trying to make a comeback. A pair of squinty eyes blinks down at him. He opens his mouth, but instead of howling, he yawns. That's it. That's the best he can do. He could lay down right here. He could take some leaves and make a pile under his head. All he has to do is close his eyes, Cheryl said. He reaches up and rips a few off the tree, plums and all, and shoves the fruit in his mouth. His hands, on their own, go after more. What's he doing? The Chinaman won't stop dogging him. Now he's rustling in the bushes by the alley. *Mr. Kamin*, he jeers. Jack almost expects him to leap out, *bang, bang, you're dead*. And as he raises his arm to fend off a storm – a horde of bugs, out to irritate him – something does barrel out, breaking branches, tearing off leaves, smashing down every limb.

He gags.

Staring across at him is a deer stopped in his passageway.

Its legs are shaking, just like his hands. He swipes at the pulp and spittle smeared on his chin, then, to stop the shaking, thrusts his hands in his pants. He coughs again.

What's a wild animal doing in his backyard?

The deer steps back.

Don't move, he cautions, but doesn't know if he means himself or the deer.



The rough bark of the tree snares his t-shirt. The deer's eyes meet his. *What am I doing here?* they seem to ask.

Please, he whispers, unaccustomed to begging, and a flush of confusion creeps up his neck. The moon, not skimping at all now, makes the animal's coat shine like cement. A quiver, like a single note from a song, ripples through its body.

There's a deer, he wants to tell somebody, in my backyard, but Louie Solomon's shade, for the first time in a decade, is pulled down without a crack. His thumb circles the wedding band embedded in his finger.

Stepping out from the tree, he opens his mouth, wide this time, and with a howl of laughter tells all of Bernard Street. Can you believe this? His voice pelts the sky. The stars shine back with their fleeting light, and the deer, huge and glistening, bounds down the passageway, back to where it came from.

Robert I. Rotberg

*on improving  
nation-state  
governance*

Good governance is essential if citizens of nation-states or subordinate political jurisdictions are to maximize their inalienable rights as subjects, taxpayers, or mere residents of the polities to which they owe, or are compelled to pay, allegiance. From their greatest need, freedom from attack (security), to mundane but real needs, such as well-maintained roads and the availability of potable water, citizens look to their suzerains – their modern nation-states, provinces, municipalities, and so on – for high-quality performance. Where that high-quality performance – good governance – is delivered, citizens can go about their personal business and pursuits with en-

hanced expectations of success, opportunity, and satisfaction. Where bad governance prevails, however, citizens suffer increasingly severe consequences – death, injury, intensified morbidity, diminished personal accomplishments, lowered expectations of achievement, hunger, and sometimes starvation.

Numerous studies have asserted strong linkages between good governance and economic growth – at least at the national level. Good governance, they suggest, provides a platform without which sustained economic growth is extremely difficult. The data from several studies also show that economic growth in nation-states contributes to the possibility of good governance. There are sound reasons why both conclusions should, a priori, be correct. But those conclusions depend on what we mean by good versus bad governance, and what governance includes within its definition.

Better governance inhibits conflict, while poor government is conducive to intrastate tensions and civil wars. Indeed, new analyses of nation-state failure attribute it to governance errors that diminish a national government's legitimacy, reduce perceptions of its fairness, encourage out-groups to mobilize, and lead ultimately to internal war. It stands to reason that better governed nation-states would undergo fewer civil wars.

This proposition – that better governance, especially in the tension-filled developing world, reduces the frequency and intensity of conflict – reinforces the prior one: economic growth is more likely where there is good governance. War and turmoil and instability obviously inhibit growth – as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and the Sudan – and special cases such as Colombia and Sri Lanka still demonstrate that conflict and insecurity can lower

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growth even without vitiating economic performance entirely.

For at least the reasons already advanced, most of us prefer good governance. It is in our self-interest. Conditions of good governance allow us to maximize our returns on personal initiative and entrepreneurship. It is difficult to conceive of anyone, anywhere, who does not seek fuller educational opportunities, paved rather than pot-holed roads, more rather than less security, and so on. The wages of poor governance, on the other hand, are high, paying off in immiseration, hunger, and death.

Good governance does not occur by chance. It must be nourished explicitly and consciously. The intervention of human agency is therefore critical. There is no good governance absent intentional, positive leadership. Conversely, where nation-states are badly led, the delivery of the essentials of governance falters, neglect becomes common, and the decay of the nation-state becomes obvious, especially to its stakeholders. Idi Amin in Uganda, Siaka Stevens in Sierra Leone, and Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo/Zaire are all African examples of how narcissistic, avaricious, and incompetent leaders create extreme situations of lamentable governance, with deleterious consequences. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has followed a similar trajectory in misgoverning his once strong nation-state.

We should no longer describe governance differences anecdotally. Traditional culture is important, but that variable is not useful in distinguishing the causes of good governance from bad governance. Governance is rather a bundle of deliverables that citizens expect, crave, or demand. These deliverables actually differ across continents only at the margin, with altered priorities and prefer-

ence weightings. Public-opinion surveys in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe show a compelling uniformity in favor of governance as a quality composed of a number of quantities (political goods) that citizens want from their governments. Thus, the specification of what governance is flows from the bottom up, not the top down. Fundamentally, this analysis depends upon a universal articulation of the requests that citizens now make, and for decades and centuries have made, of their rulers.

Eight categories of political goods comprise governance and separate the good performers from the poor performers. None is as important as the supply of security, especially human security. Individuals alone, almost exclusively in unique circumstances, can sometimes arrange their own security. And groups of individuals can band together to purchase goods or services that provide more or less substantial measures of security. Traditionally, and usually, however, individuals and groups cannot effectively substitute privately procured measures of security for the full panoply of publicly provided security.

The security good includes Max Weber's monopoly of violence. If a nation-state does not hold that monopoly it cannot provide full security. Likewise, only a secure state projects power beyond the borders of the nation's capital. If nonstate actors are violent, security exists only minimally for citizens. High levels of crime also demonstrate that a nation-state, no matter how well-off, is performing poorly in terms of human security. Citizens always look to their states for security of person.

Only when reasonable provisions for security exist within a country – especially in a fragile, newly reconstructed nation-state in the developing world – can governments deliver other desirable

political goods. After security, rule of law is primary. Effective, meaningful modern states provide predictable, recognizable, systematized methods of adjudicating disputes and regulating both the norms and the prevailing mores of a host society. The essentials of this political good are usually embodied in codes and procedures that together comprise an enforceable body of law, security of property and contract, an independent and efficacious judicial system, and a set of norms that represent the values contained in the local version of a legal system. This is a description not of a Western or non-Western form of law, but of a systematic method of arbitrating disputes without resort to violence – a political good universally desired.

A third key political good enables citizens to participate freely, openly, and fully in the political process. This good of political rights encompasses these essential freedoms: the right to compete for office; respect and support for – and the existence of – national and regional political institutions; tolerance of dissent and difference; and fundamental civil liberties and human rights. Freedom of expression and freedom of association are intrinsic to, and embodied in, this political good. This third political good differentiates stable states that deliver few political rights from states that offer more of other goods, such as economic opportunity.

The fourth essential political good is economic opportunity, which provides a platform for the exercise of entrepreneurial initiative and the maximization of an individual's quest for prosperity and higher living standards. Delivering this political good requires supplying high orders of macroeconomic openness and fiscal prudence. Included in this political good is a money and banking system, usually presided over by a central

bank and lubricated by a nationally created currency, and an institutional context conducive to monetary stability.

Among the other basic political goods that states typically supply are health care; schools and educational instruction; the physical arteries of commerce (i.e., roads, railways, harbors, and airports); communications networks; and a framework conducive to the empowerment of civil society. The first two of these political goods are obvious; in the developing world, citizens have traditionally looked to their governments to supply nearly all medical care and most forms of educational opportunity and advancement.

Literacy levels and school persistence rates can demonstrate how well or how poorly a country, compared to its peers, is meeting or exceeding its people's needs in these areas. More generally, putting numbers to all these criteria can tell us whether, within a region or across regions, a country is providing higher or lower levels of political goods than its neighbors. Is Ruritania more or less secure than its neighbors? Does Ruritania have more or less rule of law? Is it politically free? Are its citizens receiving more or less instruction and medical services? Are Ruritania's economic attainments fully reflected in its listed GDP per capita, its GDP growth rates, its governmental deficits, or its inflation rates? Is its civil society empowered? Those are among the key questions; only by answering them as objectively as possible are we able to answer the overall question: is Ruritania better or more poorly governed than its neighbors?

Measuring governmental performance requires measuring outcomes, and not inputs. We must employ proxies that inform us about a government's delivery of political goods, and not about its budgetary provisions. We want to know pri-

marily not what a government's good intentions may have been, but what it actually accomplished with those appropriated funds. If a country is corrupt, those funds may indeed have been siphoned away from service delivery into individual pockets, so the mere fact that a nation-state appropriates or expends more for health or education than its neighbors do may mean little. Results count.

By measuring such outcomes – the delivery of political goods, country by country – we can create a report card on governance, enabling us to establish a ranking system of nation-states. Doing so will encourage poorly performing nation-states to reform and to provide more and better political goods to their citizens. A ranking system will shame some states into striving to do better. It will also embolden and assist the efforts of civil society organizations in such countries, strengthening the reformist hands of parliamentary critics of poorly governed nation-states.

Such a ranking system will bring governance, and the importance of good governance in the affairs of nations, to the front of policy queues. It would, in other words, bring 'governance' out of the closet. Transparency International (TI) did just that for 'corruption' in the 1990s. The new emphasis in the World Bank and the Millennium Challenge Account on governance per se, and on the delivery of political goods and political institutions, should have the same effect for governance.

Most of all, a sophisticated, transparent ranking system would enable us to create a report card on governance to diagnose the conditions of a particular country. Doing so would strengthen the activities of NGOs. If a nation-state were ranked below its neighbors, we could say why. If security or rule of law scores

were weak, and dragging down a country's score, we could diagnose those weaknesses and undertake improvements – to the benefit of citizens. We could establish benchmarks. Countries, particularly those in the developing world, would have incentives to improve their rankings and, thus, their performance on matters of concern to citizens. Nation-states would naturally compete with their peers, leading to competition for better governance, just as the TI report card on perceptions of corruption has led to greater awareness of the dangers of corruption and, conceivably, to reduced levels of corruption in many societies.

This new focus on governance through the optic of performance, the effective delivery of political goods, deserves its own international NGO to perform the necessary objective scoring and ranking, using refined and calibrated criteria. Without the creation of such an annual scorecard showing relative strengthening or weakening of good governance, the governments of the developing world will continue to be unsure diagnostically about how they can best serve their citizens. Jawboning by Washington, London, and Brussels will have less effect, donor conditionalities notwithstanding, than the publishing of an annual record of nation-state governance achievement. Through such a novel mechanism, there is a reasonable chance of improving the manner in which many weak and well-meaning governments deliver critical political goods to their citizens.\*

\* For more detailed discussions of these issues, see Robert I. Rotberg, "Strengthening Governance," *Washington Quarterly* 38 (2004): 71–81; and Robert I. Rotberg and Deborah L. West, *The Good Governance Problem* (Cambridge, Mass: World Peace Foundation, 2004).



Susan T. Fiske

*on prejudice &  
the brain*

“They are bigots;  
you are, maybe, a little biased sometimes;  
I, of course, am accurate.”

[how to conjugate an adjective across  
three persons]

Most people think they are less biased than average. Just as we can't all be better than average, though, we also cannot all be less prejudiced than average. What's more likely: all of us harbor more biases than we think we do. Social neuroscience suggests that most of us don't even know the half of it. A

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& Sciences

twenty-year eruption of research reveals exactly how automatically and unconsciously prejudices operate. As members of a society with egalitarian ideals, most Americans have good intentions, but our brains and our impulses all too often betray us. That's the bad news from the 'decade of the brain.'

But the good news, from the current 'decade of behavior,' provides solutions. Individual values and organizational commitment can override our worst impulses. Getting information, however, is the necessary first step, and we now know a lot about bias, both blatant and subtle, with the aid of the social sciences and neurosciences.

The first thing to understand: modern prejudice is not your grandparents' prejudice. Old-fashioned racism and sexism were known quantities because people would mostly say what they thought. Blacks were lazy; Jews were sly; women were either dumb or bitchy. Modern equivalents continue, of course. Look at current images of immigrants. But most estimates place such blatant and empirically wrongheaded bigotry at only 10 percent of citizens in modern democracies. Blatant bias does spawn hate crimes, but these are fortunately rare (though not rare enough). At the least, we can identify the barefaced bigots.

Our own prejudice – and our children's and grandchildren's prejudice, if we don't address it – takes a more subtle, unexamined form. People can identify another person's apparent race, gender, and age in a matter of milliseconds. In this blink of an eye, a complex network of stereotypes, emotional prejudices, and behavioral impulses activates. Why? Because the culture puts them in our brains. That's how they become so widespread and automatic. These knee-jerk reactions do not require conscious bigotry, though they are worsened by it.

How do we know this happens? In our own lab, for example, we dug up dozens of images of societal groups who were identifiable in an instant: people with disabilities, older people, homeless people, drug addicts, rich businessmen, and American Olympic athletes. Our research participants agreed that they evoked the respective pity, disgust, envy, and pride predicted by our theory. We then slid a different group of participants into the fMRI scanner to observe their brains' responses to these evocative photos. Within a moment of observing the photograph of an apparently homeless man, people's brains set off a sequence of reactions characteristic of disgust and avoidance. For neuroscience wonks, the activated areas included the insula, which is reliably implicated in disgust toward nonhuman objects such as garbage, mutilation, and human waste. Notably, the homeless people's photographs also *failed* to activate other areas of the brain that are reliably involved whenever people think about other people or themselves (dorsomedial prefrontal cortex). In the case of the homeless (and drug addicts), these areas simply failed to light up, as if people had stumbled on a pile of garbage.

We were surprised, not by the distinct disgust but by how easy it was to achieve. These were photographs, after all, not smelly, noisy, intrusive people. Other researchers have seen that even dull yearbook photographs of black or white young men can trigger the brain's amygdala; these emotion-alert areas activate in many whites to pictures of unfamiliar black male faces, as if they are prepared for fear in particular.

Even outside of social neuroscience, social psychologists have documented people's instant unfortunate associations to out-groups – those groups not

their own. Whether they differ on age, ethnicity, religion, or political party, people favor their own groups over others, and they do so automatically. We have always had codes: PLU (people like us), NOKD (not our kind, dear), the 'hood, the man. Every culture names the 'us' and the 'not-us.' This much appears to be human nature.

This all-too-human comfort with the familiar and similar is probably hard-wired through people's affinity for their in-groups. In order to survive and thrive, people need to belong with accepting others. Attachment matters. Babies do not do well when only their physical needs are met; adults' cardiovascular and immune systems fail when they are isolated; mortality tracks social connectedness. Historically as well as currently, we are motivated to belong with others, to understand things as they do, to feel in control of our social encounters, to feel social esteem, and to be able to trust those nearest us. All this is easier when other people resemble you.

To survive in the rest of the world, people demand, like the sentry at night: 'Who goes there? Friend or foe?' People need to know right away who is on their side and who means them harm. According to our research, people's minds set up simple algorithms: If competitor for scarce resources, then not-friend. Thus, not nice, not warm, not trustworthy. If in-group or ally, then friend, and presumably warm and trustworthy.

Status also has immediate significance for social survival. After 'friend or foe,' one needs to know the other's rank. Status implies competence and the ability to enact intentions for good or ill. If high-status, then competent – one had best pay attention to this person. If low-status, one can ignore the incompetent other without much cost.

The friend-foe, able-unable judgments yield four kinds of people in the world – not the proverbial two. Able friends are people like us (middle class), are our cultural ideals (Olympic athletes, astronauts), and are our close allies (for Americans, the British and the Canadians). In most instances, these are our in-groups; we feel pride and admiration. Even people who are not themselves middle class, for example, typically identify with middle-class ideals.

The Others come in three kinds. Two of them provoke intense ambivalence and, with it, mixed messages. We pity those cooperators who cannot enact their intentions – those seemingly too disabled, deficient, or decrepit (remember, we are dealing in stereotypes here). Pity is a mixed emotion. Pity communicates paternalistic, top-down aid, coupled with neglect. This is the likable but disrespected quadrant of societal space.

Conversely, in the respected but disliked quadrant dwell those at least as fortunate as ourselves: high-status competitors. Grudgingly viewed as competent, but resented as neither warm nor trustworthy, they elicit envy, again a mixed emotion. Envy says, “The other has something that I wish I had, and I will take it away if I can.” Respect combined with dislike is a volatile mix. It predicts going-along-to-get-along, but also attacking and fighting when the chips are down. Envy is directed at high-status people not like oneself: rich people all over the world and, in the United States at this time, Asian and Jewish people. Also, no doubt, members of the American Academy.

The fourth quadrant is unequivocally bad: both disliked and disrespected. Low-status others who try to compete (but fail), exploitative parasites – they are stereotyped as neither nice nor smart. They elicit, more than any other

category, both disgust and contempt. They are alternately neglected and attacked. And these are the people whose photographs lit up the insula and failed to light up the social areas of the brain.

People have a tendency to think that biology is destiny. But just because we can correlate impulses in the brain with certain prejudices does not mean we are hardwired to hate drug addicts and homeless people. In the racial neuroscience studies, for instance, amygdala (emotion-related) reactions correspond to other indicators of prejudice. So people who are more prejudiced by other measures show more amygdala response. But the levels of response vary by individual. And the alarms in whites’ amygdalas do not go off to *familiar* black faces. Likewise, they grow accustomed to faces with repeated exposure. So prejudiced responses vary a lot, depending on the interplay between perceiver and target.

The most important lessons of the latest biologically inspired social research point to the complexity of the interactions between biology and the environment. Take the amygdala-race results. We find that they evaporate as soon as people consider what vegetable the pictured person might like for lunch. Similarly, our latest data indicate that the dehumanization of homeless people and drug addicts can be altered by the same task, guessing what they would like to eat, as if one were running a soup kitchen. A long line of our previous research indicates that putting people on the same team helps to overcome prejudices over time.

The environment can interact with human nature for good or ill. People put under stress, provocation, peer pressure, or authority sanction will enact their prejudices in the worst ways. We

have seen this in hate crimes directed at homeless people, homosexuals, and all ethnicities; and we have argued that these processes underlie prisoner abuse in settings such as Abu Ghraib.

Learning to deal with difference is hard. Generating enthusiasm for differences is even harder. Yet our message is essentially optimistic. If we recognize prejudice's subtle yet inexorable pressures, we can learn to moderate even unconscious prejudice. People will always gravitate toward the familiar and similar, but they can expand their boundaries, if sufficiently motivated. And this is the substance of social science married to neuroscience.

Daron Acemoglu &  
James A. Robinson

*on the economic origins  
of democracy*

Will Iraq, and subsequently the rest of the Middle East, manage to establish and maintain democratic institutions? Many, and not only detractors of the current Republican administration, are skeptical about the prospects of democracy in the Middle East and, perhaps, in many other economically less prosperous parts of the world, such as sub-Saha-

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ran Africa. Underlying this skepticism is a theory, widely shared by academics, policymakers, and journalists alike, that democracy can only stand on the foundations laid by a highly educated population and a 'culture of democracy.' Democracy, this theory goes, is first and foremost about consensus, compromises, and government by the people. How can a society that has not developed a culture of democracy reach consensus and tolerate dissenting opinion? How can an uneducated population refrain from making choices that will ultimately undermine democracy by empowering groups, such as Islamic fundamentalists, with objectives radically opposed to democracy?

This theory, which can be traced back to Aristotle and was most eloquently formulated by the American sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset in the 1950s, has such wide acceptance that it is now beyond 'conventional wisdom.' Yet it is not the only way to view democratic institutions. The alternative recognizes that most collective decisions a society makes under any regime are at least in part about the distribution of resources. Some groups and individuals will benefit, while others will lose out. Democracy is a specific set of institutions for making such collective decisions, distinguished by its relatively egalitarian distribution of political authority. While a dictatorship or a monarchy concentrates collective decision-making power in the hands of a narrow group, democracies give more voice to the majority of the population. This alternative theory then suggests that democracy can flourish in any sort of society as long as the distribution of benefits implied by the democratic process are consistent with the underlying distribution of power. Conversely, it is likely to collapse if such economic and political conditions are not met.



Which of these two theories is a better approach is not simply an academic matter. Whether Iraq, a country where in 2001 almost one-half of adult males and three-quarters of adult females were illiterate, and other economically less-developed nations experimenting with democratic institutions, will ultimately succeed is linked to which theory has more truth. It is also important that our advice and support to these young democracies come from the correct theory. While the accepted theory claims that democracy will remain no more than a dream in Iraq until the Kurds and Shiites develop a culture of democracy and the educational level of the Iraqi people rises sufficiently, the alternative maintains that instead these groups need to get enough out of democracy that they have no incentive to undermine it or secede.

Fortunately for the citizens of Iraq, the evidence is much more consistent with the alternative theory than the widely accepted one. Over the last century, there has been no tendency for countries that have become richer or more educated to become more democratic. Moreover, there are numerous historical examples of successful democratic societies starting with very low levels of education and no trace of a culture of democracy.

Perhaps the most telling example is from the United States, where the origins of democracy stem not from the legacy of the Mayflower and Bible-reading Puritans, but rather from the political struggles of early settlers in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. These settlers were mostly illiterate indentured laborers, certainly far less educated than the Spanish conquistadors of Mexico and Peru. Though largely uneducated, the settlers of Virginia valued and demanded representative institutions

that would enable them to influence the types of societies in which they lived. The first formal democratic institution granted to the settlers was the Representative Assembly conceded by the Virginia Company in 1619, which effectively enfranchised all white adult males. This concession was a desperate attempt to give the settlers a stake in their fledgling society, mainly to convince them not to walk away from their indentured labor contracts and obligations.

Similarly, the much-delayed democratization of Latin America has little to do with the relatively low levels of education or an absence of a democratic tradition. In fact, during the colonial period in Mexico, for example, the mayors of Indians towns were elected, a practice which the Spaniards adapted from the Aztecs. Though initially only descendants of the Aztec or Indian aristocracy could vote, the institution evolved into a vibrant and participatory one, often with all adult males taking part. Despite this democratic culture, democracy did not emerge in nineteenth-century Mexico, and though it finally did in the twentieth century, it has been marred by corruption and political instability, largely resulting from the unequal distribution of wealth and the ability of the elites to capture the political system via their control of the main political party, the PRI. Democracy arrived so late in Mexico not because it was infeasible, but because it would have diluted the political control of elites.

While the origins of democracy in North and South America show that the link between the 'culture of democracy' and democracy itself is at best tenuous, the most telling example is probably that of Botswana, the most successful democracy and economy in sub-Saharan Africa. When the British granted independence to this colony in 1965,

*Note by  
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which they had acquired largely as a buffer between South Africa and German Southwest Africa (Namibia), they left little of value: there were twelve kilometers of paved road, twenty-two Botswanans who had graduated from college, and only one hundred who had finished secondary school! But Botswana was fortunate to have avoided the most adverse effects of colonialism, and under the leadership of Seretse Khama and then Quett Masire, it built and maintained democratic institutions, and used the revenues from diamonds both equitably and wisely. Botswana's democracy has not only endured and flourished, but has not even been challenged by a coup or tarnished by major electoral fraud during the past forty years.

These examples and many others show that it is indeed possible for a society to be uneducated and democratic, and they suggest that the elusive notion of the 'culture of democracy' is as likely to be the outcome of successful democratic institutions as their cause. The main threat to Iraqi democracy is therefore not the low educational attainment of its population or its lack of a 'culture of democracy,' but the high degree of polarization along ethnic and religious lines and the difficulty of engendering a system that gives enough voice to various groups and redistributes the society's resources fairly.

Not an easy recipe, but certainly more hopeful than asking for a change in 'culture.'

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*Inside back cover*: A Palestinian shrine for martyrs, organized by Hamas on the campus of Al-Najah University, on the West Bank of Nablus, January 28, 2002: the shroud on display belonged to a suicide bomber. The day before, in a dramatic departure for Palestinian organizations that had previously banned women from suicide bombings, a female student from the university had detonated herself in the heart of one of Jerusalem's busiest shopping streets, killing herself, an elderly bystander, and injuring at least one hundred others, a dozen of them seriously. See Mia Bloom on *Female suicide bombers: a global trend*, pages 94 – 102: "The message female suicide bombers send is that they are more valuable to their societies dead than they ever could have been alive." Image © Reuters/Corbis.



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