

# Will Trump's Policies Wreak Havoc On The US And Global Economies?



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With the midterm elections rapidly approaching, many Americans will start thinking more and more about the economy before they decide how to cast their votes. In this context, Trump's claim that the US economy under his administration is the "greatest in history" needs to be thoroughly and critically examined in order to separate facts from myths. How much of the ongoing "recovery" is being felt by average American workers? And what about Trump's escalating trade war with China, which is already beginning to impact American consumers and various US manufacturers, while making European firms nervous? In this exclusive interview, Gerald Epstein, professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, clears the air on several myths and misconceptions about the developments that Trump has tried to frame as an "[economic miracle](#)."

*C.J. Polychroniou: Trump likes to boast about an economic revival of historic proportions under his administration, which includes a strong labor market, a robust stock market, and a 4 percent GDP rate. What are the facts and myths about Trump's alleged economic miracle? Give us the full story.*

*Gerald Epstein:* Trump is a gross exaggerator who loves to construct stories. When it comes to his claims about an economic miracle under way during his administration, I think my friend and colleague John Miller in the economics department at Wheaton College put it best in a September 30 presentation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst: “Compared to the standard of U.S. economic performance since 1948, we have been living through an economic expansion that has been historically long, historically slow, and that has done historically little to improve the lot of most people.”

It is safe to say, as Miller and many other economists show, slashing corporate taxes has not generated an investment boom or a stock market boom. Data show that during the second quarter of 2018, housing investment [continued to go down](#), and spending on new equipment, the largest component of investment, grew only half as quickly as it had at the end of 2017, prior to the tax cut. As [the data discussed by Josh Bivens of the Economic Policy Institute](#) show, business investment in structures such as office buildings and factories did increase far more quickly than before the tax cut, but most of that went into oil and gas drilling which resulted from higher world energy prices.

*What’s the explanation for S&P 500 and Dow setting all-time records under Trump, and what impact do stock market trends have on the life and well-being of average Americans?*

It is true that the stock market has increased since Trump was elected, but it has been on an upswing since the recession bottomed out in 2009. In fact, stock prices (the S&P 500 adjusted for inflation) increased just 2.1 percent from Jan. 1 to Sept. 1, 2018 — far slower than earlier in the expansion, and the near double-digit increase during the 1990s expansion.

Only in the third week of September did the S&P 500 Stock Index and the Dow Jones Index finally [top their January 2018 highs](#).

Still, it is clear that since Trump was elected, financial investors have been quite happy and optimistic. The Republican agenda of tax cuts and deregulation have significantly increased corporate profits and the expectations of further corporate profits, and these drive up stock prices.

But most stocks are owned by the very wealthy. According to Edward Wolff, [the richest 10 percent of the population own close to 90 percent of all stocks](#). So

when the stock market goes up in value, it is the already very rich that mostly benefit.

Now some of this could trickle down as investment and jobs but this appears to be rather limited. As I mentioned earlier, we are not seeing much of an increase in investment in factories and equipment as a result of the tax cuts and corresponding increase in the value of the stock market. It is true that when the stock market goes up substantially it can increase the consumption of those that own stocks and some of that can trickle down when increases in consumer demand boost the economy. But here the question is the size of the impact — which is modest at best — and the impact on wages.

Up until now, this increase in consumption and decline in unemployment has not led to much in the way of increased wages, when the uptick in inflation is taken into account. People's paychecks might be a bit bigger but so is the cost of living. So, the economy seems to still be largely stuck in a period of stagnant inflation-adjusted wages, which has been plaguing us for more than 40 years. The Trump economy has yet to break free of that swamp.

The reasons for this seem myriad: a major one is the reduced bargaining power of workers due to a 40-year political assault on unions and workers' bargaining rights. A second is related to appearance of other global trade powers like China on the scene and the response of American capitalists and politicians to that crucial structural shift.

*Trump has made the reduction of the trade deficit one of his central goals, which partly explains his gambles with trade wars, tariffs and protectionism and his so-called "America First" policies. Yet, the US trade deficit, ironically enough, has widened considerably (especially with China) under the Trump administration. Is the increase in the trade deficit a direct result of the trade war?*

No. The increase in the trade deficit is mostly due to the fact the US economy has been continuing to grow and recently picked up speed. Any growing economy will increase imports; if exports are not leading the growth — which they are not in the US and haven't been for several decades — then the trade deficit is almost certain to grow. But what it does show is that Trump's trade policy has not reversed the secular dependence of the US on trade deficits, which has been increasing in the last 40 years or so.

*Just recently, numerous US manufacturing companies testified how Trump's trade wars and tariff policies will increase both the cost of production and the cost of imports, cause layoffs and devastate lives, while failing to improve competition or spur additional growth. Given all this, what's the real purpose behind the trade war with China, and will tariffs boomerang on workers in the US and the global economy?*

Trump believes that he can win political support from his base by bashing foreigners and "others" — be they Mexican and South American citizens, Muslims, African Americans and women, even if his policies hurt his base in economic terms. He is specializing in a type of [white nationalist] "identity politics" and is very good at manipulating people. For the rich, he delivers the goods.... He believes he can get away with this even if he hurts his base economically. He believes he can put lipstick on trade deal pigs and his base will buy it. Perhaps he is right. We will see.

So, yes: the trade war he has started might sound good to his base, but is likely to hurt many of them, as Canada, Europe and China are smart when they retaliate, knowing fully well that they will harm his base.

So part of his goal is to fire up his base by being tough on the foreigners. But the fight with China is much more than that. Trump has decided that the US is in a power struggle with China for global dominance. He is not the first US capitalist politician to believe that. US strategists have talked about making a pivot to China for more than a decade now. Trump has decided to lurch toward China.

His trade deals, such as the new NAFTA, contain sections which require that Canada and Mexico notify the US if they are going to make any trade deals with China; and there are various elements in them that attempt to discourage such deals with China. So this is all part of the attempt to create a new cold war with China.

Cold Wars are useful for capitalists. They can justify massive military expenditure; they can justify patriotism and squashing dissent; they can justify loyalty to the strong leader.

Another reason why Trump is pursuing these policies is that they can split the labor movement and the Democrats. When Steve Bannon was on his way out of the Trump administration, he contacted Robert Kuttner of the American Prospect

and said he wanted to form a left/right coalition over trade. He and Trump have been partly successful in this. The United Steelworkers Union has supported his tariffs on steel. Much — but not all — of organized labor has offered tentative support for Trump's new NAFTA, even though there are very few positive features for labor in the agreement.

The new NAFTA also has a lot of very negative features, including the undermining of environmental regulations, the increase of patent protections, limitations on the ability to restrict pharmaceutical prices and other consumer-gouging provisions.

As a result, even labor unions and groups like Public Citizen have been reluctant to endorse it fully yet.

*Do you have any predictions about how the story of Trump's trade war against China and his overall economic policies will end?*

Overall, Trump's policies will prove to be extremely disruptive. The trading system will develop many cracks, the supply chains of trade will get mucked up, and the expansionary wave coming from the tax cuts will fade out with nothing left but deficits and bloated capitalists to show for it. But this will not necessarily mean political trouble for Trump and the Republicans. For that to happen, the Democrats and the left have to not only make clear what are all the problems in Trump's and the Republicans' economic charades, but have to promote their alternatives relentlessly, and in a unified fashion. The left has developed a strong set of policies that can address the ills facing the majority of US residents — single payer health care, raising the minimum wage, a Green New Deal, breaking up Wall Street banks and promoting financial alternatives, tax increases on the wealthy, real infrastructure investment, affordable and improved education, and a peace-oriented foreign policy. This is a winning agenda. If economists, policy makers and activists can continue to develop this program and promote it relentlessly, then when the Trump economy falls apart, it is the left that can win with a viable program that can truly work for the many.

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*About the author*

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main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to Truthout as well as a member of Truthout's Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of [\*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change\*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at Truthout and collected by Haymarket Books.

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## De verborgen heimwee van Léo Malet. Een speurtocht in Parijs



*Pont de Tolbiac, ca. 1910*

*De Franse schrijver Léo Malet (1909-1996) schreef in de jaren veertig, vijftig en zestig tientallen detectiveromans. Na Georges Simenon was hij de best verkochte detectiveschrijver in Frankrijk. Voor de Tweede Wereldoorlog was hij actief als anarchist en betrokken bij de surrealistische beweging rond André Breton. Zijn bekendste boek is Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac (1956), wat zich afspeelt in het 13e Arrondissement in Parijs. Wie in het voetspoor van Malet de wijk wil doorkruisen, treft een stadswijk aan die in ruim een halve eeuw tijd enorm van karakter is veranderd. De vraag is of dat allemaal ten goede is.*



*Jacques Tardi, Nestor Burma op de  
Pont de Tolbiac*

Een warme zomerse dag in Parijs, een aantal jaren geleden. Ik sta op de plek waar de Rue de Tolbiac overgaat in de Pont de Tolbiac, in het 13e Arrondissement, aan de oostkant van Parijs, langs de Seine. Het eerste gedeelte van de brug overspant een aantal treinsporen en na de kruising met de Port de la Gare, volgt het tweede gedeelte over de Seine. Helaas is de oorspronkelijke gietijzeren brug in de jaren tachtig van de vorige eeuw vervangen door een moderne betonnen constructie.

Op deze plaats zouden in 1936 een aantal anarchisten een geldloper van het nabij gelegen koelhuis Entrepôts Frigorifiques beroofd hebben. Van de geldloper, het geld of de daders is nooit een spoor terug gevonden. Pas twintig jaar later zou de zaak opgelost worden. Dat is althans het gegeven in de roman *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac* (1956) van Léo Malet.

In deze roman wordt privédetective Nestor Burma - voormalig anarchist - twintig jaar later door een oude kameraad getipt over de zaak van de beroofde geldloper. Burma verdiept zich in de zaak en wordt vervolgens geconfronteerd met zijn anarchistische verleden, met personen en gebeurtenissen die hij al lang had verdrongen.



*Jacques Tardi, Nestor  
Burma op de Pont de  
Tolbiac*

### *Geweld*

In 1936 is de jonge Burma een krantenverkoper in het 13e Arrondissement en logeert hij in het Foyer Végétalien - wat werkelijk bestaan heeft: 182 Rue de Tolbiac - waar veganisten, anarchisten en andere wereldverbeteraars een goedkoop onderkomen kunnen vinden. Op de slaapzaal wordt onder de anarchisten gediscussieerd over het gebruik van geweld tegen de maatschappij en tegen personen. De namen vallen van Callemin, Soudy en Garnier, enkele van de zogenaamde *Autobandietsen*. Deze groep anarchisten, ook bekend als de Bende van Bonnot, zorgde in 1911 en 1912 voor onrust en paniek in Parijs en omstreken, vanwege enkele gewelddadige overvallen. Het geld was bestemd voor de anarchistische beweging.

Burma is tegen het gebruik van geweld, maar anderen menen dat geweld niet kan worden uitgesloten. De overval op de geldloper bij de Pont de Tolbiac is het gevolg. Wanneer Burma zich twintig jaar later op de oude zaak stort, lijkt een confrontatie met vroegere kameraden onvermijdelijk.





Léo Malet, *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac*, 1956

### *Idealen*

In het boek worden anarchisten niet stereotiep, karikaturaal neergezet als harteloze fanatici met cape, hoed en bom. Het zijn gewone figuren met idealen, sappelend om de kost te verdienen. Maar bij sommigen speelt de geldzucht op. Anarchistische idealen worden opzij gezet en wellicht komt hun ware karakter boven. *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac* is in de eerste plaats bedoeld als een spannend boek, maar het heeft een tweede laag. De wijze waarop Malet de gebeurtenissen laat ontrollen en de ontknoping van het verhaal, zijn een afrekening van Burma met de handelwijze van vroegere kameraden. Dat Burma daarbij geen geweld hoeft te gebruiken, komt niet alleen goed uit, maar geeft de opvattingen van Burma - maar ook die van Malet zelf - weer.

### *Surrealisten*

Dat Léo Malet de herinneringen van Burma aan diens anarchistische jaren zo treffend beschrijft, moet terug te voeren zijn op zijn eigen achtergrond. Halverwege de jaren twintig was Malet een actief anarchist. Hij schreef in kleine tijdschriften als *l'Insurgé* en *La Revue Anarchiste*, en voorzag in zijn onderhoud als chansonnier in tweederangs theatertjes in Montmartre. Hij begon surrealistisch getinte teksten te schrijven en maakte surrealistische erotische kunst. Hij stuurde een gedicht naar André Breton, de voorman van de surrealistische beweging en uitgever van het tijdschrift *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Breton nodigde Malet uit zich bij de groep aan te sluiten. In 1936 publiceerde

Malet zijn bekendste surrealistische gedicht *Ne pas voir plus loin que le bout de son sexe*.



*Léo Malet (7 maart 1909 - 3 maart 1996)*

### *Detectiveromans*

De Tweede Wereldoorlog maakte een einde aan de activiteiten van de surrealisten. Na de Duitse inval werd Malet als 'subversief element' door de Franse Vichy-autoriteiten gevangen gezet. Na enige tijd werd hij vrijgelaten maar werd vervolgens door de Duitsers naar een krijgsgevangenkamp overgebracht, hoewel hij niet in het leger diende. Zijn ervaringen daar verwerkte hij later in zijn eerste detectiveroman *120 Rue de la Gare* (1943). De roman was een klein succes en Malet besloot door te gaan met het schrijven van het detectiveromans. Opzet, stijl en hoofdfiguur had hij afgekeken van Dashiell Hammett, met Raymond Chandler de grondlegger van de *hard-boiled* detectiveroman. Malet kende het werk van Hammett want deze was voor de oorlog al in het Frans vertaald. Met Nestor Burma creëerde hij een Franse variant op Hammetts *private eye* Sam Spade, geschoeid op dezelfde geest: een *coole* detective, onverschrokken, niet te beroerd om een robbertje te vechten, cynisch in zijn commentaren en vaak in conflict met de lokale politie.

### *Mysteries*

Malet schreef tientallen detectiveromans onder diverse pseudoniemen en introduceerde zo het genre *hard-boiled* in Frankrijk. Briljant was zijn idee een

serie detectiveverhalen te schrijven waarvan ieder deel zich in een ander arrondissement van Parijs afspeelt. Dankzij de gedetailleerde beschrijvingen van de wijk, is het mogelijk met ieder deel uit de reeks in de hand en het bijgevoegde kaartje, de routes van het verhaal in het arrondissement na te lopen.

Malet noemde deze reeks *Les Nouveaux Mystères de Paris*, een verwijzing naar en eerbetoon aan de roman *Les Mystères de Paris* van de Franse auteur Eugène Sue (1804-1857). Diens roman verscheen in 1842 en 1843 als feuilleton in afleveringen en beschreef het dagelijkse leven in Parijs aan de onderkant van de samenleving. Het werk geldt een van de eerste sociale romans. Beïnvloed door het vroege socialisme toonde Sue de sociale omstandigheden van de Parijse arbeidersbevolking.

### *Jeugdzonde*

De romans van Malet hebben natuurlijk een heel ander karakter. Maar Malet is wel op z'n best in de romans die in gewone volksbuurten spelen, in kroegjes, dubieuze uitgaansgelegenheden, bordelen, stegen en ongere straten, te midden van prostituees, clochards, straatfiguren, kruimeldieven en oplichters. Dat hij zijn verleden als anarchist niet verloochent, blijkt soms uit kritische opmerkingen die hij Burma laat maken over politieke en sociale omstandigheden. Detective Burma heeft na de Tweede Wereldoorlog het anarchistisch ideaal losgelaten, net als Malet zelf. Maar Malet spuugt niet in de bron waaruit hij gedronken heeft. Hij benadert het anarchisme in *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac* niet op schampere, belachelijke wijze of als een jeugdzonde. Ook Malets surrealistische verleden duikt zo nu en dan op in zijn romans. In *Corrida aux Champs-Élysées* zijn bijvoorbeeld verwijzingen terug te vinden naar Dada en Marcel Duchamp en draait de zaak om de diefstal van een beeldje uit het Louvre, waarbij Picasso en Apollinaire betrokken zouden zijn geweest.



*Jacques Tardi, Rue Watt*

## Volkswijk

In de romans van Malet ligt het niet voor de hand dat het recht traditiegetrouw zegeviert. In *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac* is er geen winnaar, ook het recht zegeviert niet. Eigenlijk zijn er alleen maar verliezers: de oude kameraad die Burma tipt, probeert tegen de stroom in tevergeefs zijn anarchistische levenswijze vast te houden, anarchisten die hun kameraden verraden, privédetective Burma die zijn kameraden is kwijtgeraakt en zijn idealistische verleden heeft verdrongen.

Het boek is tevens een weemoedige terugblik op Malets eigen verleden. Er spreekt heimwee uit naar onbezorgde tijden. Weliswaar was het bestaan armoedig, maar dankzij de strijd voor idealen, leek het leven zin te hebben. Heimwee heeft Malet vooral naar de wijk waar zich dat verleden afspeelde: het 13e Arrondissement.

Toen hij in 1956 het boek schreef vond hij dat de wijk haar vooroorlogse karakter reeds lang verloren had: de oorspronkelijke Parijse volkswijk was vervallen geraakt, de bevolking vergrijsd, handel en bedrijvigheid verdwenen, evenals de gemoedelijke volkse sfeer. Met Malets herinneringen aan de dertiger jaren in de wijk en zijn beschrijving van de omgeving twintig jaar later, wordt duidelijk dat het 13e Arrondissement de werkelijke hoofdrol vervult in *Brouillard au Pont de Tolbiac*.



*Jacques Tardi, Sluiers over de Pont de Tolbiac, 1982*

### *Stripversie*

Dat moet ook de Franse striptekenaar Jacques Tardi – bekend van zijn strip Isabelle Avondrood – hebben begrepen, toen hij in 1982 een stripversie van de roman maakte, *Sluiers over de Pont de Tolbiac* (Uitgeverij Casterman). Hieruit spreekt diezelfde heimwee naar een tijd en naar plekken die niet meer bestaan. Niet in de vorm van platte nostalgie, maar als aanklacht tegen het beleid van de gemeente Parijs. De stripversie van Tardi verscheen juist op het moment dat het gemeentebestuur in de wijk rigoureuus de slopershamer begon te hanteren. Grote delen van de oude bebouwing sneuvelden, omdat de gemeente Parijs de wijk had uitgekozen ter realisering van het project ‘Paris Rive Gauche’. Wat restte van de oorspronkelijke volkswijk, bevolkt door overwegend allochtonen, diende vervangen te worden door luxe woontorens, kantoren, megabioscopen en sportcomplexen.

In zijn tekeningen in *Sluiers over de Pont de Tolbiac*, weet Tardi de locaties en sfeer van de wijk in de jaren vijftig perfect tot leven te wekken. Vlak voordat de grote sloop van de wijk begon, fotografeerde hij alle locaties uit de roman – herkenbaar bij Malet terug te vinden – en gebruikte deze als basis voor zijn tekeningen. De stripversie is eveneens een eerbetoon aan een wijk die op dat moment eigenlijk al was verdwenen.

### *Bibliotheek*

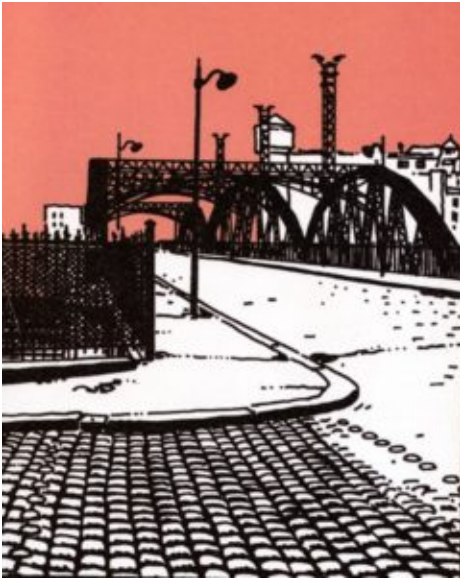
Wie met het stripalbum onder de arm en de roman van Malet in de tas, het 13e Arrondissement bezoekt, constateert dat van een groot deel van de oorspronkelijke wijk nauwelijks iets is overgebleven. Oorspronkelijke straatnamen bestaan nog wel, maar de bebouwing is ingrijpend gewijzigd. Met name in het gedeelte tegen de Seine aan en rond de Place d’Italie zijn vrijwel geen gebouwen te vinden die ouder zijn dan veertig jaar. Rond de Place d’Italie is het Parijse Chinatown geherhuisvest: in plaats van in gewone Parijse winkelstraten, zijn Chinese restaurants en supermarkten hier nu te vinden in moderne gebouwen met veel glas en beton, die in het financiële district van de stad niet zouden hebben misstaan.



### *Bibliothèque National*

Nog steeds is het gebied rond de Pont de Tolbiac een enorme bouwput. Gezichtsbepalend voor de omgeving is de uit vier glazen torens bestaande Bibliothèque National de France, een onder Mitterrand gebouwd presidentieel prestigeobject. De torens, elk als een openstaand boek, op de hoeken van een groot plein, werpen letterlijk en figuurlijk een schaduw over de wijk. Bij de oplevering kreeg architect Dominique Perrault forse kritiek te verduren: glazen torens die zonlicht doorlaten zijn niet de optimale omgeving voor het bewaren van oude boeken en archieven. Later werden achter de ramen draaibare houten panelen geplaatst. Daarmee deed men een van de uitgangspunten van de architect voor het gebouw - visuele openheid - eigenlijk weer teniet.

Tussen de vier torens bevindt zich een grote laag gelegen binnentuin - zes verdiepingen diep - waarin 250 reusachtige naaldbomen uit Canada werden overgeplant. De tuin is niet toegankelijk voor het publiek. De moderne architectuur rond de Bibliothèque National trekt, mede dankzij de nieuwe, ultramoderne metrolijn 14 hordes toeristen.



*Jacques Tardi, plaats delict  
Pont de Tolbiac*

### *Misdaad*

Van de Pont de Tolbiac loop ik naar de Rue Watt, een paar honderd meter verderop. Het is de locatie van één van de sleutelscènes in het boek van Malet. Het is een sinistere, onheilspellende plek, eigenlijk niet eens een echte straat. Er staan geen huizen, het is meer een soort tunnel onder een spoorwegemplacement door. Aan de zijkanten een half afgebrokkeld trottoir met een wiebelend hek. Het is er donker, water drupt vanuit het plafond omlaag. Geen plek waar je voor je plezier komt. Misdaadgevoelig zou je kunnen zeggen, want de Rue Watt figureert ook in Franse politiefilms als *Doulos* (Pierre Lesou, 1957), *Flic Story* (Jacques Deray, 1975) en *Les Compagnons de Baal* (Pierre Prévert, 1968). De sfeer wordt goed getroffen op een prachtige foto, gemaakt door Robert Doisneau, van twee in de Rue Watt rondhangende onderwereldfiguren.

Zelfs, en helaas, ook op die locatie heeft inmiddels de vernieuwing toegeslagen: nu zijn er licht uitstralende, kunstzinnige steunpilaren en de trottoirs en zijwanden zijn van strak beton. Gloednieuw asfalt maakt de transformatie compleet.





*Plaats delict, ca. 2010*

Terug naar de Pont de Tolbiac. De exacte plek waar in het boek van Malet de overval op de geldloper heeft plaatsgevonden, is lastig te bepalen. De tekeningen van Jacques Tardi brengen uitkomst, maar de plek is onherkenbaar veranderd. Maar nee, niet helemaal. In de schaduw van de Bibliothèque National staat nog, met haar onmiskenbare watertoren, het koelhuis van de Entrepôts Frigorifiques, waarvoor de overvallen geldloper werkzaam was. Het werd in de jaren tachtig gekraakt, is inmiddels gelegaliseerd en is verbouwd tot ruimtes voor kunstenaarsateliers en artistieke bedrijfjes. Het is één van de laatste restjes vooroorlogs 13e Arrondissement.



*Rue Watt, ca. 2012*





*Rue Watt, 2019*

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# **Julia Wouters ~ De zijkant van de macht - Waarom de politiek te belangrijk is om alleen aan mannen over te laten**



Ills. Joseph Sassoon  
Semah

De politiek is te belangrijk om alleen aan mannen over te laten - Els Borst zei het al in 1998 -, maar vreemd genoeg neemt het aantal vrouwen in de politiek juist af. Terwijl de maatschappelijke betrokkenheid en het activisme onder vrouwen de laatste jaren sterk is gegroeid, hebben weinigen de ambitie om de politiek in te gaan. "Vrouwen houden niet van een slangenkuil." Zo hadden van de 28 partijen die meededen aan de landelijke verkiezingen van 2017 er slechts vier een vrouwelijke lijsttrekker. Hoe komt dat?

In 'De zijkant van de macht' zoekt Julia Wouters naar een verklaring, waarbij zij put uit haar eigen kennis en ervaringen, (internationale) onderzoeken en de ervaringen van politici zelf. Zij analyseert op welke manieren vrouwen worden benadeeld en geeft veel praktische tips in een wereld die mannen en mannelijkheid als maatstaf neemt. Wouters meest effectieve strategie: Handhaaf je als vrouw binnen de (mannelijke) politiek arena en gebruik je invloed om voor de lange termijn die arena zo te veranderen dat vrouwen zich er ook thuis voelen.

In het eerste hoofdstuk geeft Wouters een uitgebreid overzicht van hoe de positie van vrouwen in de politiek zich sinds de invoering van het vrouwenkiesrecht heeft ontwikkeld. Anna de Waal, Joke Smit, Neelie Kroes, Jeltje van Nieuwenhoven, Elske ter Veld, Annemarie Jorritsma, Eveline Herfkens, Hedy d'Ancona zijn van de generatie waarbij het van belang was gemeenschappelijke belangen te hebben en onderling solidair te zijn. Vrouwen die vanaf de negentiger jaren in de politiek gingen zoals Femke Halsema, Marianne Thieme en Sadet Karabulut hadden niet langer een specifieke vrouwenagenda, maar veel eerder een partij-ideologische en individualistische agenda: zij wilden vooral hun eigen kracht bewijzen.

Maar er is nog veel te doen om vrouwen een gelijkwaardige positie te geven. Er is nog steeds sprake van alledaags seksisme en hardnekkige vooroordelen. In de politieke arena is het nodig dat meer vrouwen zich inzetten om de positie van vrouwen te verbeteren.

Want de traditionele politiek heeft aan geloofwaardigheid verloren; een nieuwe generatie politici moet verandering en vernieuwing creëren en vanzelfsprekend kunnen vrouwen hierin een belangrijke rol spelen, aldus Wouters.

In 'De zijkant van de macht' laat Wouters zien hoe het in de politiek werkt en wat vrouwen en mannen moeten veranderen om er samen een succes van te maken. Ze gaat op zoek naar een politieke arena, waarin vrouwen zich wel thuis kunnen voelen, want de ongelijkheid is hardleers en de voordelen zitten diep. Er is al veel

veranderd, maar ook nu worden vrouwen het woord ontnomen, en daarmee invloed. Het is van groot belang te weten hoe het systeem werkt om succesvol te zijn en zich te wapenen met kennis tegen seksisme, o.a. door het niet persoonlijk op te vatten zodat eigenwaarde en zelfvertrouwen niet worden beschadigd. Vrouwen hebben baat bij extra en meer specifieke begeleiding en coaching, maar ook is het van belang dat ze een eigen leven kunnen leiden naast hun werk in de politiek. Dat laatste is overigens ook in het belang van mannen, zoals Lodewijk Asscher vaak bepleit.



Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, Theresa May en Hillary Clinton hebben de weg vrijgemaakt maar functioneren in een mannenwereld als 'one of the guys'. Nu is een nieuwe krachtige generatie vrouwen aan zet om verandering af te dwingen in de politiek en hoe vrouwen op hun eigen manier politiek kunnen bedrijven. Welke manier dat zou moeten zijn is nog onbekend en er is al helemaal geen gedeeld beeld van.

Wouters noemt Jacinda Ardern (1980) - premier van Nieuw-Zeeland (Time Magazine kwalificeert haar als een van de honderd meest invloedrijke personen ter wereld en zij was de tweede premier -na de Pakistaanse premier Benazir Bhutto- die in functie beviel van een kind), Katrin Jakobsdóttir (1976), premier van IJsland, en Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (1989) uit de Bronx, New York, als hoopvolle voorbeelden. Ocasia-Cortez won in 2018 de Democratische voorverkiezing voor het Huis van Afgevaardigden namens het 14 e congresdistrict van New York.

Ook houdt Wouterse een vurig pleidooi voor verandering in de journalistiek, een belangrijke schakel tussen politiek en samenleving. "Om een cultuuromslag binnen de politiek te realiseren is het noodzakelijk dat de manier waarop er over de politiek en vrouwen in de politiek geschreven en gesproken wordt ook verandert."

Parlementaire journalisten moeten zich bewust worden van hun vooroordelen in een tijd waarin de nadruk ligt op scoren en ego, waardoor de parlementaire journalistiek meer 'machó' is geworden.

Op een strijdbare en optimistische manier geeft Julia Wouters in haar boek talloze praktische adviezen, waarbij voorop staat dat vrouwen zelf het initiatief moeten nemen om verandering in gang te zetten. Voor Wouters is de politieke arena een van de belangrijkste plekken waar vrouwen daadwerkelijk invloed kunnen uitoefenen. Maar, zoals Wouters ook zelf constateert, wordt de politieke arena steeds minder gezien als dé plek waar je moet zijn als je echte 'macht' en 'invloed' wil hebben.

De veel bekeken video *Apeshit* van Beyoncé en Jay -Z, opgenomen in het Louvre, laat zien dat machtsverandering vanuit cultuur een heel belangrijke rol kan spelen in verschuiving van machtspositie, niet alleen wat betreft de 'zwarte aanwezigheid', maar ook in het zichtbaar maken van de vanzelfsprekende leidende rol van de vrouw.

*Julia Wouters* is politicoloog en was ruim tien jaar de rechterhand van Lodewijk Asscher als zijn politiek adviseur en speechschrijver. Daarvoor werkte ze als journalist en als parlementair verslaggever bij verschillende actualiteitenprogramma's.

Julia Wouters - De zijkant van de macht. Waarom de politiek te belangrijk is om aan mannen over te laten

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*Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten*

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# **Islamic State & The Artaudian Theatre Of Cruelty**



Antonin Artaud (1896-1948)

### *Abstract*

Intrigued by the idea that the Islamic State's media is performing Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, we questioned in this article whether Islamic State's use of media does indeed compare to the hellish visions of the notorious French dramaturge, and consequently ask ourselves, if so, how we should interpret and give meaning to the eventual connection between two subjects that seem so far apart, and yet so close to each other: the Theatre of Cruelty and the gruesome religiously inspired videos of Islamic State. [i] The results of our analysis confirm significant parallels between the Theatre of Cruelty and the cruel videos of Islamic State. Considering the fact that the message of cruelty is central to many of their videos, we conclude that 'Islamic State's media productions indeed implement the characteristics underlying Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.' But what does all this mean? Cruelty and violence are indeed elements of human being's nature. Humankind has to embody it in one way or the other, and from that perspective, it is much better to incorporate these darker sides of men in the metaphysical sphere. We are deliberately speaking here of humankind, irrespective of religious or ethnic background, because there are Westerners and Easterners that have learnt this dear lesson: acknowledging the dark side of men and expressing it in art.

*Key words:* # Islamic State # Artaud # Theatre # Propaganda # Cruelty # Hermeneutics # Interpretation

### *1 Introduction*

'Artaud, a sickly child twisted further by the shock of World War I, wanted his actors to "assault the senses" of the audience, shocking parts of the psyche that other theatrical methods had failed to reach. Well, IS has read the book. It's been obvious since September 11 that we're living in an age of vicious political theatre. That's what 'terrorism' is: the manipulation of large populations by shock and awe and 'liberating unconscious emotions'" (to quote Artaud).'**[ii]**

'If the attacks on the Twin Towers used the iconography of the Hollywood action blockbuster, the beheadings in the desert evoke drama far more ancient - Old Testament strife, Hellenic legend. [...]It may sound unlikely, but ISIS is carrying out *in extremis* the program of the 'Theatre of cruelty' of the influential French dramaturgedemiurge Antonin Artaud.'**[iii]**

In the summer of 2014, the geopolitical stage was shaken by the Islamic State videos. Starting off a series of terrifying communiqués with a video of the beheading of journalist James Foley in *A message to America*, Islamic State quickly set a new standard for extremists' use of media as a propaganda tool. Now that the extreme display of violence has become the hallmark of Islamic State terror, certain journalists have suggested a link between these brutal videos and dramatist Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) and his 'Theatre of Cruelty'. We were intrigued by the idea that the correspondence between Islamic State's media outlets and Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty might actually go beyond the shared predominance of cruelty and have taken the suggestion made by Sakurai as a cue to research whether Islamic State's use of media does indeed compare to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty on a more fundamental level. And consequently ask ourselves how, if so, we should interpret and give meaning to the eventual connection between two subjects that seem so far apart, and yet so close to each other: the Theatre of Cruelty and the gruesome religiously inspired videos of Islamic State.

The research done is comparative in nature. By comparing and contrasting the principal underlying ideas, the audience/performance relation, and the performance itself of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Islamic State's video productions, we hope to arrive at a detailed and nuanced understanding if and if yes, how Islamic State and Artaudian theatre relate to each other. The possible connection between both being eventually confirmed, we will consequently dwell on the meaning of such connection.

The article is accordingly structured: Section one details our hypothesis and

research method. Section two discusses Islamic State media. Section three discusses Artaudian thought. In section four, we analyze IS media through Artaudian thought. Section five recapitulates our findings, which lead to a conclusion and discussion.

### *Hypothesis and methodology*

'The full body of Islamic State propaganda is vast', writes Winter[iv], and we might add to that that it is diverse. It is a misunderstanding that all of the IS media products are characterized by violence and cruelty; there are also 'peaceful' ones presenting the paradise that the Caliphate would be. Still, inspired by the quotes mentioned above we focus on the cruel ones and their relationship with Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Our hypothesis in researching this is the following:

*Islamic State's media productions implement the characteristics underlying Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.*

To test this hypothesis, we concentrate on three elementary domains of the theatre as distinguished in literature on the subject[v][vi]: (1) the central ideas behind the performance, (2) the audience/performance relationship, and (3) the performance itself. They result in the following research questions:

RQ1: *Do the ideas behind Islamic State media productions compare to Artaud's ideas on the theatre?*

RQ2: *Does the audience/performance relation in Islamic State media productions compare to Artaud's?*

RQ3: *Does the performance of Islamic State media productions compare to the Artaudian performance?*

We will answer our hypothesis and research questions by operationalizing a case study. By comparing and contrasting crucial elements typical of each in the domains in question, a decision is made based on whether the similarities outweigh the differences, or vice versa. The validity of the hypothesis will subsequently be judged on the basis of the cumulative presence or absence of substantiating elements in the outcomes of the three research questions investigated.

### *Islamic State Media*

In this section, we first explain the vision of IS on media. Subsequently, we discuss the IS media/audience relation. Finally, we discuss the video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, the present case study.

### 2.1 A vision on media

In Islamic State's goals to establish a caliphate, one work in particular has become influential in its strategy: *The Management of Savagery*, by alleged al-Qaeda strategist Abu Bakr Naji[vii]. *The Management of Savagery* attempts to improve on Jihadi operations by pointing out the mismanagement of resources, recruits and violence in previous Jihadi movements.

Naji[viii] emphasizes that an effective use of media in the Jihadi movement's strategy is imperative for achieving success in Jihadi operations. The objective is to create a media strategy functioning on two levels, civil and military, in order to create an appeal to the masses to join the jihad, to create a negative attitude toward those who do not join the ranks, and to convince enemy troops to abandon service or join the ranks through a monetary incentive or physical threat. This media strategy should especially, but not exclusively, target at recruiting the youth, 'after news of our transparency and truthfulness', seeking 'rational and sharia justification' to add power to the message and expose the enemies' lies[ix].

There is a clear dichotomy in Naji's vision on media. On the one hand, he criticizes the abusive reports in the media issued by the superpowers, stating they are deceptive and obfuscate the masses. On the other hand, he admits the necessity of pursuing a media strategy in creating the Umma, the ideal of an all-encompassing Islamic world, using 'rational and sharia justification'[x] to win over the hearts and minds of the masses:

*'Therefore, this important point should not be ignored, especially since we want to communicate our sharia, military, and political positions to the people clearly and justify them rationally and through the sharia and (show that) they are in the (best) interest of the Umma'. [xi]*

Looking at Islamic State's media strategy, the similarities between Naji's vision on media and IS's implementation of propaganda become strikingly clear. Broadly speaking, IS propaganda is meant to serve two different purposes: the first is recruitment, focusing on the utopian appeal of the Caliphate; the second is to intimidate, scare and threaten opponents[xii].



In *The Management of Savagery*, Naji emphasizes the power of the masses, and the need to harness this power in order to enhance the Umma[xiii]. Islamic State endorses this idea by planning its propaganda strategies in such a way that the message will reach as large a (Western) audience as possible. To reach their audience, IS focuses heavily on social media as means of communication. Naji's strategy involves targeting the youth in particular, who, are strongly represented on the Internet. On its ideas regarding the use of media to demoralize the enemy[xiv], Islamic State finds a like-minded counterpart in the Western media. Propaganda aimed at menacing and intimidating governments and populations is equally abundant in the various Western media outlets. Winter attributes this to the nature of commercialized news institutes: 'After all, fear sells'[xv]. Although the use of social media is not new for jihadist groups, IS is noted as setting 'the gold standard for propaganda in terms of its quality and quantity'[xvi].

## 2.2 *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*

Out of the vast number of videos IS has produced so far, we opted in our present study for the video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, which was published on the 13th of November of 2014. As can be deduced from the quotes of Jones and Sakurai above, -cruel- IS video productions would allegedly have been created in the vein of the Theatre of Cruelty. As an analysis of all IS video productions is virtually impossible, and considering the fact that the message of cruelty is central to many of their videos, considering moreover that *Although the Disbelievers Dislike* appears to be targeted particularly at a Western audience - after all, are not most Westerners disbelievers ('infidels')?- and last but not least since it prominently features Western believer 'Jihadi John', we opted for this video for making our case. Furthermore, it is important to mention that the video has been the object of earlier analysis by Winter[xvii].

In this section, we present a summary of a detailed analysis of the video. The title of the video is an excerpt from the Quran, chapter 9, verse 32[xviii]:

*'They want to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah refuses except to perfect His light, although the disbelievers dislike it.'*

The video, with a runtime of 15m53, consists of five different segments[xix]: The first shows a map moving in time, displaying claimed territory and regions with official IS affiliates, followed by countries that IS is aiming to expand into. The second segment presents a documentary-style narrative, summarizing the rise of IS. The third segment shows IS fighters, parading twenty-two 'Nusayri' prisoners

(term used to refer to the Alawite or Shiite regime of Syrian President Assad and its supporters) through an olive grove past a box of knives, concluding with their simultaneous execution. The fourth segment returns to the map, highlighting countries in which jihadist groups pledge allegiance to the caliph of Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The fifth and final segment shows a clip of the allegedly British 'Jihadi John' with the severed head of American aid worker Peter Kassig, followed by a short speech by 'Jihadi John', addressing president Obama.

In discussing the video, Winter observes that 'In [...] *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, IS attempts to provide a graphic cinema-quality experience to its viewers, something which, at first sight, it succeeds in achieving.'**[xx]** This experience is achieved through the use of several dramatic elements. These elements are animation, dramatic sound effects, the use of non-instrumental religious songs - 'Anasheed' in Arabic-, the use of a documentary-style**[xxi]** narrative accompanied by graphic - 'Hollywood- Style' - war imagery, symbolism of the flag, slow-motion effects, dramatic facial shots, orchestrated 'acting', immersion of the audience through multiple camera angles**[xxii]** and the display of violence.

In the video, symbolic imagery is used resembling Western iconography and popular culture. The 'son of Islam'**[xxiii]**, who is striding forth, carrying the Islamic State flag, is an image strikingly similar to the iconic photograph of American soldiers raising the flag over Iwo Jima during World War II. The footage of warfare and the use of the first-person perspective**[xxiv]** are reminiscent of video games like *Call of Duty*. It presents the IS narrative in a local context, but is highly recognizable for foreign audiences. Furthermore, the video includes numerous displays of symbolism referring to Islamic scripture. For example: After the mass execution of the twenty-two 'Nusayri' soldiers, their heads are displayed on top of their bodies lying on the ground**[xxv]**. Watching the video, one cannot help but conclude one is witnessing a carefully staged event of cruelty intended to scare and horrify, fully thought through in content and structure for maximum effect.

### *The Theatre of Cruelty*

In this section, we discuss Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.

#### *3.1 Artaud and His Doubles*

The life and (theatrical) writings of French avant-gardist, dramatist, and theorist

Antonin Artaud have sparked the imagination of many artists and critics. His ideas were theorized by thinkers like Susan Sontag (1973) and Jacques Derrida (2002), who made a dominant mark on understanding Artaud, by interpreting his work against the backdrop of a 1960s leftist and experimental period of the Theatre. However, as Jannarone rightfully argues in her publication *Artaud and his Doubles* (2012), the sentiment of the masses and the political settings of this post-World War II era were different from the period in which Artaud wrote down his ideas, making their and others' interpretation of his work 'inadequate, if not inappropriate' [xxvi]. This prompted Jannarone to re-examine the writings and ideas of Artaud, situating and interpreting them in a historically appropriate context. Rather than including the character and rather manic personal life of Artaud in evaluating his work, as many had done before her, Jannarone restricted herself to examining his plays and writings, which resulted in a take on his work radically different from previous interpretations.

### 3.2 Central ideas of the Artaudian Theatre

Antonin Artaud articulated his central ideas on the Theatre in his work *Le Théâtre et son double* (1938 [xxvii]), a collection of essays written between 1931 and 1935, resulting in his famous conceptual 'Theatre of Cruelty'. The delusion caused by World War I constituted a fierce and 'climactic articulation', of irrationalist and vitalist thought originating at the turn of the twentieth century, which now backfired on itself as its optimistic and progressive liberal views on human nature were discredited in this outburst of violence. Although the avant-garde movement sought to bring about the destruction of existing systems, their intentions were predominantly utopian. Artaud, however, rejects the idea of utopia, and instead longs for an ideal of 'true culture', as he believed that traditions, art, and received ideas only represent the stagnation of 'true culture'. In a sense, he longs for a primordial form of culture, an encounter with forces akin to those featuring in the life and character of the brutal Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Characteristic of Artaudian thought is the inversion of the aspirations of Western civilization, and the eulogization of their negations.

Artaud uses the plague in the first essay, *The Theatre and the Plague*, in his *The Theatre and its Double* as a central metaphor in his ideal theatre, implying that the theatrical event should have a force equal to that of a plague terrifying the city, a physical, cruel cataclysmic event with the power to overthrow man-made systems and return him to a state of nature and mysticism. The metaphor of the

plague essentially serves as an instrument for the destruction of corruption. However, 'the plague used as a model for theatre, does not cure in any recognizable sense: it only unleashes' [xxviii]. The theatre envisioned by Artaud, as Jannarone suggests, is an unacknowledged repetition of the horrors of World War I, not climaxing into a victory, but rather into a perversion of victory. In Artaud's theatre, there is truly no such place as a man-made utopia [xxix]. Traumatized by the disenchanting outcome of World War I, Artaud proposed a theatre aimed at destroying man-made systems in search of a 'true culture', void of corruptions. He calls for a physical, cruel action to happen to force man back to a state of 'savage impulses', 'bestial essences', where he is driven by 'the secret forces of the universe', rather than individual intellect and the pursuit of civilization [xxx].

### *3.3 The Audience in Artaudian theatre*

During the 19th century, the audience's role in the theatre had become that of a domesticated, hidden bystander. In theatrical theory, this phenomenon has become known as the 'crisis of bourgeois theatre'; technological and social developments led to a 'stable hierarchy in the performance, enforced physical behavior and immersion' within the theatre. This resulted in one single rule: 'The audience will behave'. Reactionary, the avant-garde movement adopted ideas that opposed these controlling factors while agitating and activating the audience [xxxi].

Artaud's writings on the subject of the audience incorporate ideas from pre-war 20th century as well as avant-garde movements: while ushering in a rhetoric of revolt and agitation found in the avant-garde movement, and dismissing the strict rules of separation between the audience and the performance as perverse. He also incorporated several innovations from the bourgeois theatre: He used technological innovations to bring about a stronger immersive experience, while sticking to the tradition of hierarchy in relation to the performance. His manifestos advocate 'organized anarchy', which, as Jannarone [xxxii] observes, 'points to the unique dynamic at the heart of the Theatre of Cruelty's ideal audience/performer relationship.' Pure anarchy is considered decadent, operating 'outside and irrespective of higher laws' [xxxiii]. With respect to the controlling forces of nature, Artaud in his Theatre of Cruelty aims both at agitation and control: an orchestrated breakdown of feelings and boundaries within a 'predetermined structure' [xxxiv].

In conclusion, the audience in the Theatre of Cruelty holds a unique position in between major theatrical movements, containing elements from the bourgeois theatre's innovations as well as elements from the avant-garde movement. These elements converge into an audience/performance relation called 'organized anarchy', through which the audience is thrown into savagery by means of an orchestrated structure.

### *3.4 The Theatre of Cruelty*

The practical performance Artaud had in mind combined his ideas on society with those he held on the psychology of the individual, and was aimed at dislodging his audience, freeing them from society's chains and directing them toward a natural state of being through a cruel liberator. He first put his radical theatrical theories into practice during the period in which he ran the Jarry Theatre (1926-1928), and finally in his last theatrical work, the adaptation of *The Cenci* (1935), which turned out to be a fiasco due to financial mismanagement and aesthetic failure. As a result of his troubled realization of the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud retreated into the solitude of theoretical writing.

Examining Artaud's period as a stage director gives insight into the practical performance derived from his ideas. The performance of the Theatre of Cruelty is a 'one directional event, a system of control and coercion' [xxxv], an instrument that imposes the creator's worldview on his audience as an experience. The director, as the artistic authority, has absolute control over the performance, abandoning other sources of authority such as the playwright. His inspiration works 'outside of existing laws and is uniquely capable of negotiating between the material world and the invisible one.' [xxxvi] This resulted in a shift from the use of playwrights and their scripts toward production plans, thus severely reducing the influence of given texts. The production plan would function as a basis for performance, replacing fully written-out scripts. The artist's objective is to represent the 'spirit' of a text, rather than render a literal representation of it.

Practical elements in the *mise-en-scène* of the Theatre of Cruelty, should consist of 'abrupt changes of tone and rhythms; mysterious doubles of characters; echoes and amplifications of sound; slow-motion; alternately blinding, mysterious, and shadowy lightning effects; and skewed set pieces' [xxxvii]. The stage in the Jarry Theatre was decorated with fear-invoking props.

*The Artaudian theatre and Islamic State media compared*

In this section, we present a detailed comparison of Islamic State media, in particular the video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, and the ideas of Antonin Artaud.

#### 4.1 Central ideas

One of the main objectives in Islamic State propaganda, is achieving a state of savagery in (un)friendly territory[xxxviii]. In unbalancing the existing powers lies the opportunity of incorporating such territories in the Umma. Instrumental in this plan, is the use of media to expose the enemies' 'deceptive media halo', through 'rational thought and sharia law'. Naji[xxxix] (2006) proposes a counter-mechanism acting against established beliefs. There are three aspects to be considered in his proposed use of media: the use of 'rational arguments and sharia law' as justification for Jihadi operations; a liberating action against opposing forces who abide by other ideals, and the utopian goal of founding the Umma. In comparing and contrasting these with Artaudian ideas, we find they have elements in common with each other. The ideas of Artaud being traumatized by World War I, were strictly anti-establishment. He describes his concerns on civilization in *Le Théâtre et son double* (1938) as follows:

*'Never before, when it is life itself that is in question, has there been so much talk of civilization and culture. And there is a curious parallel between this generalized collapse of life at the root of our present demoralization and our concern for a culture which has never been coincident with life, which in fact has been devised to tyrannize over life'* [xl].

Artaud denounces civilization and culture as a tyrannizing force acting upon the nature of life. Instead he opts for a primordial ideal where man is in alignment with his true nature and in contact with the mysterious forces surrounding him. Artaud thus subscribes to universal principles of life, opposed by man's attempts to reach a civilized world. In a similar fashion, Naji rejects the existing powers, and points towards a 'universal law, which is also sharia law' [xli]. There is a striking similarity between Islamic State ideology and Artaudian thought. They both refer to a system of universal laws that both believe to be of divine origin. Or, in the words of Artaud:

*'If our life lacks brimstone, i.e., a constant magic, it is because we choose to observe our acts and lose ourselves in considerations of their imagined form instead of being impelled by their force. ... And this faculty is an exclusively human one. I would even say that it is this infection of the human which*

*contaminates ideas that should have remained divine; for far from believing that man invented the supernatural and the divine, I think it is man's age-old intervention which has ultimately corrupted the divine within him.'* **[xlii]**

In his interpretation of what it is that constitutes the divine, Artaud makes a strong distinction between 'modern' monotheism and ancient naturalistic religions:

*'The Conquest of Mexico poses the question of colonization. It revives in a brutal and implacable way the ever-active fatuousness of Europe. It permits her idea of her own superiority to be deflated. It contrasts Christianity with much older religions. It corrects the false conceptions the Occident has somehow formed concerning paganism and certain natural religions, and it underlines with burning emotion the splendor and forever immediate poetry of the old metaphysical sources on which these religions are built.'* **[xliii]**

Artaud refers to paganism: old metaphysical sources rejected by Christianity. Paganism in Islamic State ideology is considered sinful. A clear example of this can be found in the denunciation of what is happening 'these days in the city of Baghdad', which IS caliph al-Baghdadi comments on **[xliv]**. He accuses the (Shiite; considered the worst of enemies of IS) Baghdad government in charge at the time of this statement of being guilty of apostasy. While Artaud underlines elements of 'immediate poetry' through 'metaphysical sources', such liberties of religious interpretation are limited in Islamic State ideology. However, what Artaud and IS are both trying to accomplish, is to bring about a state of purity of man, going back either to metaphysical sources, in the case of Artaud, or to holy scriptures, in the case of Islamic State.

Artaud's invocation of the plague **[xlv]** serves as a metaphor for a necessary destructive force, which should ring and rage through the theatre to liberate its audiences from the clutches of society. A similar approach can be found in Naji's proposed media strategies **[xlvi]**, where he suggests fear **[xlvii]** as an instrument to destabilize regions into a state of savagery. The ultimate goal of such tactics in Naji's work is to incorporate these regions into the Umma. The important element both ideas have in common is the incorporation of (the fear of) destruction as a liberating force in the existing societal structure.

The ideas of Antonin Artaud, in their original conception, were nihilistic. Jannarone describes the ferociousness of Artaud's writings as a 'fight for

impossible absolutes' **[xlvi]**. The ideal of a life where all hypocrisy that flows forth from the act of civilization is brutally discarded in favor of a deeper, divine nature. In a very similar way, Islamic State adheres to the creation of a world-encompassing Islamic State that rejects any form of civilization other than the historical version of the Caliphate, a jihadist state that is governed by the purest form of Islam **[xli]**.

In conclusion we can say that Naji proposes three objectives for a media apparatus. Although the first goal - imposing the idealism of the rational and sharia law - closely resembles an Artaudian ideal, it should be stressed that Artaud envisions this source as far more naturalistic and chaotic. The second objective shows striking similarities with Artaudian ideas: the act of liberation through cruelty; a necessity in the deconstruction of a faulty or hostile order. The third objective, the foundation of the Umma shows paradoxical similarities with Artaud's 'true culture'. While Artaud deems the realization of such a 'true culture' an 'impossible absolute', the supporters of Islamic State wholeheartedly believe in it, and therefore fight for its realization. Now these two visions seem to contradict each other. But IS's firm belief in realizing the dreamed Umma can be drawn into question, as more than once the ideologists of Islamic State have expressed their weakness in the eyes of God and stressed the fact that after all they are only human, and necessarily flawed as a result. We find this asserted more than once in the different volumes of the IS glossy *Dabiq*. An article in *Dabiq* 3, entitled *Advice for those embarking upon Hijrah* warns those intending to travel to the Caliphate to be realistic in their expectations:

*'Keep in mind that the Khilāfah is a state whose inhabitants and soldiers are human beings. They are not infallible angels'. 'You may find some of your brothers with traits that need mending. But remember that the Khilāfah is at war with numerous kāfir states and their allies, and this is something that requires the allotment of many resources. So be patient'* **[II]**.

In conclusion it can be postulated that Artaud may have been closer to being conscious of the impossibility of the realization of his 'true culture' than Islamic State adherents are of their dreamed Umma. But the *Dabiq* quotes make it equally clear that the IS fighters are aware of their own weaknesses or should at least be aware of them. What seems quite clear in all cases is that both need the hand of the divine to realize their utopian goals and as such they show a striking similarity.



#### *4.2 Performance - Audience relationship*

The audience in Artaudian theatre holds a unique position in Theatre history. Plying the traditions of the avant-garde and bourgeois movements, Artaud set out to project an awakening experience onto his audiences. The two main characteristics of the relation between public and performance in his work are, firstly, the hierarchical structure of the play - the use of a 'domesticated' audience **[li]**. Secondly, Artaudian theatre wields an agitating rhetoric meant to break the barriers between an audience passively watching and the play at hand. The rhetorical action often worked against the integrity of Artaud's performance. He thus chose to use the oxymoronic concept of 'organized anarchy' **[lii]** to achieve the ideal relationship he envisioned with his audience.

When considering the audience to performance relationship in Islamic State's media outlets, a few elements can be picked out that deserve analysis against the background of Artaudian and avant-garde theatre. Firstly, there is the specific imaginary relying, heavily on the war-narrative, depicting combat, brutality and victories achieved by Islamic State. It is reminiscent of the rhetoric used in Artaudian fashion - the performance either being a threat to and provocation of a supposedly hostile audience, or acting as a liberator for those who are oppressed by societal structures, motivating the audience to sympathize with Islamic State and thereby also serving as a recruitment tool. As Jannarone observes, Artaud (in his rhetoric) uses the trope of shock as an instrument of punishment rather than provocation **[liii]**. In contrast to avant-garde dramatists, and Brechtian theatre for example, the aim is not to challenge the audience into political and intellectual engagement. The aim in the Theatre of Cruelty is 'the exploration of our nervous sensibility'. **[liv]** Here we are confronted with what appears to be a clear difference between Artaudian theatre and Islamic State's media productions. Although a very similar rhetoric and shock effect is apparent in IS's cruel videos, they also contain elements that propagate activist engagement from a jihadist perspective.

On the relative distance of the audience in relation to the performance, a similarity can be observed between the behavior of modern audiences and the avant-garde audience. As the permanent establishment of the bourgeois social class took place, the theatre transmuted from a common people's institute to a commodity of refinement **[lv]**, turning the audience into 'domesticated' observants rather than a crowd involved in the performance. The avant-garde movement

reacted to this phenomenon and fought audience conventions by either shock or reason[**lvi**]. They chose to ‘engage’ their audience (as in Brechtian political theatre, for instance). A strong similarity can be observed when we compare this to contemporary 21<sup>st</sup>-century pre- and post-social media audiences and their ability to interact with a performance. As Winter observes[**lvii**], ‘the Internet is the modern Jihad’s radical mosque’, and it is now possible for audiences anywhere to interact with members and proponents of Islamic State. The Artaudian approach embellishes ideas of bourgeois theatre in that it propagates hierarchy within the audience-performance relation in order to ‘assert the performance’s authority over the spectators’[**lviii**]. It is here that the subtle difference lies between Artaud and other avant-garde dramatists, as Artaud does not specifically ask his audience to engage, he rather seeks to achieve ‘an orchestration of the feeling of breaking boundaries within a predetermined structure’[**lix**]. It becomes apparent that, although Artaud also seeks to break down the barrier between a bourgeois audience and the play, he utilizes the audience to performance relationship in a one directional, non-dialogical way. Even though Islamic State media are intended to actively stimulate engagement and deliberation, the rhetoric of Islamic State itself can be considered to be non-dialogic as well, using as it does Islamic scripture as a foundation for IS actions. Thus, for example, in *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, caliph Al-Baghdadi cites Imam Malik, founder of the Sunni school of the Malikites, on the rise of the ‘Rafida’ (‘rejecters’; IS terminology to refer to the Shiites) in the city of Baghdad: ‘One must not remain in a land in which Abu Bakr and Omar are insulted[**lx**]’. (05:08) Using this citation, he urges the devout to relocate to lands where Abu Bakr and Omar are not insulted with the ‘would-be’ mandate of religious authority.

In conclusion we can say that the audience to performance relation in Artaudian theatre and IS media shows parallels on the subject of rhetoric. Although Islamic State media, unlike Artaud, are actively seeking their audience’s engagement, the trope of shock they employ is similar to Artaud’s. Furthermore, the hierarchical structure used in Artaudian theatre to assure dominance over the audience finds a parallel through the use of non-dialogical rhetoric in IS media. This becomes most evident in the citations of Islamic scripture used in their media outlets. Finally, a parallel can also be observed with regard to the anticipation of crowd behavior. While Artaud sought to ‘immobilize’ the individual intellect, Islamic State through its shocking messages, spreading like wildfire through social

media, likewise triggers gut reactions that bypass the individual intellect.

#### 4.3 *The practical performance*

In this section, we present an analysis of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike it*, and discuss whether the various elements can be said to correspond or not to those in the Artaudian theatre. The opening sequence of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It* [lxi], shows a blue world map centering on Iraq and Syria. A bright light can be seen spreading across the globe: a metaphor for the political influence of Islamic State. It can be argued that the color of the world map - blue - is a metaphor for the divine, symbolizing the power of the idea of a world created by a deity with the intention for it to be an earthly paradise for its followers. The camera subsequently moves over Rome, China and the United States. Although the implication of this scene is twofold - a display of ambition and a call for action - the suggestion is that Islamic State will eventually spread across the entire planet. Next, the message of this animation is expressed in quoting the prophet Mohammed (*Sahih* of Muslim [lxii]): 'Indeed, Allah Gathered the Earth for me, and thus I saw its eastern and western extents, and indeed the reign of my Umma will reach what was gathered for me from the Earth'. The male voice in the background of the clip sings a religious chant.

This segment with the narrative of the spreading of the Umma can be interpreted in terms of Artaudian theatre. Artaud, performing in the Jarry Theatre, created an atmosphere of 'eeriness', of mystery and the *irréel*, in order to have his audience experience a gap between the material world and a 'frightening invisible one'. His décor consisted of objects 'violently real', signifying an immaterial world at work. [lxiii] In the video, the décor of a world map, conquered by a prophetic force, accompanied by Arabic chanting and religious text, is both fearful and reminiscent of higher forces at work, whilst still functioning as a depiction of the material world. The first segment thus acts as a mediating object - a piece of scenery - in between a material and an invisible world.

The second scene of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It* [lxiv] starts with Islamic State's most iconic piece of music containing the famous line *Dawlat al-Islam Qaamat* ('The Islamic State has risen'). Winter [lxv] describes this scene as a 'pseudo-documentary' which (re)tells the historical frame within which Islamic State was founded. The scene is shown in a blue picture frame, reminiscent of Western news reports, suggesting both divinity and objective value. The blue frame in theatrical tradition is called the proscenium [lxvi], a tool for directing the

audience's attention towards an immersive experience. During this segment, the narrator gives a historical overview of the emergence of Islamic State in the past decade, -with arguably subjective elements added. Rhetorical elements can be discerned, such as the use (and repetition) of the term 'crusaders' **[lxvii]**, creating a religious context for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the term 'sons of Islam', and a reference to *Dabiq* (see note 4), where they will eventually 'strike the armies of the cross' **[lxviii]**, suggestive of conviction and cause. This scene offers a sense of historical relevance, victimhood and a legitimization of the IS cause **[lxix]**. It also serves to underline the legitimacy of the leader of Islamic State, caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. At 04:06, an iconic image is used of an armed militant carrying the banner of IS, walking along local scenery somewhere in the Caliphate. The image, showing the militant in profile, bearded and dressed in black attire, portrays an idyllic version of the caliphate warrior. The scene, as was already observed above, is visually reminiscent of the famous picture of American soldiers raising the flag on the island of Iwo Jima during the Second World War. It should be noted that during this interlude the proscenium used in the first half of the scene has disappeared, as if to suggest a strong distinction between the past and the present, underlining the factuality of that which has passed, and emphasizing the reality of Islamic State having settled itself upon the world stage.

The scene continues with a speech by caliph al-Baghdadi **[lxx]**. He explains why one should not stay in a land where 'Abu Bakr and Omar are insulted,' (i.e. the lands where Shiites reign, see earlier above). This is either meant to refer to the start of the Caliphate in Syria, or as a justification for engaging in armed conflict, even against other 'Muslims'. There is strong evidence to suggest that the latter is the case, as the scene following al-Baghdadi's speech is one of heavy combat. The narrator continues to comment on the images, now shown **[lxxi]** without the use of a proscenium. Rather than being an attempt at describing history, the comment serves as an ominous threat: 'It was not befitting for the grandsons of Abu Bakr and Omar [...] to take the stance of a subservient and humiliated person. So they sharpened every blade, to make the rafidah ('the rejecters' (of true Islam) as IS calls the Shiites) taste all sorts of killing and torment.' Up until 07:34, the video shows battle scenes, more specifically victories won by Islamic State. This segment ends with the narrator forecasting war 'until Allah is worshipped alone.'

The second scene has certain elements that fit the Artaudian tradition, along with some that contradict his ideas: The use of IS's rhythmic, iconic hymn *Dawlat al-*

*Islam Qaamat* produces an unsettling effect in an unfamiliar audience. The narrator then, in his depiction of Islamic State's history, takes his audience along into an alternate reality. It can be argued that the use of a fixed text, a script written by an author, is not within the strict concept of the Artaudian director's role. This element can therefore be said to be Artaudian in goal, but not Artaudian as an instrument in the play. The use of a proscenium in conjunction with a 'frameless' total experience in the latter half of the scene parallels Artaud's use of both bourgeois theatre techniques for immersion and avant-gardist views [lxxii]. The introduction of caliph al-Baghdadi, particularly in view of his position as leader of Islamic State, constitutes a strongly religious directive force, akin to the Artaudian structure of hierarchy: 'His director emerges as a ruthless holy man who commands the audience in the name of a "secret" goal, using the theatre as a means to a revelation that operates beyond the bounds of the theatre' [lxxiii]. Finally, in the theme of invasion, mentioned both in the reference to the war in Iraq and subsequently in the rise of Islamic State, there is an immediate parallel with the works of the Jarry Theatre, where Artaud would practice his early conceptions of theatrical revelation, a state of total understanding through the vision of 'dark forces, invasion, and catastrophe' [lxxiv].

The third segment shows the execution of twenty-two Syrian army captives. This scene is arguably the most theatrical element of the entire video *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*. Starting at 07.39, it shows the captives escorted by IS fighters against the backdrop of an olive grove. They are walking in double file, one soldier escorting one prisoner, the latter with their heads bowed down, as in submission to the sons of Islam. At 07:47, the camera angle changes, now showing the barefoot prisoners walking beside the soldiers. This shot emphasizes the relation of power between the prisoner and his escort, soon to be executioner. In front of the line, the infamous 'Jihadi John' walks in full black attire. He is dressed in the stereotypical outfit of militant Islamists [lxxv], whilst his fellow soldiers are wearing conventional military outfits. During frames 07:50-08:00, several different camera angles are used, either focusing on the surroundings of the olive grove, or on the faces of the young IS fighters. It should be noted that up until this point Jihadi John's is the only face that is covered. At 08:02, the line of IS fighters walk past a crate filled with army-style combat knives. The action slows down dramatically while the executioners pick up their weapons; the inserted sound of sharpening knives adds intensity to the scene. The faces of the IS fighters, apart from 'Jihadi John's', are fully visible. There is no sense of

anonymity, nor does the gaze of the camera seem to be intruding on the soldiers' privacy. They are fully aware of their role as actors and act accordingly. At 08.28, the group lines up at an open spot where the execution will commence. At 08.34, 'Jihadi John' begins to address president Obama, just as he did during his earlier appearance in the video [A Message to America](#). This scene is carefully orchestrated, as we see a close-up of the line of prisoners and executioners, with 'Jihadi John' at the center flanked by two soldiers. At their feet, there are three prisoners, kneeled down obediently. 'Jihadi John' now utters religious-war rhetoric: 'By Allah's permission, we will break this final crusade.' [lxxvi] The scene with the three kneeled prisoners at the feet of their executioners reminds us of the holy trinity, underscoring through symbolism the narrative of an interreligious war. If you listen closely during this segment you notice that the original sound must have been dubbed over and the new recording inserted later in the audio track. If anything, this means that the message spoken by 'Jihadi John' was scripted in advance. At the 09:00 minute mark, there is a dramatic focus on the Nusayri prisoner at the feet of Jihadi John, followed by a close-up of an executioner warming up his hands and knife. For 45 seconds, there is a buildup of dramatic tension, with shots alternating between Nusayri soldiers, IS fighters, and knife play. There is little audible sound, while the tension builds, and extra attention is drawn to the images shown.

At 09:45, 'Jihadi John' gives his group the command to execute the prisoners. For ten seconds, we hear the sound of a heartbeat, heavy breathing, and camera shots alternating with a black screen. These are effective techniques to build up dramatic tension, culminating in the horrible act about to take place. From 09:55 to 10:24, the gruesome execution of the twenty-two captives is displayed. There are different camera shots, showing the desperation and the pain on the prisoners' faces during the cutting of the throats and the subsequent decapitation, and a stream of blood, flowing on the ground.

After the execution has taken place, the atmosphere of the scene changes dramatically. It shows the calm hands of the executioners and their bloodstained knives at 10:27, with only the sound of gushing winds in the background. The camera pans to the corpses of the Syrian men, decapitated, with their heads on their chest facing the camera. At 10.38, the camera pans again, now focusing on the grim faces of the Islamic State soldiers, showing neither joy, nor resentment, only firm determination. The IS fighters appear to be men of different

nationalities, which as Winter[**lxxvii**] remarks, is not a coincidence: ‘the novice executioners are deliberately given a central role, almost as if this footage featured a jihadist “homecoming”, made primarily to focus on IS’ most favored foreign fighters’ . This segment of the video is concluded with these final words: ‘Know that we have armies in Iraq and an army in Sham (= Syria) of hungry lions, whose drink is blood and play is carnage’.

This segment is considerably Artaudian, as it is not merely theatrical, but also staged as an event led by an authoritative figure, using a rhetoric akin to that of the words that rang through the Jarry Theatre. Looking more closely at the scene, starting at 07:39, we see the twenty-two prisoners walking in an orchard, heads bowed down next to their executioners. With the camera focusing on the Islamic State soldiers, we witness a duality of those who are about to die, and those who will go on living - the conquered and the conquerors. It is reminiscent of the Artaudian disposition of the actor and the inanimate representation of the figure often found in his theatre, signifying the mediating force between the visible world and the invisible world that Artaud sought to uncover. In the Artaudian theatre, there is a concentration of power centering on the director of the stage, which is remarkably similar to the position of ‘Jihadi John’ both during the progression through the orchard and during the execution itself. Upon passing the block of knives, time is alternately compressed and drawn out, the action slowing down and speeding up, thus capturing the audience’s attention in similar fashion as Artaud would do to immerse his audience in the play[**lxxviii**]. The execution itself, starting at 09:45, is obviously of vital importance in a comparison with the theatre of Cruelty. As critically as Artaud perceived cruelty as an instrument of the ‘dissolution’ of hierarchy[**lxxix**], so the use of cruelty itself became the hallmark of the Artaudian theatre. During the execution, the audience is no longer being addressed; there is no longer a call for action or engagement. The execution serves as a punishment[**lxxx**] rather than a provocation; the audience, whether enemy or potential ally, is in shock, and profoundly affected by what it has witnessed. It is a shock felt throughout the entire body, right down to the organs. The heads of the executed prisoners are placed on top of their mutilated bodies. A small stream of blood is visible at 11:18, accentuating the visceral currency in which Artaud would offer his revelation. The beginning of the fourth segment of the video[**lxxxi**] is much like the opening sequence of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, but rather than presenting an articulated message, it consists primarily of the vocal pledges of jihadist groups swearing allegiance to

Islamic State: ‘To the Khalifah Ibrahim Ibn ‘Awwad Ibn Ibrahim al-Qurashi al Husayni, pledging to selflessly hear and obey, in times of hardship and ease, and in times of delight and dislike. We pledge not to dispute the matter of those in authority’. We see the Islamic State flag flying over regions whose jihadist groups swear their allegiance to IS, local militants active in Yemen, Libya and Algeria[**lxxxii**]. The pledge of allegiance (bay’ah) is subsequently accepted in a second voice recording of al-Baghdadi, in which he announces the expansion of the Caliphate into these regions[**lxxxiii**].

It should be noted that the words used by the different jihadist groups mix and link up seamlessly, which shows that the ‘bay’ah’ comes in the form of a standard formula that has to be memorized. This obviously goes against the ideas of Artaud, as he abandoned the use of scripts in favor of production plans, thereby giving the actor the artistic freedom to represent the spirit of the text, rather than give a literal rendition of it. Although the appearance (in sound) of al-Baghdadi again underlines the ominous presence of a strong religious figure in the play, the content of this segment is rather practical in nature and does not show significant parallels worth mentioning.

The fifth and final segment[**lxxxiv**] shows ‘Jihadi John’ with the severed head of Peter Kassig, addressing President Obama and challenging him on his geopolitical policies concerning Iraq. This segment is stylistically very different from the preceding segments of the video and earlier videos featuring the executioner. As Winter remarks: ‘The fifth and final section [...] is remarkably inconsistent with the rest of the video and, indeed, all previous IS executions of Western hostages.’ He points out a qualitative difference in production, making the segment seem ‘disjointed’ and ‘tacked on as an afterthought.’[**lxxxv**] According to Winter, the plausibility of the scene is a point of discussion[**lxxxvi**], as the footage appears to have been digitally edited. ‘Dabiq’, which features prominently earlier in the video, and is also mentioned by ‘Jihadi John’, appears in writing in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. This suggests that the scene was shot in Dabiq itself, and that the audience is being shown the landscape in which the prophesized battle at Dabiq will take place. ‘Jihadi John’ concludes his speech: ‘And here we are, burying the first American crusader in Dabiq. Eagerly waiting for the remainder of your armies to arrive.’[**lxxxvii**] The segment is concluded with a final statement by al-Baghdadi in Arabic, whilst the image of the IS soldier, carrying the Islamic State flag is repeated.



Unlike the previous parts of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It* is, the final segment converges widely from the characteristics of Artaudian theatre. In contrast to the hierarchical structure of the previous, carefully orchestrated scenes, this scene is rather like a personal challenge or threat, with a dramatic change of tone in the words uttered by 'Jihadi John.' [lxxxviii] We are past the moment of cruelty, the beheading of Peter Kassig, almost like it never happened. There are no more elements of immersion to be considered, and even 'Jihadi John', who only a moment ago led a progression toward a climax of theatrical tension, has dropped his prowess as an authoritative figure. Although this segment shows little resemblance to Artaudian theatre, it is not entirely surprising that it should have been added in the narrative of this video; it serves like a clergyman's moralizing speech, reiterating the justification of the Jihadi cause after the theatrical climax in segment three.

The question we wanted to answer is whether or not the practical performance of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It* compares to the Artaudian performance. Looking at the different segments, it is clear that the introductory segment does fit the Artaudian tradition. The second segment shows strong resemblances, even though the theme of invasion is itself presented as a revelation by IS, rather than being used as a catalyst for theatrical revelation. It can be argued that this notion is not outside of Artaudian tradition per se, as the actual catalyst for theatrical revelation is presented in segment three, thus also making the theme of invasion a separate constituting element of the Islamic State narrative. The third segment perfectly fits the Artaudian tradition, showing surprising parallels with the actual Theatre of Cruelty: the actors and their doubles, the biblical scenery of the orchard, an authoritative leader, and a cruel beheading scene that acts as a catalyst for theatrical revelation. The fourth segment shows no particular parallels with the Theatre of Cruelty, but it is clear also that it serves little dramatic purpose. It merely affirms the narrative of the expanding Caliphate. The fifth and final segment constitutes a stylistic break with the previous segments and shows little resemblance to the Theatre of Cruelty; it is like an epilog, justifying once again the arguments for the Jihadi cause. Concentrating on the first three segments, we can conclude that there are evident and strong parallels between the IS video and the Artaudian theatre. Although the final two segments are far less comparable to the Theatre of Cruelty, we argue that they serve a different purpose in the overall narrative, but as such do not contradict the argument that there are strong parallels between *Although the Disbelievers*

*Dislike It* and Artaud's visions.

### *Chapter 5. Conclusion*

To formulate a thoroughly substantiated answer to the question if the hypothesis of this study - 'The Islamic State's media productions carry out Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty' - can be corroborated, we have divided the research into three different domains to find matching and conflicting characteristics: the ideas, the audience and the performance in the two 'theatrical' manifestations. As such, we have come to the following conclusions.

Abu Bakr Naji proposes three ideas behind the use of Jihadist media: To lend strength to the justification of Jihadism through rational thought and sharia law, to overcome societal structures through the power of fear and violence, and to incorporate destabilized regions into the Umma. Similarly to Naji, Artaud proposes as main ideas behind the Theatre of Cruelty a search and longing for a divine source of authority, to obliterate the fetters of a 'manmade' culture through the use of shock and violence, and finally, to live in a truly natural state of being. Although the Umma is described as the Jihadist utopia, it is as much as an impossible absolute as Artaud's strict visions for humanity's true ideal life. Therefore we conclude that the ideas behind the Theatre of Cruelty and the Islamic State are indeed comparable.

The audience to performance relationship of Islamic State's media outlets is characterized by a non-dialogical rhetoric, mandated by the use of Islamic scripture, which is full of cruel imagery, to shock and engage the audience. The Theatre of Cruelty devised similar principles of audience to performance relationships in order to bring about a punishing, cruel and liberating experience for its spectators. The perception of the audience as a crowd is a fundamental element of the Theatre of Cruelty, and shows a strong parallel with the Jihadist use of social media, spreading their ideas through an online community as if it were a crowd. It is legitimate to conclude therefore that the audience to performance relation in the Islamic State media and the Theatre of Cruelty is comparable.

The practical performance, as studied through the case of *Although the Disbelievers Dislike It*, shows strong similarities with practical elements in, and the actual performance of the Theatre of Cruelty.

Taking into account the results of each independent research question proposed in this study, observing significant parallels between the Theatre of Cruelty of Antonin Artaud and the cruel videos of Islamic State, and as stated above considering the fact that the message of cruelty is central to many of their videos, we conclude that 'Islamic State's media productions indeed implement the characteristics underlying Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.'

Hugh Prysor-Jones in *Chronicles Magazine* [lxxxix] stated that Islamic State has 'read the book' on Artaud, and describes Islamic State media productions as being inspired by Artaud's 'assault of the senses.' We do not know if IS propagandists are aware of the existence of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty but it is evident that IS is implementing its characteristics. The question that remains to be answered now is: what does this mean? What does the connection between the two tell us? The Theatre of Cruelty presents a fictional happening to reach ultimately an impossible absolute, an eloquently conceived state of the human ideal being. It was never realized, because crossing the barrier of the fictional would imply that real violence and cruelty is necessary to achieve that which is idealized, and would therefore automatically be halted by authorities (one could even argue that such a dramatic revolt in the West could only and solely be executed in a - virtual- art or philosophical sphere). The Islamic State is not constrained by such limitations. A more important consideration is that Artaud never meant to actually use real violence and cruelty to reach his goals. Violence and cruelty were meant to be virtual procedural effects to reach the dreamed ideal. The cruelty used by the Islamic State is part of a 'real time' strategy to create its prophesized Umma. The Islamic State faces no significant internal opposition in the territory it controls, and as such, has the freedom to exercise its 'Management by Cruelty', resulting in, amongst other things, its violent and cruel media productions.

'ISIS is systematically working to use visual standards that will give their videos an underlying professional look to someone whose eye is accustomed to a European or North American industry standard' state Dauber & Robinson [xc]. Working this way Islamic State deliberately confronts the West with scenes of violence that are so similar to Hollywood action movies: fictional scenes of violence that 'we' enjoy for our pleasure, are now manifested into reality. In that sense, Islamic State is holding up a mirror for the West, as if saying: 'This is your perverse image of heroism and sensational courage; and we are merely living

your fantasy. See what hypocrites you are, condemning our cruelty, while enjoying your own fictional cruelty.' We believe that it would be unwise not to take this message from Islamic State seriously. The mirror Islamic State is holding up to us does make us aware that we are indeed enjoying violence as a fiction - as a fantasy. It is part of our culture and it would make us indeed hypocrites if we condemn the Islamic State for only realizing what we already advocate and enjoy in our own works of fiction. It places us back on our feet, and we might ask ourselves if we should not reconsider the role of violence and cruelty in our Western body of fiction.

However, there is another essential point: Violence and cruelty in Western media are fictional, but have long been subject of discussion. Is violent imagery not detrimental to children? Can people be incited to crime after seeing cruel and violent films and playing similar games? These are legitimate questions indeed. But do we need Islamic State to confront ourselves with these questions? And what is the moral right of Islamic State to teach us this lesson? Should we listen to people who make a double caricature of our culture by turning torture and murder into a reality?

And there is still another point to be made: Cruelty and violence are indeed inevitable elements of human being's nature. Denying these is pointless. Mankind has to do something with it, and from that perspective, it is much better to incorporate these darker sides of men in the metaphysical sphere where no real physical harm is done. We are deliberately speaking here of mankind, irrespective of religious or ethnic background, because there are Westerners and Easterners that have learnt this dear lesson: acknowledging the dark side of men and expressing it in art; this happens in Egypt, Morocco, Iraq and Syria as well.

The lesson Islamic State thus has to learn is much more pertinent: its fighters are actually killing in its 'art productions'. Still, we cannot realistically expect that the Islamic State will be ready to learn the lesson of expressing one's ideals metaphysically because it aims to realize its scenario, consciously or unconsciously based on the principles of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, into the physical realm. Looking at the fundamentals of both Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Islamic State's cruel videos, they revel in similarities. Considering however the schism between the virtual and the real world, Artaud and Islamic State's worlds could not differ more.

*Notes:*

[i] We owe thanks to our colleagues Pieter Nanninga of Groningen University, Herman Beck and Sander Bax of Tilburg University and Kimberly Jannarone of the University of California for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

[ii] [Prysor-Jones, 2014](#).

[iii] Sakurai, 2014.

[iv] Winter, 2014. 12.

[v] Butcher, 1902.

[vi] Grotowski, 2002. 255.

[vii] Naji, 2006; Saltman & Winter, 2014. 29; Hashim, 2014.

[viii] Naji, 2006.

[ix] Ibid. 51.

[x] Ibid. 51.

[xi] Ibid. 91.

[xii] Saltman & Winter, 2014. 38.

[xiii] Naji. 2006. 14-15.

[xiv] Ibid. 50-51.

[xv] Winter, 2015. 32.

[xvi] Saltman & Winter, 2014. 38.

[xvii] Winter, 2014.

[xviii] <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=9&verse=32>

[xix] Winter, 2014. 2.

[xx] Winter, 2014. 2.

[xxi] Ibid. 4.

[xxii] Ibid. 8.

[xxiii] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 4:10.

[xxiv] Ibid. 4:17.

[xxv] Ibid. 10:38.

[xxvi] Jannarone, 2012. 1-2.

[xxvii] Artaud, 1938. 7. We used an English translation of his work. See references.

[xxviii] Jannarone, 2012. 42.

[xxix] Ibid. 50.

[xxx] Ibid. 33.

[xxxi] Ibid. 75-77.

[xxxii] Ibid. 85.

[xxxiii] Ibid. 86.

- [xxxiv] Ibid. 86.
- [xxxv] Ibid. 159.
- [xxxvi] Ibid. 144.
- [xxxvii] Ibid. 146.
- [xxxviii] Naji. 2006.
- [xxxix] Ibid.
- [xl] Artaud, 1938. 7.
- [xli] Naji. 2006. 184.
- [xlii] Artaud, 1938. 2.
- [xliii] Ibid. 126.
- [xliv] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 4:18.
- [xlv] Artaud, 1938. 15.
- [xlvi] Naji. 2006. 51-53.
- [xlvii] Ibid. 67.
- [xlviii] Jannarone, 2012. 1.
- [xlix] Saltman & Winter, 2014. 31-32.
- [l] Dabiq is a place in North-Western Syria where the Islamic Armageddon will ultimately take place. See all volumes of *Dabiq* on <http://www.clarionproject.org/news/islamic-state-isis-isil-propaganda-magazine-dabiq>
- [li] Jannarone, 2012. 82.
- [lii] Ibid. 85.
- [liii] Ibid. 87.
- [liv] Ibid. 87.
- [lv] Ibid. 77.
- [lvi] Ibid. 82.
- [lvii] Winter, 2015. 43.
- [lviii] Jannarone, 2012. 84.
- [lix] Ibid. 86.
- [lx] Abu Bakr (573-634) and Omar (583-644) are two of the four rightly guided caliphs and successors of the prophet Mohammed. Both are important figures in Sunni Islam.
- [lxi] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 0:00-0:50.
- [lxii] Muslim (around 815-875) collected traditions of the prophet Mohammed. His work is called the *Sahih*.
- [lxiii] Jannarone, 2012. 150.
- [lxiv] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 0:51-7:35.

- [lxv] Winter, 2014. 4.
- [lxvi] Jannarone, 2012. 90.
- [lxvii] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 0:57.
- [lxviii] Ibid. 1:15-1:17.
- [lxix] Winter, 2015. 29.
- [lxx] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 5:11.
- [lxxi] Ibid. 5:16.
- [lxxii] Jannarone, 2012. 122.
- [lxxiii] Ibid. 151.
- [lxxiv] Ibid. 151.
- [lxxv] A picture of Al-Zarqawi, linked to several terrorist organizations.  
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/who-is-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/201>
- [lxxvi] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 8:46.
- [lxxvii] Winter, 2015. 7.
- [lxxviii] Jannarone, 2012. 146.
- [lxxix] Ibid. 123.
- [lxxx] Ibid. 87.
- [lxxxi] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 11:18.
- [lxxxii] Ibid. 12:17.
- [lxxxiii] Ibid. 12:35.
- [lxxxiv] Ibid. 13:55.
- [lxxxv] Winter, 2015. 25.
- [lxxxvi] Ibid. 29.
- [lxxxvii] [Islamic State, 2014](#). 15:19.
- [lxxxviii] Winter, 2014. 25.
- [lxxxix] [Pryor-Jones, 2014](#).
- [xc] [Dauber & Robinson, 2015](#).

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**Mati Shemoelof ~ ...reisst die**



# Mauern ein zwischen 'uns' und 'ihnen'



Ills. Joseph Sassoon  
Semah

Onlangs verscheen van dichter, auteur, uitgever, en bekende stem in de Arabisch-joodse Mizrahi-Beweging Mati Shemoelof *...reisst die Mauern ein zwischen 'uns' und 'ihnen'*. Tekst en gedichten wisselen elkaar af.

Het heeft Mati Shemolof enige tijd gekost om te begrijpen dat de geschiedenis van zijn familie uit de geschiedenisboeken is verwijderd en in de Israëliëse samenleving is gemarginaliseerd. Je komt in een soort van diaspora terecht als je van Arabische afkomst bent, terwijl Israël een thuis zou moeten zijn voor joden die naar een joodse staat emigreerden, aldus Shemoelof. Hij nam in 2007 dan ook het initiatief om *Echoing Identities: Young Mizrahi Anthology* uit te geven met teksten van de derde generatie Mizrachi. Door al zijn ervaringen is Mati Shemoelof zich bewust geworden van de diaspora van anderen, of het nu Syriërs zijn in Berlijn, Afghanen, Libiërs of Oost-Europeanen; maar vooral de diaspora van de Palestijnen uit de periode 1948 en 1967 raakt hem.

Shemoelof's Perzische grootvader werd in het begin van de 20e eeuw gedwongen uit Mashhad (Iran) naar Haifa te emigreren, dat toen nog bij Palestina hoorde. Haifa van voor 1948 was een moderne stad, waar verschillende culturen

vreedzaam naast elkaar leefden, waar zijn opa goed zaken kon doen en vrij was. Maar deze Palestijnse geschiedenis van Haifa is niet meer bekend.

De geschiedenis van zijn moeder is kenmerkend voor een familie van Mizrachim, voor joden met een Arabische cultuur en taal. Ze waren goed geïntegreerd in Irak en over het algemeen seculier. Zij werden echter in 1951 gedwongen van Bagdad naar Israël te emigreren, net als zo'n 120.000 andere Iraakse-joodse burgers, met achterlating van al hun bezit. Dat was onderdeel van de deal tussen Irak en Israël: de zionistische beweging kreeg arbeidskrachten en Irak bezit. Maar eerder had al de Farhud in Irak plaatsgevonden: op 1 en 2 juni 1941 vond een Pogrom plaats tegen joden in Bagdad, waarbij tussen de 150 en 200 doden vielen en van velen hun bezit werd afgenomen.

Nu zijn in Israël muren rondom Palestijnen, maar ook om de Arabische joden is een muur geplaatst. En toch zijn vele Mizrachi, die in armoede leven, niet solidair met de Palestijnen.

Om je te verhouden tot al die muren in Israël, in - en extern, is moeilijk en maakte Mati Shemoelof tot activist van de Mizrachi-Beweging, die strijdt voor sociale rechtvaardigheid en erkenning van identiteit. De Mizrachi-Beweging onderzoekt met name de verwantschap tussen hun identiteit en die van de Palestijnen en de Arabische wereld.

Mati Shemoelof verliet in 2013 Israël en arriveerde met een kleine koffer op 23 september in Berlijn, zijn derde Exil, honderden boeken achterlatend bij zijn ex-vriendin, maar ook zijn leven als politieke activist liet hij achter. Hij begon in Berlijn opnieuw, met nieuwe kansen als schrijver en als politiek activist.

In Berlijn verkeert hij in een meerstemmige werkelijkheid. Met zijn partners preekt hij Engels, op straat Duits, en Hebreeuws onder Israëli, in de synagoge of wanneer hij literatuur leest. En als hij een Arabische Berlijner spreekt, dan lachen ze om zijn ouderwetse Arabische uitdrukkingen die hij kent van zijn grootmoeder.

In Berlijn en Europa is het Mizrachi gedeelte van zijn geschiedenis niet bekend; door de Shoah zijn zij bekend met de Asjkenazische joden. Aan de andere kant begrijpen en kennen de Palestijnen en de Arabische diaspora de diepe historische en culturele verbondenheid niet. Voor de Palestijnen zijn ze onderdeel van het Israëliësch bezettingsregime.



De 'Mizrachi-Palästinensische Partnerschaft' werd op 13 juni 2016 opgericht met het doel een eenheid te creëren tussen alle onderdrukte groepen in Israël, door de identiteiten niet te benadrukken maar respect te hebben voor de ander. Mizrachi staat dan ook niet voor een etnische herkomst, maar voor een

bewustzijn. Het gaat erom co-existentie van monotheïstische religies in het Midden-Oosten mogelijk te maken.

Ze hebben ook, samen met Lorocho ('Weite') een joods-Arabisch Journal geïnitieerd, waarin het vraagstuk van hoe om te gaan met het verlies van je culturele wortels centraal staat, hetgeen geen eenvoudige samenwerking betreft. De strijd om erkenning van de Mizrachi in Israël gaat verder, de onderdrukking van Palestijnen is verergerd. Daarnaast duwt het neoliberalisme mensen verder naar de afgrond.

Mati Shemoelof heeft nu een nieuwe positie als Arabische-joodse, post-Israëlich dichter. Er komen nieuwe muren aan, niet alleen tussen Arabieren en joden of tussen Palestijnen en Israëli, maar ook tussen nationalisten en zij die dat achter zich hebben gelaten. De AfD heeft al voorgesteld Engels onderwijs op de scholen af te schaffen.

Maar hierdoor ontstaan ook weer nieuwe mogelijkheden, *die Mauern zwischen 'uns' und 'ihnen' nieder zu reissen*. Daartoe heeft hij met andere Arabische joden het culturele initiatief *Poetic Hafla* opgericht, een meerstemmige poëzie, middels actie, lezingen, performances en zingen in vele talen. Een spiegel voor de Berlijnse ervaringen van Mizrachi.

Hij sluit af met het gedicht *Von Israël träumend*.

Von Israel träumend

Ich träume von Israel  
frage mich, was sein wird  
will gute Nachrichten in der Zeitung lesen  
mein Arabisch verbessern und mit ihm in Frieden leben

Ich will meine Gedichte in Gaza lesen

und in den Nahostzug steigen  
geradewegs nach Haifa (ein paar Kleider und Bucher nehm' ich mit)  
will fahren zur Überraschungsparty meiner Großmutter in Bagdad

Ich denk an Israel,  
das der Nahostunion beiträt  
Und der Europäischen,  
Israel, warum lachst Du mich aus,  
zeugt doch Wirklichkeit für das  
unsichtbare Ringen der Träume

Ich will frei dahingleiten in der Luft, die sich  
zwischen Haifa und Beirut erstreckt  
will, wie die Wandervögel, ganz Europa  
durchwandern, Asien und Afrika,  
ohne Paß, ohne Nationalität  
wissen sie mehr über uns, als wir je wissen werden  
unsere Konflikte kennen sie, und kommen doch jedes Jahr aufs Neue  
(muß leider grad lesen, daß sie weniger werden)

Ich träume über Israels, normaler Weise  
Und phantasierte neue Möglichkeiten, ihm zu dichten.

---

Mati Shemoelof's verlies van zijn complexe culturele identiteit is het startpunt van zijn kracht om te schrijven, te dichten, activistische evenementen te organiseren en boeken uit te geven. Hij schrijft omdat hij gelooft dat de Diaspora muren kan slechten. Hij strijdt tegen het antisemitisme in Europa, voor solidariteit van de Palestijnse kwestie. Hij droomt van een Nahöstliche Union, een Midden-Oosten Unie zoals de EU, en deelt deze droom met de jongere generatie Arabische Diaspora.

Zie ook <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/on-friendship-collateral-damage-2/>

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De tekst is gebaseerd op een lezing die Shemoelof in juni 2018 gaf in Berlijn *zur Eröffnung der Verantsaltungsreihe des diAk e.V. -Israel/Palestina/Deutschland - zusammen denken Wir erinnern-Zwischen Nakba und Staatsgründung. zwischen*

# Human Rights, State Sovereignty, And International Law



We live in an era where virtually every government on the planet claims to pay allegiance to human rights and respect for international law. Yet, violations of human rights and plain human decency continue to occur with disturbing frequency in many parts of the world, including many allegedly “democratic” countries such as the United States, Russia, and Israel. Indeed, Donald Trump’s immigration policy, Putin’s systematic repression of dissidents, and Israel’s abominable treatment of Palestinians seem to make a mockery of the principle of human rights. Is this because “faulty” forms of government or because of some Inherent tension between state sovereignty and human rights? And what about the international regime of human rights? How effective is it in protecting human rights? Richard Falk, a world renowned scholar of International Relations and International Law sheds light into these questions in the exclusive interview below with C. J. Polychroniou.

Richard Falk is Alfred G. Milbank Emeritus Professor of International Law, Politics, and International Affairs at Princeton University and the author of some 40 books and hundreds of academic articles and essays. Among his most recent books are *A New Geopolitics* (to be published in December 2018); *Palestines’s Horizon: Toward a Just Peace* (2017); *Humanitarian Intervention and Legitimacy Wars: Seeking Justice in the 21st Century* (2015); *Chaos and*

*Counterrevolution: After the Arab Spring* (2014); and *Path to Zero: Dialogues on Nuclear Dangers* (2012).

*C. J. Polychroniou: Richard, you taught International Law and International Affairs at Princeton University for nearly half a century. How has international law changed from the time you started out as a young scholar to the present?*

*Richard Falk:* You pose an interesting question that I have not previously thought about, yet just asking it makes me realize that this was a serious oversight on my part. When I started thinking on my own about the role and relevance of international law during my early teaching experience in the mid-1950s, I was naively optimistic about the future, and without being very self-aware, I now understand that I assumed that moral trajectory that made the future work out to be an improvement on the past and present, that there was moral progress in collective behavior, including at the level of relations among sovereign states. I thought of the expanding role of international law as a major instrument for advancing progress toward a peaceful and equitable world, and endeavored in my writing to encourage the U.S. Government to align its foreign policy with international law, arguing, I suppose in a liberal vein, that such alignment would promote a better future for all while at the same time being beneficial of the United States, especially given the overriding interest in avoiding World War III.

My views gradually evolved in more critical and nuanced directions. As my interests turned toward the dynamics of decolonization, I came to appreciate that international law had legitimized European colonialism, and the exploitative arrangements that were imposed on the countries of the global south. I realized that the idealistic identification of international law with peace and justice was misleading, and at best only half of the story. International law was generated by the powerful to serve their interests, and was respected only so long as vital interests of these dominant states were not threatened.

The Vietnam War further influenced me to adopt a more cautious view of international law, and even more so, of the United Nations. I opposed the war from the outset from the perspective of international law, citing the most basic prohibitions on intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states and the core prohibition of the UIN Charter against all recourses to aggressive force. I did find it useful to put the debate on Vietnam policy in a legal format as the country was then under the sway of liberal leadership, although tinged with Cold War

geopolitics and ideology. The defenders of Vietnam policy, motivated by Cold War considerations, relied on legal apologetics as well as claims that it was important for world order to contain the expansion of Communist influence, and that the adversary in Vietnam was China rather than North Vietnam. The legal debate to which I devoted energy for ten years convinced me that international law on war/peace issues was subordinated to geopolitics including by the Western democracies, and that even so, legal counter-arguments were always available to governments eager to disguise their reliance on geopolitical priorities. International law remains useful and even necessary for the routine transnational activities of people and governments, stabilizing trade and investment relations, but often in ways that favor the rich, and issues pertaining to questions of safety, communications, and tourism exhibit a consistent adherence to an international law framework.

The U.S. global leadership role is unique in this respect in the period since 1945. In the early postwar period the U.S. seemed to be the champion of a law-regulated world order responsive to the UN Charter framework. This was never the whole story as the Cold War prompted a variety of unlawful interventions, including assassination plots against foreign leaders perceived as leftists. After the Vietnam War the United States Government gradually recognized that its foreign policy goals could not be achieved by relying on an international law approach, a recognition that became especially clear in carrying out its political commitment to support Israel unconditionally. The moves away from liberal internationalism accelerated during the presidency of Ronald Reagan who was instinctively opposed to adjusting American policy to an international law framework.

It was during the presidency of George W. Bush that international law has been further marginalized by being put aside or crudely reinterpreted whenever seen as an obstacle. The United States started spiraling out of control after the 9/11 attacks in the direction of redefining itself an illiberal democracy, a process reaching a new height during the Trump presidency when even the democratic foundational principles of the republic were increasingly drawn into question. This dynamic has been reinforced by the global rise of ultra-nationalist political movements that have gained control of important governments throughout the world. For these movements, nationalist goals are always be given precedence without a second thought. From these perspectives international law should not

be allowed to interfere with fidelity to a nationalist agenda. At the same time, the pressures exerted by migratory flows stemming from war torn regions, especially the Middle East and Africa, and from ecologically challenged habitats, have weakened mainstream support for human rights, and especially for those who are refugees or asylum seekers. Despite neoliberal globalization, and in some respects, as a reaction to it, the state system has become more statist, with a corresponding retreat in efforts to protect the human rights of vulnerable peoples, especially if they are regarded as strangers to the community of the nation state.

In making this negative assessment, it is important not to overlook the central relevance of international law and human rights to civil society movements for peace, justice, and ecological sustainability. These normative sources of authority give peoples a legitimated discourse by which to oppose oppressive tendencies of the state or international institutions, and to project images of alternative futures that are more benevolent from the perspective of promoting a more satisfying shared destiny for the peoples of the world, with a special emphasis on protecting those who are most vulnerable. It is civil society that has tried to keep the 'human' side of human rights as integral to the protective mission, while governments are again limiting their view of rights to the 'rights' side as an entitlement of a national citizenry, especially those who are native born.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* Human rights are the cornerstone underpinning the rule of law, yet many governments throughout the world violate human rights with frightening frequency. Is there an inherent tension human rights and state sovereignty? Or, to phrase the question differently, do human rights challenge state sovereignty?

*Richard Falk:* I believe the premise of your question is somewhat misleading. It maybe appropriate to suggest that 'human rights' should become the cornerstone of a global rule of law, and that it does function in this manner in a genuine democratic state. In international society the basis of an effective rule of law is mutual self-interest and reciprocity especially in the context of commercial and financial arrangement, maritime safety, and diplomatic relations. When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (UDHR) was drafted, largely under the influence of Western liberal internationalist values, shortly after World War II it was looked upon as a largely aspirational document with very weak expectations with respect to compliance or implementation. This was partly



signaled by labeling the document as a 'Declaration,' which meant that it was without obligatory force. It has been my view that the UDHR would not have won widespread support from leading government had it been negotiated as a lawmaking treaty with the effect of eroding sovereign rights. In this sense, compliance with the norms contained in the UDHR depends on what I have called in the past 'voluntary international law.' In effect, international human rights standards were brought into being because they were understood to be unenforceable, but this initial cynicism was challenged over time by a series of unanticipated developments.

Several factors altered this situation in ways that have given a weak obligatory status to some norms encompassed by the international law of human rights. For one thing, human rights NGOs emerged such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. These civil society actors adopted as their mission campaigns to exert pressure by way of naming and shaming to induce compliance with human rights standards by governments. For another, the West found it useful to claim for itself democratic practices relating to human rights that were alleged absent or deficient in the Soviet Union and East Europe, drawing a propaganda contrast between 'the free world' and 'the Soviet bloc' that was centered on degrees of adherence to human rights in the liberal sense of individual rights. Thus human rights became a valuable propaganda tool to convey what distinguished Cold War adversaries from one another in a self-serving manner. The Soviet Union countered Western allegations by claiming that human rights should be conceived more collectively in relation to societies as a whole and with an awareness of class differences, and thus emphasized adherence to economic and social rights as beneficial for the entire citizenry. This ideological difference, combined with the push for obligatory standards in international law, led to the artificial division of human rights into two parts, and their formulation in separated treaties: Convention on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). As might have been anticipated, the Western countries give their entire emphasis to civil and political rights, and deny any obligatory force to economic, social, and cultural rights, which are derided as unenforceable and inconsistent with the workings of market economies that sort out winners from losers.

Against this background two important international developments lent practical political significance to these conceptual issues. First, the efforts of the countries

in East Europe to gain freedom from Soviet rule, led to movements of resistance organized around demands for adherence to human rights by the institutions of the state. Secondly, the UN-backed Anti-Apartheid Campaign illustrated that human rights, if widely backed on a global level, can be a formidable instrument of soft power resistance to an oppressive regime of the sort present in apartheid South Africa. In such contexts, international law and human rights played important roles in struggles by people against repressive conditions, and deserve appreciation by progressives who are otherwise critical of hypocritical legalism and moralism as the means by which the rich and powerful hide their reliance on naked power to achieve their ends.

These developments suggest the emergence of human rights, but not yet its global acceptance as enforceable law. Particularly over the course of this century human rights have been under intense pressure from a number of sources. First came the American response to the 9/11 attacks in 2001 that produced a counterterrorist campaign that subjected suspects to torture and indefinite detention without charges or trial. Then came the migration and refugee crises that exerted pressures on states to close their borders, despite the life-threatening denials of human rights entailed. Finally, came the rise of autocratic leaders who relied on scapegoats and fear-mongering to justify disregard of rights by governmental institutions, especially of all residents without all the credentials of nationality and citizenship.

We can work toward a world in which there is a global rule of law that embodies human rights, but such a world does not now exist, and in all likelihood, never existed. Sovereignty based on territorial boundaries and international recognition, and given emotional content by nationalist and patrioteering ideologies, tends to override human rights concerns whenever the two sources of rights clash. Despite the use of the word 'human' the real perception of 'human rights' remains dependent for implementation on national procedures of implementation.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* How does Donald Trump's immigration policy square off with human rights and international law?

*Richard Falk:* Trump's immigration issues proceeds as if international doesn't exist, or at least doesn't count. His approach to Muslim potential immigrants or undocumented Hispanics living in the United States displays a monumental

indifference and lack of empathy to whether such an identity should be respected and protected. Trump's sole criterion is whether or not it is good for America with a pragmatic and selective approach to law enforcement (useful with respect to undocumented immigrants) and a total disregard for the values and norms of human rights. Overall, Trump has exhibited contempt for international law treaties that were considered when negotiated as major breakthroughs contributing to peace, security, and a sustainable environment. Among his most notable repudiations of law-oriented approaches were his withdrawal from 2014 Climate Change Agreement, repudiation of the 2015 Nuclear Program (5 +1) Agreement with Iran, and refusal to take part in international efforts to develop a humane and collective approach to problems arising from global migration and refugee flows. Trump's ultra-nationalist and Islamophobic political agenda is self-consciously and deliberately insensitive to claims advanced on the basis of international law. It is a view that accords preferences to geopolitical opportunism in all sectors of international life that give unreserved support to nationalist priorities without even taking into account considerations of legality or of moral and political legitimacy.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* Ever since it's creation as a nation-state, Israel has shown an absolutely brutal face towards the Palestinian people. Why is the so-called international community allowing Israel to continue with its inhumane stance towards the Palestinians?

*Richard Falk:* I think the fundamental explanation for this long experience of Israeli oppressive practices and policies with respect to the Palestinian people flows directly from the essential nature of the Zionist project to establish an exclusivist Jewish state in a predominantly non-Jewish society, and to do so during the long twilight of European colonialism. This reality was further shaped by the Zionist insistence on seeking to be a legitimate modern secular state that respects human rights and formally operates as a constitutional democracy. Such Zionist goals meant that to be Jewish and to be democratic led directly to the forcible dispossession of as many as 750,000 non-Jewish residents of Palestine in 1947 in events differentially remembered by the Palestinians as the Nakba, or 'great catastrophe,' and by the Israelis as the War of Independence. My point is that ethnic cleansing was embedded in the establishment of a majoritarian and exclusive Jewish state from the moment that the Israeli state came into being. This insistence on being an exclusivist Jewish state was always embedded in the

Zionist Project, but it was not revealed until the passage of the Israel Nation State Law of the Jewish People, which removes any ambiguity, converting the de facto realities of an apartheid state into a self-proclaimed de jure framework.

There is a further issue of great importance. The idea of self-determination gained prominence during the period after World War II, gaining momentum as a result of a series of anti-colonial struggles involving countries throughout Asia and Africa. The Palestinian people could not be expected to submit to the Zionist Project without doing all in their power by way of resistance, and archival records show that Palestinian resistance was anticipated by early Zionist leaders. These prospects and realities of resistance generated Israeli responses designed not just to uphold security, but to crush Palestinian hopes and lead to their submission to what had the appearances of 'a lost cause.' The supposed Trump 'deal of the century' is a geopolitical reinforcement of Israeli efforts to compel the Palestinian to accept an Israeli victory, and to content themselves with some improvements in the economics of everyday life attainable only under Israel's political and cultural domination. Again, the cycle of resistance and repression is mutually reinforcing, and can be expected to continue until Israel recalculates their interests so as to reach a political compromise capable of producing sustainable peace based on the equality of the two peoples. This is what happened in South Africa, coming as a surprise, as a result of mounting worldwide soft power pressures that led the political leadership to accept the dismantling of the apartheid regime in the country. Until Israel's political leaders reach such a point, there will be escalating patterns of Palestinian resistance, reinforced by international solidarity initiatives, giving way to interludes of intensified Israeli repression, and on and on.

Of course, in the background until recently, was the relevance of the Jewish diaspora as creating a geopolitical situation that shielded Israel from efforts to implement either UN majority views on how to resolve the conflict or to exert inter-governmental pressures on Israel by way of sanctions. Zionism is a non-territorial world movement with a territorial base in Israel since 1948. With Trump in the White House Israel is assured of unlimited political support for its policies of brutality against the Palestinian people. This development is accentuated by the broader developments in the Middle East that have led to a convergence of primary interests of Arab governments with the regional policies of Israel, which has meant a weakening of regional and international

governmental support for the Palestinian national struggle. The failure of the Palestinian movement to achieve political unity contributes further to the current ordeal being daily experienced by the Palestinian people as the excessive Israeli violence at the Gaza border in response to a largely nonviolent protest movement has demonstrated so dramatically.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* Numerous artists withdrew recently their participation from a music festival in Israel, apparently under pressure from the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Given that Israel is not facing the sort of international isolation that apartheid South Africa began to face years before its collapse, is BDS of any concrete benefit to the Palestinian people, or merely a plain irritation for the Israeli government?

*Richard Falk:* The growing impact of the BDS Campaign is a sign that global solidarity movement of support for the achievement of Palestinian basic rights is gaining political traction throughout the world. With the UN unable to implement its numerous resolutions based on upholding Palestinian rights under international law and the Oslo 'peace diplomacy' abandoned after falling into a condition of disrepute, civil society has both the opportunity and responsibility to playing a central role in creating the preconditions for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in manner that recognizes the rights and equality of Jews and non-Jews. BDS is the spearhead of this form of coercive nonviolent efforts to obtain compliance with basic requirements of law and morality. It should be kept in mind that BDS was not an internationalist venture, but formed in response to a call for solidarity by a large number of NGOs based in Palestinians and has continued to be led by Palestinians.

The frantic efforts of Israel and its supporters around the world to criminalize participation in BDS seems an over-reaction to the effectiveness of BDS as a tactic of opposition and a challenge to the legitimacy of Israel as an exclusivist or apartheid Jewish state. Such moves to defame BDS supporters and even to criminalize participation is posing a serious danger to free expression in the West. It should be appreciated that BDS tactics are entirely nonviolent, although admittedly militant with a coercive intention, and based on transnational civil society 'enforcement' initiatives in settings where the institutions and procedures of global governance are unable or unwilling to protect the rights of vulnerable peoples.

The pronounced efforts to brand BDS as 'anti-Semitic' is particularly regressive. By the insistence in defining anti-Semitism as embracing harsh criticism of Israel it directly challenges freedom of expression and weakens the capacity of society to promote social and economic justice. Besides this, by conflating criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews, Zionist opportunism is confusing the nature of anti-Semitism in ways that obscure real threats of ethnic hatred, which is as unacceptable to BDS supporters as it is to BDS attackers. The definitions of what sometimes called 'the new anti-Semitism' by the U.S. State Department and by the British Labour Party are illustrative of this unfortunate trend.

At the same time it is important to appreciate the potential leverage exerted by the BDS campaign. Roger Waters, co-founder of Pink Floyd, recently called cultural and sports boycotts of Israel by world class artists and celebrity athletes as 'a game changer.' He had in mind the singer Lana Del Ray who withdrew from concert appearances in Israel and the star Argentinian footballer, Lionel Messi, who captained the team that cancelled 'a friendly' with Israel prior to the Moscow World Cup. Waters explains his animating motivation with these words tied to the wider struggle for human dignity:

"And as I say often on stage, when we all got together in 1948 in Paris, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed by the then-fledgling United Nations, it declares that all human beings all over the world, irrespective of their religion, ethnicity, or nationality, have a natural right to basic civil and human rights, and to the right of self-determination. And I believe that to be true. So this struggle is really only an attempt to implement those brave words from 1948."

The long victimization of the Palestinian people is a stark reminder that the original undertaking to promote human rights in 1948 remains an almost invisible distant goal. In praising those who support boycotts Waters declared that it is simply "the right thing to do." In so declaring he was explicitly invoking Archbishop Tutu's influential remark that 'neutrality in the face of injustice' is morally unacceptable.

It is helpful to remember that most of the positive changes with respect to law and morality started on the streets with expression of outrage directed at prevailing policies. This was true of the civil rights movement in America, of the protests against Communist rule in Eastern Europe, of the Arab Spring, of the struggles for gay rights, and indeed for every notable positive development that

has occurred during my lifetime. Yet one should not get carried away. We should not, however, uncritically glamorize movements from below. Fascism was responsive to populist frustrations giving rise to demagogues who stir crowds to frenzy with their demonic solutions to the ills of society.

*C. J. Polychroniou:* You served for many years as United Nations Special Rapporteur for Palestinian Human Rights. What has been the role of the UN towards the so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and where does international law stand over this matter?

*Richard Falk:* My experience at the UN as Special Rapporteur helped me understand why the UN is important, yet extremely limited due to its lack of independent political capabilities needed to implement its recommendations. This gap between contributions and expectations was particularly apparent in relation to the Palestinian issue. In both the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the General Assembly in New York, the Palestinian struggle to achieve their rights was supported rhetorically by an overwhelming majority of states, yet it was opposed by important geopolitical actors, especially the United States. In concrete terms this UN majority was able to insist on fact finding inquiries into allegations of Israeli wrongdoing and to release reports extremely critical of Israel's behavior, but the Organization was blocked as soon as it tried to implement any recommendations that would challenge Israel's policies and practices. Such outcomes on the level of behavior give rise to impressions of irrelevance that are as misleading as are reliance on the UN, as now constituted, to serve as a reliable vehicle for achieving the values of peace, global justice, and ecological stability.

In a positive manner, the UN was a crucial authority with respect to validating Palestinian grievances, and helped Palestine in its effort to win the Legitimacy War with Israel, which is important. Legitimacy Wars are 'fought' to get the upper hand with world public opinion by appealing to international law and international morality. In the early period of Israel's existence, with the cloud of liberal guilt associated with the Holocaust still shaping political consciousness, the wrongs done to the Palestinian people were virtually erased from awareness in the West. In recent years, the soft power balance has been shifting in Palestine's favor just as the hard power balance is more weighted in Israel's favor than ever before. It should be remembered that most political struggles relating to self-determination were won in the end by the side that won the Legitimacy

War, and not the side with military superiority. This observation applies not only to the wars against European colonialism, but it also relates to the American regime-changing interventions as well as the Vietnam War.

Another aspect of my experience as a UN appointee, although not a UN civil servant as the position was voluntary and unpaid, was a bewildering mixture of independence and defamation. Even the Secretary General could not dismiss me, only the Human Rights Council could do this if a majority found that I exceeded my mandate. Throughout my tenure at the UN the HRC overwhelmingly supported my efforts as Special Rapporteur. At the same time, ultra-Zionist NGOs, UN Watch and NGO Monitor, were free to roam the halls, and release all sorts of defamatory material about me without losing their accreditation at the UN, and even having leverage with several pro-Israeli governments, prompting diplomats representing the U.S. and Canada to echo their attacks almost word for word.

My position at the UN was tricky in unexpected other respects, with pitfalls that I discovered only in the course of my experience. Perhaps, most significantly, I came to realize that the Palestinian Authority (PA), which represents Palestine at the UN and originally backed my appointment, pushed hard behind the scenes to have me dismissed by the HRC, or at least put me under rather intense pressure to resign. I only began to understand this when it became clear that the PA put greater stress on their rivalry with Hamas than with their struggle for Palestinian self-determination, and as well, were somewhat compromised by their quasi-collaborative relationship with Israel, especially with respect to West Bank security arrangements and access to international aid cash flows. What irritated the PA was my effort to present the role of Hamas fairly, especially as it related to developments in Gaza, and the initiatives taken by Hamas leaders to negotiate a long-term ceasefire with Israel. With the passage of time I did work out live and let live workable arrangements with the PA who were ably represented in Geneva and New York by Palestinian diplomats who were dedicated to achieving Palestinian self-determination but believed their effectiveness depended upon accepting UN constraints associated with an acceptance of the reality that it is the U.S. that calls the shots on many issues of concern to Palestine. In other words, I learned to be less judgmental without giving ground on my essential effort to report the truth as I perceived it.

Finally, I was forced to accept the fact that although I did my best for six years to



express the realities of the Palestinian situation, focusing on the denial of basic rights under international law, including the inescapable relevance of continuous unlawful Israeli encroachment on occupied Palestine by settlements, the wall, disrupting mobility, and numerous other measures, the Palestinian situation on the ground got worse and worse with the passage of each year. Israel never adhered to international law treaty arrangements that obliged UN Members to cooperate with the UN in the discharge of its official undertakings. When I tried to enter Israel at the end of 2008 on an official mission trip, I was expelled and detained in a prison cell for more than 16 hours. Despite this, the UN was unwilling to mount a public protest or to secure my access throughout my term.

What I did achieve as SR was to facilitate some shifts in the public discourse on the Palestinian struggle within the UN itself and in relation to the NGO community and the attentive media. It became more possible to speak of 'settler colonialism' in relation to the Zionist Project of establishing a Jewish state with the blessings of British Foreign Office in 1917 although the Jewish population of Palestine at the time was less than 6% and of 'annexation' with reference to the expansion of the settlements established in violation of international humanitarian law governing belligerent occupation and of 'apartheid' as the essential character of the manner in which Israel maintained control over the deliberately fragmented Palestinian people. It was these assessments that exerted enough influence to help explain the personal attacks on me as an anti-Semite and political extremist. It also led me to have very positive relations with many of the delegations representing countries supportive of Palestine and to receive private reassurances of support and even admiration from high-ranking UN staff members.

*Source: Global Policy Journal*