

Noam Chomsky On Donald Trump And The “Me First” Doctrine



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:
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President Trump’s [sudden cancellation](#) of the upcoming denuclearization summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is just the latest example of Trump’s wildly erratic approach to foreign policy.

While Trump’s domestic policies seem to be guided by clear objectives — increasing corporate profits, undoing every policy made by the Obama administration, and appeasing Trump’s anti-immigrant base — the imperatives driving US foreign policy under Trump remain something of a mystery.

In this exclusive interview, renowned linguist and public intellectual Noam Chomsky sheds light on the realities and dangers of foreign relations in the age of “gangster capitalism” and the decline of the US as a superpower.

C. J. Polychroniou: Noam, Donald Trump rose to power with “America First” as the key slogan of his election campaign. However, looking at what his administration has done so far on both the domestic and international front, it is hard to see how his policies are contributing to the well-being and security of the United States. With that in mind, can you decode for us what Trump’s “America

First” policy may be about with regard to international relations?

Noam Chomsky: It is only natural to expect that policies will be designed for the benefit of the designers and their actual — not pretended — constituency, and that the well-being and security of the society will be incidental. And that is what we commonly discover. We might recall, for example, the frank comments on the Monroe Doctrine by Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of State, Robert Lansing: “In its advocacy of the Monroe Doctrine the United States considers its own interests. The integrity of other American nations is an incident, not an end. While this may seem based on selfishness alone, the author of the Doctrine had no higher or more generous motive in its declaration.” The observation generalizes in international affairs, and much the same logic holds within the society.

There is nothing essentially new about “America First,” and “America” does not mean America, but rather the designers and their actual constituency.

A typical illustration is the policy achievement of which the Trump-Ryan-McConnell administration is most proud: the tax bill — what Joseph Stiglitz accurately called “*The US Donor Relief Act of 2017*”. It contributes very directly to the well-being of their actual constituency: private wealth and corporate power. It benefits the actual constituency indirectly by the standard Republican technique (since Reagan) of blowing up the deficit as a pretext for undermining social programs, which are the Republicans’ next targets. The bill is thus of real benefit to its actual constituency and severely harms the general population.

Turning to international affairs, in Trumpian lingo, “*America First*” means “*me first*” and damn the consequences for the country or the world. The “me first” doctrine has an immediate corollary: it’s necessary to keep the base in line with fake promises and fiery rhetoric, while not alienating the actual constituency. It also follows that it’s important to do the opposite of whatever was done by Obama. Trump is often called “unpredictable,” but his actions are highly predictable on these simple principles.

His most important decision, by far, was to pull out of the Paris negotiations on climate change and to tear to shreds efforts to prevent environmental catastrophe — a threat that is extremely severe, and not remote. All completely predictable on the basic principles just mentioned.

The decision benefits the actual constituency: the energy corporations, the

automotive industry (most of it), and others who pursue the imperative of short-term profit. Consider perhaps the most-respected and “moderate” member of the Trump team, former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson, kicked out because he was too soft-hearted. We now know that ExxonMobil scientists were in the lead in the 1970s in recognizing the dire threat of global warming — facts surely known to the CEO, who presided over efforts to maximize the threat and to fund denialism of what the management knew was true — all to fill some overstuffed pockets with more dollars before we say “goodbye” to organized human life, not in the distant future.

It’s hard to find a word in the language to describe such behavior.

The decision also appeals to the pretended constituency: the voting base. [Half of Republicans deny that global warming is taking place](#), and of the rest, a bare majority think that humans may have a role in it. It’s doubtful that anything comparable exists elsewhere.

And, of course, the decision reverses an Obama initiative, thus keeping to high principles.

One cannot overemphasize the astonishing fact that the most powerful country in world history refuses to join the world in doing at least something — in some cases a lot — about this existential threat to organized human life (and to the species that are disappearing as the Sixth Extinction proceeds on its lethal course). And beyond that, is devoting its efforts to accelerating the race to disaster. And no less astonishing is the failure to highlight, even to discuss this extraordinary situation. Considering what is at stake, it is hard to find a historical parallel.

The same hold pretty much on other policies, though sometimes with more elite opposition. Take Obama’s Iran deal — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). That, of course, has to go, on pretexts too ludicrous to discuss, and always ignoring the fact that while Iran has been adhering to the agreement, the US has been violating it all along by acting to block Iran’s reintegration into the global economy, particularly the global financial system, and to undermine “the normalisation of trade and economic relations with Iran.” All in violation of the JCPOA, but of no concern, on the prevailing tacit assumption that “the indispensable nation” stands above the law.

A considerable majority of Republicans have always opposed the deal, though in this case, Republican elites are often more realistic. The business world does not appear to have supported even the earlier sanctions regime — one of those interesting cases where state policy diverges from the interests of the actual constituency, much like Cuba policy. The decision harms the welfare and security of the general population, and might have truly horrendous consequences, but that is scarcely a consideration.

The Trump team is working hard to maximize the likely disastrous effects. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made his [first major speech](#) at the ultra-reactionary Heritage Foundation, focusing on Iran, with demands so extreme that the goal must be to ensure that they are instantly rejected. Among them, that Iran withdraw its forces from Syria and end its support for Hezbollah and Hamas, and more generally, end its campaign “to dominate the Middle East” — newspeak for Iran’s unwillingness to retreat into a shell and allow the US its traditional right to dominate the Middle East (and any other place it can) by force, with no impediments. Pompeo also warned the Europeans to join the US jihad, or else.

There is some merit in Trump’s posturing about how the JCPOA should be improved. It definitely can be. In particular, it can be extended to establishing a Nuclear Weapons-free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East, with serious inspections, which would eliminate any alleged threat of eventual Iranian nuclear programs. To achieve that goal should be quite straightforward. There is no need to obtain Iran’s acquiescence. Iran has long been in the forefront of those calling for establishment of a NWFZ, particularly as the spokesperson for G-77 — the former non-aligned countries — which strongly advocates this development. The Arab states, with Egypt in the lead, initiated this proposal and have strongly urged that it be implemented. There is overwhelming international support. The matter regularly comes up in the review sessions of the Non-proliferation Treaty, with full agreement — almost. One country regularly blocks the effort, most recently Obama in 2015. The reason is not obscure: Israel’s nuclear weapons systems must not be subject even to inspection, let alone steps toward dismantlement.

It is important to add that the US and UK have a special responsibility to work to establish a Middle East NWFZ. They are committed to this goal by Security Council Resolution 687 — a commitment that takes on even greater force because it is this Resolution to which they appealed when seeking desperately to create some legal pretext for their criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003.

But all of this is unmentionable, so we can put it aside.

The Trump decision has infuriated much of the world, with the usual exceptions. In particular, it has infuriated European allies. Whether they will be willing to stand up against the global bully is unclear; it is a frightening prospect. If Europe does not proceed with the JCPOA, as the Trump wreckers hope, that might encourage Iranian hardliners to develop “nuclear capability” — a capacity to produce nuclear weapons if they ever decide to, which many non-nuclear states have. That might provide a green light for those who have been itching to bomb Iran for a long time, among them the new National Security Adviser John Bolton and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Case by case, we find much the same, sometimes with further complexities.

Trump’s view of world affairs seems to assign very little role to diplomacy, as evidenced by the desolation of the State Department under his administration. What’s your own understanding and explanation for Trump’s aversion to diplomacy?

His position makes good sense. In confronting adversaries — for Trump, most of the world, apart from a few favored dictatorships (and the increasingly reactionary Israeli client) — it is only reasonable to play one’s strong card. The US is militarily strong — in fact, overwhelming in military strength. Trump’s *increase* in the vastly inflated military budget amounts to about 80 percent of the total Russian military budget, which is declining. But increasingly under Trump, the US is diplomatically weak and isolated. So why bother with diplomacy?

Incidentally, this is by no means a completely new departure. As its global power declined from its peak in the 1940s, the US has increasingly disregarded international institutions. During the years of its overwhelming global dominance, when the UN could be counted on to stay in line and serve as a weapon against adversaries, the UN was highly respected by elite opinion and Russia was berated for constantly saying “no.” As other industrial countries reconstructed from wartime devastation and decolonization proceeded on its agonizing course, the UN lost its allure. By the 1980s, respected intellectuals were pondering the strange cultural-psychological defect that was causing the world to be out of step. The US cast its first Security Council veto in 1970, and quickly gained the

lead in doing so. It is the only country to have gone so far as to veto a Security Council resolution calling on all states to observe international law — mentioning no one, but it was understood that it was a response to Washington's rejection of World Court orders to end its "unlawful use of force" (aka international terrorism) against Nicaragua and to pay substantial reparations. The US rarely ratifies international conventions, and when it does, it is typically with crucial reservations, effectively exempting itself: the genocide and torture conventions, and many others.

Rather generally, while Trump is carrying defiance of world opinion to new extremes, he can claim predecessors.

Trump's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem (something which many of his predecessors had actually promised of doing but never carried out when in office) has created havoc in the Middle East, just as expected, although the administration has justified this decision as part of the need to "secure peace" in the region. First, what were the motives behind this decision? Second, can this move be regarded as legal according to norms and principles of international law? And, thirdly, can this decision be undone by future US presidents?

The motive was hardly concealed, and follows from the usual Trump principles. The move is strongly supported by Trump's Evangelical base — by now, the major popular support for Israel as more liberal sectors, as elsewhere in the world, are coming to oppose Israel's violence, repression and flagrant violations of international law. The move is also a gift to major Republican Party donors like Sheldon Adelson and Paul Singer. This decision, too, isolates the US in the world scene, harming the country in the longer term, but that is irrelevant. The US vetoed an otherwise unanimous Security Council resolution condemning the move, which is in violation of numerous [UN Security Council] resolutions on Jerusalem since 1968. The decision can be reversed.

The Gaza massacre in the aftermath of the Trump administration decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem exposed not only the historical insensitivity of the Trump gang to the plight of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation (as well as its unconscionable ignorance of Muslim culture and history), but also the brutality of the Israeli state and, equally important, the cowardice, once again, of the so-called international community. Your thoughts or reactions to all of the above?

All correct, except that reference to the “Trump gang” is too narrow. Few are aware of the extent of Israeli brutality. Just to take one pertinent example, few are aware that just as the recent nonviolent demonstrations were beginning, leading to the Gaza massacre when Israel responded with military force, Hamas leadership approached Israel with a [call for a long-term cease-fire](#) (“hudna”). Israel, of course, rejected it, as it invariably does, rarely even giving reasons, though after the murderous Operation Protective Edge in 2014, an Israeli defense official explained that Israel does not respond “because there was no reason to conduct a dialogue with a bruised and beaten movement.” In short: *We have overwhelming military force, you are defenseless, we can smash your society to bits any time we like, so why on earth should we call for an end to violence, abandoning our virtual monopoly?*

The North Korea nuclear saga has become a key global issue featuring the “rocket man” and America’s “dotard.” Do you see any prospects for a lasting peace between North and South Korea?

One possibility, advanced by China with broad international support, including North Korea intermittently, has been a double freeze: North Korea would freeze its development of nuclear weapons and missiles, and the US would cease its threatening military maneuvers on North Korea’s borders, including menacing flights by the most advanced nuclear capable bombers — no laughing matter in a country that was flattened by merciless US bombing, even destruction of major dams (a serious war crime), within easy memory. The option has been rejected by the US.

A double freeze could have opened the way to further negotiations, perhaps reaching as far as what was achieved in 2005. Under international pressure, the Bush administration turned to negotiations, which achieved substantial success. North Korea agreed to abandon “all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs” and allow international inspections — phrases worth re-reading in the light of constant misrepresentation. In return, the US was to provide a light-water reactor for medical use, issue a non-aggression pledge, and join in an agreement that the two sides would “respect each other’s sovereignty, exist peacefully together and take steps to normalize relations.”

At once, the Bush administration broke the agreement. It renewed the threat of force, froze North Korean funds in foreign banks and disbanded the consortium

that was to provide North Korea with a light-water reactor. Bruce Cumings, the leading US Korea scholar, [writes](#) that “the sanctions were specifically designed to destroy the September pledges [and] to head off an accommodation between Washington and Pyongyang.”

That path could be pursued again.

On April 27, North and South Korea signed a historic document, the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula. It’s worth reading carefully. In the Declaration, the two Koreas “affirmed the principle of determining the destiny of the Korean nation on their own accord [repeat: *on their own accord*] ... to completely cease all hostile acts against each other in every domain [to] ... actively cooperate to establish a permanent and solid peace regime on the Korean Peninsula ... to carry out disarmament in a phased manner, [in order to achieve] the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula ... to strengthen the positive momentum towards continuous advancement of inter-Korean relations as well as peace, prosperity and unification of the Korean Peninsula.” They further “agreed to actively seek the support and cooperation of the [international] community [meaning, the US] for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

Furthermore, as Korea specialist Chung-in Moon reviews in *Foreign Affairs*, the two sides did not just make high-level commitments. They also laid out specific timetables for implementing them and took concrete steps that would have immediate effects in facilitating cooperation and preventing conflict — something quite new and very significant.

The import of the Declaration is clear. The US should back off and allow the two Koreas to achieve peace, disarmament, unification and complete denuclearization. We should accept the call for support and cooperation in this endeavor by the two parts of the Korean nation to determine its destiny “on their own accord.”

To put it more simply, the Declaration is a polite letter saying, “Dear Mr. Trump, declare victory if you want to prance around in public, but please go away and let us move towards peace, disarmament and unification without disrupting the process.”

US analysts have been clear and frank about the real nature of the North Korean

threat. New York Times foreign affairs commentator Max Fisher writes that North Korea “has achieved what no country has since China developed its own program a half-century ago: a nuclear deterrent against the United States,” and Trump’s threats and sanctions have not succeeded “to stall or reverse those gains.” Clearly, we must act to prevent anyone from deterring our resort to force and violence.

It’s worth noting that Iran poses a problem rather like that of North Korea. Among specialists, across the political spectrum, few would disagree with the conclusion of the respected and properly conservative International Institute of Strategic Studies in 2010 that “Iran’s nuclear program and its willingness to keep open the possibility of developing nuclear weapons is a central part of its deterrent strategy.” US intelligence concurs. Again, that is intolerable to the two rogue states that demand the right to rampage freely in the region, as they regularly do.

If Trump and his advisers have any sense, they will seize the opportunity and accept the plea of the two Koreas.

Unfortunately, expecting some sense may be too hopeful. The egregious hawk John Bolton, who has been just as publicly eager to bomb North Korea as Iran, went out of his way to bring up a model that he surely knew would infuriate and antagonize North Korea — the “Libya model”: *You give up your deterrent, and then we will destroy you, ending with a brutal murder applauded with a vulgar joke by Hillary Clinton.* Then Vice President Mike Pence [chimed in](#) saying it’s not a mere threat but “more of a fact” that “this will only end like the Libyan model ended if Kim Jong Un doesn’t make a deal.”

Along with threatening military maneuvers at the North Korean borders, this is just the way to move negotiations forward. Predictably, there was a harsh verbal North Korean response, though coupled with some crucial actions: North Korea reported that it had just [destroyed its key nuclear weapons testing site](#), setting off explosions to collapse underground tunnels. Trump responded a few hours later by [cancelling the planned summit meeting in Singapore with Kim Jong Un](#).

This not the end, however, and perhaps those who understand that Trump might register an ill-deserved triumph may prevail.

Israel’s prime minister, the irrevocable Bibi Netanyahu, has been driven for years

by the idea of “regime change” in Tehran. Do you think this is a realistic objective now that Tel Aviv has a “real friend” in the White House?

I don't think so, and I doubt that Israeli strategists do either. An invasion of Iran is most unlikely. If the US and Israel attack, it's likely to be from a safe distance — missiles mainly — and aimed at specific targets, though there might be Special Forces operations. We might recall that the US and Israel have already committed what the Pentagon describes as an [“act of war”](#) against Iran, justifying a military response from the target — namely, the cyberwar attack on Iranian nuclear facilities.

Europe's key leaders seem to be distancing themselves with ever greater frequency from Washington's policies on global affairs. Do you think we may be at the start of a new era between European and American relations? This is something which many had expected to happen from the time of Charles de Gaulle all the way up to the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev, but perhaps the time has finally come. So, your take on this? Is the era of US hegemony and obedience to Washington's dictates nearing its end?

From the early postwar years, there was considerable concern in planning circles in Washington that Europe might move to become a “third force” in global affairs, a neutralist bloc. De Gaulle was indeed the leading proponent of this conception, and a version was revived by Gorbachev in his call for a “Common European Home” of cooperation and interchange from the Atlantic to the Urals, in which both NATO and the Warsaw Pact would be dismantled in favor of a pan-European security system. The idea was dismissed by the US in favor of expanding NATO, over the strong objections of George Kennan and other statesmen who warned, accurately enough, that this “policy error of historic proportions” would lead to rising and very ominous tensions on the Russian border. NATO's mission today, historian Richard Sakwa writes, is “to manage the risks created by its existence.”

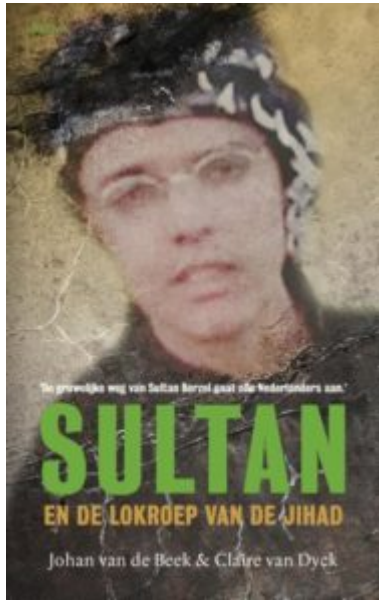
As to whether Europe today might move in an independent direction, I'm skeptical. Despite Trump's moves to diminish and isolate America, and to alienate allies, and despite the exit of America's major advocate (Britain) from the European Union, I suspect that Europe will be unwilling to pose a serious challenge to Washington. Europe faces too many internal problems, and despite Trump, the US still remains unmatched as a global power, with means of violence and coercion that it is not reluctant to use, as the world knows all too well.

But a lot remains uncertain. [As the business press observes](#), The United States' "ability to impose financial sanctions around the world depends on the willingness of China and Europe to comply — and that may be waning." In the case of China, it has been waning rapidly. China has been moving to establish an international currency regime and trading system independent of the US. Trump's effort to destroy the Iran nuclear deal has infuriated the Europeans, who reacted at once by agreeing to invoke rules to shield European Union companies from US sanctions, to permit the European Investment Bank to finance business in Iran, and to encourage European countries to explore transfers to Iran's central bank, bypassing the US-dominated international financial system. These "blocking mechanisms" were last invoked in 1996, when Clinton sought to curb European investment in Cuba, Iran and Libya. Clinton backed down. But the world has changed.

It's possible that Trump may succeed in creating a diminished America, hiding in fear behind walls, isolated and marginalized — though retaining plenty of guns to kill one another and a fearsome capacity to destroy at will.

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**Johan van de Beek en Claire van
Dyck ~ Verwerping van de
Westerse waarden**



Sultan en de lokroep van de jihad - Johan van de Beek en Claire van Dyck - Uitgeverij Balans - 2017 - ISBN 9789460034886 (Paperback) ISBN 9789460034893 (E-Book) & *The Middle East in Europe and Europe in the Middle East* (2008- I Have a dream- Felix Meritis en MEXIT)

In *'Sultan en de lokroep van de jihad'* beschrijven de onderzoeksjournalisten Johan van de Beek en Claire van Dyck het radicaliseringsproces van drie jonge Maastrichtenaars, die in 2014 vertrekken naar Syrië. Sultan Berzel, oftewel Abu Abdullah al-Hollandi blaast zich kort na zijn vertrek op op het Nisourplein in Bagdad en neemt 23 mensen mee in de dood.

Sultans Koerdische vriend Rezan, die hem vergezelt, sterft op het Syrische slagveld. De derde jihad ganger, de bekeerlinge Aïcha, voorheen Lina geheten en net als Berzel en Rezan afkomstig uit Maastricht (wijk Wittenvrouwenveld) weet te ontsnappen en keert terug naar Nederland. Zij gelooft nog steeds in de jihad.

De onderzoeksjournalisten proberen te achterhalen waarom deze jonge mensen besluiten deel te nemen aan de Islamitische Staat. Hadden ze tegen kunnen worden gehouden? En is er, na het kalifaat, een blijvend gevaar van radicalisering en terreur in Nederland?

Sinds 9/11 wordt er driftig gezocht naar een patroon, een universele theorie die kan verklaren waarom jonge mensen "het oerinstinct tot overleving uitschakelen en kiezen voor een gecombineerde zelfmoord/massamoord". Gevoelens van onrecht, discriminatie, gebroken gezinnen, zoektocht naar identiteit, armoede, eenzaamheid, opvoedingsproblemen, het verkeren in kringen waar afkeer van democratie en verwerping van westerse waarden worden gepredikt, kunnen niet alles verklaren: de zelfmoordterrorist blijft ongrijpbaar.

Terrorisme blijkt vooral een bourgeois aangelegenheid: islamitische terroristen vormen hierop geen uitzondering. De zelfmoordterrorist is vooral angstaanjagend omdat hij onvoorspelbaar is.

Via een zoektocht naar het begin, de reis terug, proberen de journalisten antwoorden te vinden. De levens van de drie jihadisten worden uitgebreid beschreven en diverse onderzoeken en auteurs worden aangehaald. Zoals de Franse jihadismekenner Gilles Kepel, die 'de burgeroorlog binnen de islam' benoemt, waarbij de linies niet alleen langs ideologische breukvlakken lopen, maar vaak ook tussen jong tegen oud.

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Terror in France: The rise of Jihad in the West with Giles Kepel

Over the last two years, France has been the target of multiple brutal terrorist attacks. What caused the radicalization of young French Muslims? Why did governments across Europe fail to address it?

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Jihad betekent 'zware, onzelfzuchtige inspanning voor het geloof' niet per se gewapende strijd, maar zoals gematigden zeggen, meer een strijd tegen het kwaad in de eigen ziel. Maar de meeste bronnen beschrijven de jihad als strijd tegen de ongelovigen.

Voor de drie jonge Limburgers is de oorlog tegen niet-moslims de enig correcte. Martelaarschap is het grootste offer dat je kunt brengen. Zelfmoordterroristen zijn geen zelfmoordenaars maar 'moedjahedien' die hebben besloten om alles en zichzelf op te offeren ten dienste van Allah.

Het komt niet vaak voor dat een jongere in zijn eentje radicaliseert (via sociale media) constateren de onderzoekers, er is vrijwel altijd een persoon of groep die een jongere richting radicalisering duwt, en dan worden sociale media van belang als bevestiging. "De algoritmes van Facebook helpen je verder op het al gekozen pad." Geen tegengeluid, maar een constante stroom van beelden die varianten zijn op hetzelfde thema. Onwetendheid wordt geëxploiteerd.

Opvoeding is belangrijk; moslimjongeren in westerse landen zoeken vaak iets waar ze bij kunnen horen. Ze horen thuis of in de moskee dat de islam superieur is en dat het Westen uit is op ondermijning van het geloof. Dan ontbreekt de drang dat je wil functioneren in de westerse maatschappij; liever omarm je de islam en dat kan in zijn uiterste consequentie leiden tot jihadgang of sympathie.

Kepel is ervan overtuigd dat terrorisme niet een oorlog van de islam tegen het Westen is, maar een oorlog binnen de islam zelf. "De derde generatie jihadisten

wil een klimaat van angst in Europa verspreiden. Dat moet leiden tot vijandelijkheid tegen álle moslims, waardoor die op hun beurt radicaliseren. Het uiteindelijke doel is een burgeroorlog en het stichten van een soort kalifaat op de ruïnes van het oude continent.“

Een culturele breuk met het Westen wordt ook door de meer gematigden salafisten gewenst. En in die breuk kunnen gefrustreerden zich vestigen en kan het idee van de jihad wortel schieten en woekeren.

Voor Kepel is het de vraag of intellectuelen en geleerden onder moslims in Europa hun tegenstem in Europa in de komende tijd luid genoeg zullen verheffen. En of de eenlingen die dat nu doen, medestanders zullen krijgen.

Is er, na het kalifaat, een blijvend gevaar van radicalisering en terreur in Nederland? In Marokkaanse kringen hebben de zorgen over de eigen jeugd inmiddels een alarmfase bereikt.

Tien jaar geleden, in 2008 organiseerde Felix Meritis, Europees Centrum voor Kunsten Wetenschappen, en MEXIT de manifestatie I HAVE A DREAM...

In dit kader vond op 13 juni de bijeenkomst *'The Middle East in Europe and Europe in the Middle East'* plaats. Met Nilüfer Göle, voormalig hoogleraar Sociologie aan de Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Parijs; Tariq Ramadan, voormalig gasthoogleraar aan de Erasmus Universiteit, Rotterdam en Paul Scheffer, voormalig bijzonder hoogleraar Grootstedelijke problematiek aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam. *Moderator: Markha Valenta*, voormalig onderzoeker Vrije Universiteit

Een verslag van deze bijeenkomst, waar de sprekers hoopvol waren over de rol van Europa bij het ontwikkelen van een Europese islam.

Lecture held by Paul Scheffer during the programme 'I Have a Dream... The Middle East in Europe and Europe in the Middle East' on 13 June 2008 in Felix Meritis (Amsterdam).

Lecture held by Nilüfer Göle during the programme 'I Have a Dream... The Middle East in Europe and Europe in the Middle East' on 13 June 2008 in Felix Meritis (Amsterdam)

Lecture held by Tariq Ramadan during the programme 'I Have a Dream... The Middle East in Europe and Europe in the Middle East' on 13 June 2008 in Felix Meritis (Amsterdam).

Göle spreekt over de publieke sfeer die moslims bijna dwingt een constructieve rol te spelen. Ramadan heeft het over de verborgen sfeer, waarin moslims zich onderwerpen aan kritisch zelfonderzoek, leidend tot een emancipatoire revolutie. Scheffer wijst op het belang van het waarborgen van werkelijke en complete godsdienstvrijheid. Alle drie constateren ze hoe de nationale staat roet in het eten gooit. Vandaar dat ze hoopvol zijn over de rol van Europa. Dit biedt een andere kader, maar daarvoor moeten we wel onze culturele puurheid opgeven.

Ontwikkelt er zich een nieuwe vorm van Europese islam of een vorm van islamitisch Europa? Is Europa een andere verhouding aan het ontwikkelen tot de islam en de moslims dan Amerika? Heeft de islam een meerwaarde voor Europa? Is de islam een versterking of een verzwakking voor de publieke ruimte?

De vraag die Nilüfer Göle zichzelf stelt is of de droom voor Europa een kans heeft. Draagt de islam bij aan de versterking van de Europese publieke sfeer, of juist niet? In de VS wordt diversiteit in de publieke sfeer geaccepteerd, in Europa niet. Hoe valt dit te verklaren? In haar wetenschappelijke werk bekijkt zij het vraagstuk van de Europeanisering van de culturele islam van twee kanten. Enerzijds vanuit de sociologie en dan vooral de invloed van immigratie op de publieke sfeer en anderzijds vanuit de publieke sfeer zelf. De islam speelt op drie niveaus een rol, namelijk nationaal, Europees en mondiaal.

In het nationale debat over de islam gaat het onder meer over de problematiek rondom de hoofddoek en creatieve uitingen in boeken, strips en films. Met andere woorden, de vrijheid van meningsuiting en gender-gelijkheid. Göle constateert een semantische verschuiving in de problematiek rondom deze onderwerpen. Want hoe noemen we vrouwen uit de tweede generatie Turkse migranten? Ze zijn eigenlijk niet meer Turks, maar hebben een bewuste identiteit, die echter

verschilt van Nederlandse vrouwen van hun leeftijd. De mogelijke Turkse toetreding tot de EU heeft het debat over een Europese identiteit op scherp gezet, omdat de feitelijke verbondenheid tussen Europa en een christelijke traditie blootlegt. Dan is er op mondiaal niveau terrorisme, dat al gauw synoniem is voor islamitische expansie. Hierdoor werd islam een hedendaags probleem. Eerst was het beperkt tot het Midden-Oosten, maar die 'veilige afstand' is verdwenen en dat veroorzaakt onrust. Plotseling gaat het om het aanvallen en verdedigen van de Europese publieke sfeer en dat leidt tot "het besef dat identiteit en puurheid een illusie zijn".

Göle komt tot de slotsom dat immigratie alleen de situatie niet afdoende verklaard. Sociologie belicht slechts het 'verticale staatsbeleid', terwijl het eigenlijk in essentie gaat om Europese waarden. Moslims introduceren andere openbare waarden in de oorspronkelijke Europese liberale pluralistische waarden. Zou Europa zich kunnen openstellen voor andere bronnen van beschaving? Zij ziet al tekenen van het ontstaan van een publieke sfeer waarin sprake is van 'wederzijds lenen' in plaats van het van boven af opleggen van Westerse waarden.

Eigenlijk is de kern van het probleem: conflicterende dromen. Welke droom gaan we delen? Volgens Göle zouden we niet de 'droom van de ander over Europa' moeten delen, maar samen dromen van 'het andere Europa'.

Tariq Ramadan haakt aan bij de dromen van Göle. Hij denkt dat het gaat om twee verschillende dromen, waaraan echter wel een vergelijkbare analyse ten grondslag ligt. Hij ziet een juxtapositie tussen het gezichtspunt van binnen en van buiten. Is het niet zo dat voor Europese moslims de droom al werkelijkheid is? Zij zijn Nederlands, ze zijn Europeaan en ze zijn moslim.

Ramadan is ervan overtuigd dat 'verwarring' het grote probleem is. We blijken telkens weer niet in staat goed te beoordelen wat er echt aan de hand is. Misschien komt het omdat de islam een gepassioneerd geloof is en passie tot verwarring leidt. In Europese en moslim landen bestaat twijfel en spanning. Volgens Ramadan komt het allemaal neer op die ene vraag: "Wie zijn wij in deze mondiale wereld?" Het antwoord moet gezocht worden bij de natiestaat en niet bij het geloof. Twee dingen zijn daar voor nodig: uiteenrafelen (*deconstruct*) en nieuwe zichtbaarheid. Om het probleem aan te pakken moeten we ons concentreren op de uitdagingen van moslims in hun samenlevingen. Hoe dragen zij daaraan bij?

Ramadan trekt de directe lijn tussen gezagsgetrouwheid en burgerschap. Uit cijfers op *grassroot* niveau blijkt dat de overgrote meerderheid van de immigranten zich aan de wet houdt. Moslims zijn staatsburgers en meer dan hun ouders zichtbaar in de *mainstream*. Ze maken steeds meer deel uit van de samenleving waarin ze leven. Deze nieuwe vorm van zichtbaarheid, dat is waar het volgens Ramadan om draait. Hij spreekt van een "stille revolutie". De uitdagingen zijn religieus en cultureel, een dialectisch proces. De spanningen die zich openbaren bij de mensen in het proces moeten goed worden bestudeerd.

Hoe ziet zo'n studie er uit? Ramadan introduceert drie L-en, die we moeten bestuderen en respecteren op *grassroot* niveau: *Laws* (wetten), *Language* (taal) and *Loyalty* (loyaliteit). Doorgrond de wetten van het land als je ze ter discussie wilt stellen. Beheers de taal als je vrij wilt zijn om als burger bij te dragen en respect te krijgen. Wees loyaal op kritische en consistente wijze met wederzijds respect. Wanneer deze drie L-en in acht worden genomen voorkomt dit verwarring doordat het twee belangrijke belemmeringen wegneemt: het minderheidsdenken en de slachtoffermentaliteit. Het zorgt voor een verbinding tussen *insider* en *outsider*. Daarenboven wordt op deze wijze het islamiseren en culturaliseren van het sociale probleem voorkomen en de causale relatie daartussen teniet gedaan: "Verwar mijn aanwezigheid niet met immigratie!"

Ramadan heeft het aan den lijve ondervonden. Als moslim intellectueel is hij, zoals hij het zelf noemt een *contradictio in terminis*. Zijn persoonlijke missie is het hameren op het loslaten van het minderheidsdenken en de slachtoffermentaliteit. In plaats hiervan kan een algemeen gevoel van 'erbij horen' ontstaan, dat kenmerkend zal zijn voor het postintegratie denken. Zijn ethiek van het burgerschap is een voorwaarde voor het bouwen van een pluralistisch Europa. Er rest alleen het nieuwe ons, een uitdaging, maar daar zullen we het mee moeten doen. En dat gaat lukken, want we zijn allemaal thuis en bezig onze toekomst vorm te geven.

De aanwezigheid van de islam in Europa is relatief nieuw, aldus Paul Scheffer. Het proces dat begon met de immigratie in de jaren zestig nadert zijn eind. We zullen de aanwezigheid van moslims in onze samenleving moeten bevestigen en dan voorwaarts zonder om te zien. Hij ziet een parallel met de Duitse migratie naar de VS aan het begin van de 20e eeuw. Duitsers werden in de VS gezien als 'onloyaal'. Maar tegelijkertijd zei president Woodrow Wilson daar in 1916 over: "Er bestaat niet zoiets als een Duitse Amerikaan, alleen een Amerikaan".

Scheffer pleit voor eenzelfde benadering. Het zou niet langer moeten gaan om de islam IN Europa, maar de islam EN Europa. Er bestaat geen voorspelbare kloof bestaat tussen de opvattingen van moslims en niet-moslims als het gaat over het Midden-Oosten, maar een discussie over hoe de VS haar invloed daar doet gelden. Toen de Fitna-zaak speelde, waarschuwde Syrië Nederland als geheel, dus inclusief de één miljoen Moslims. En ook constateert Scheffer een vorm van niet-slachtoffergedrag van moslims in Nederland. Deze drie voorbeelden wijzen op een groeiende differentiatie van de moslimervaringen in Nederland en Europa. Vandaar zijn pleidooi om vanaf nu te spreken over islam EN Europa.

Want als het gaat om islam in Europa constateert Scheffer een verontrustende trend. Het lijkt er namelijk op dat de beginselen van godsdienstvrijheid in het gedrang komen en moeten worden verdedigd tegen de druk van de staat. We moeten waakzaam blijven voor deze basale vrijheid, de vrijheid van geloof. Er lijkt sprake van een tendens om hieraan afbreuk te doen in naam van andere idealen, aldus Scheffer.

Hij is het niet eens met Göle als ze spreekt van een publieke sfeer waarin sprake is van “wederzijds lenen”. Integratie is namelijk nog steeds een realiteit. En integratie betekent segregatie en reciprociteit; het elkaar anders laten zijn. Maar hij ziet wel het belang van een open samenleving, zoals Soros die bedoelt. Samen maken mensen hun eigen samenleving.

Als een van de oorzaken van de huidige situatie noemt Scheffer de afwezigheid van een culturele dialoog. Over geloofsafvalligheid, ofwel apostasie, valt bijvoorbeeld nauwelijks te praten. Een goed begin zou kunnen zijn het delen van ‘de horizon van godsdienstvrijheid’. Maar tot op heden heeft nog geen enkele politicus deze oproep gedaan.

Scheffer ziet convergentie in de gedeelde en geleefde werkelijkheid. Er ontstaat een nieuwe realiteit, waarin het gaat om het loslaten van het ideaal van etniciteit en het herbevestigen van het ideaal van het geloof. Daarmee zal ook populisme afzwakken, omdat dat is gebouwd op de etniciteit van de meerderheid. “Etniciteit slijt, geloof zal blijven”. Waar we vandaan komen moet plaats maken voor waar we heengaan.

Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten

‘Be Realistic, Demand The Impossible!’ ~ How The Events Of 1968 Transformed French Society



France. Paris et Banlieue. Graffiti, bombages, inscription et affiche dans les fac et les rue autour de mai 1968

This week, 50 years ago, France was going through the biggest labour strike in its history. Two-thirds of its labour force were out in the streets demanding better working conditions. Workers had taken control of factories, set up barricades, organised sit-ins and fought off attempts by the police to disperse them. Thousands of students who had rebelled against conservative university administrations had also joined them.

By the end of the week, French President Charles de Gaulle would disappear from Paris, seeking support from the French army for a military intervention against the strikers.

Tanks, however, would not roll down the streets of Paris that year. De Gaulle would decide instead to dissolve the parliament and call for general elections. Although the crisis would subside by June, the events of May would have a major ripple effect in space and time.

Today, 50 years later, we can honestly say that what happened in May 1968 – from Paris to Prague, and from Mexico to Madrid – was the most significant political development that took place in the West during this tumultuous decade.

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of the second chapter of the civil rights movement in the US, the re-radicalisation of the labour force throughout Western Europe, women's rights, and gay rights. But the political scene in the 1960s was marked above all else by the Vietnam War and the protests of 1968 against political elites, authoritarianism, and the bureaucratisation of everyday life.

They were spontaneous, explosive protests of rebellious spirits that changed fundamentally the political, social and cultural landscape of entire nations, although no revolution ever occurred

The May '68 protests had the most dramatic impact in the country that had experienced one of the greatest social upheavals in western history, the French Revolution.

And it all started, as most challenges to the status quo do, by the youth.

French students who came of age with politics and philosophy normalising resistance and personal responsibility (Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist-Marxism reigned supreme throughout the 1960s) rebelled against a highly traditional and even archaic educational system, but their protests soon developed into a fight against the capitalist system and the whole bourgeois model, resting on a "patriarchal-authoritarian sexual order" came under attack.

The student protests in France actually started in 1967, at Nanterre University, against restrictions that prevented male students from visiting female colleagues at their dorm.

A series of events that followed in the first months of 1968, including the arrest of several students over the explosion of an American Express office in central Paris, helped to further radicalise the youth. The protests spread to other universities after Nanterre University was shut down by its dean in a desperate attempt to prevent the further escalation of protests.

When the Sorbonne was also closed following clashes between students and police, a major march was scheduled for May 10 which led to the Night of the Barricades.

What followed is well-traversed territory by journalists and historians alike.

Thousands of students clashed in the early hours of May 11, with hundreds of riot police who used tear gas and beat students with truncheons. By the time the sun

came up, hundreds of students had been hospitalised and some 500 had been arrested.

By then, the battle was not merely over sexual repression and educational reform. It was about a demand for deep social transformation and that demand was accompanied by inexorable anger over the hypocrisy of a conservative, authoritarian system, the legacy of the Algerian independence war, and, yes, even the legacy of collaboration with the Nazis during World War II.

The French student protests of May 1968 were indeed about producing a national catharsis in the context of a rapidly changing world.

As such, the slogan that best captures the spirit of the May 1968 protests was the one that first appeared mainly on the walls of Paris and read as follows: “Be realistic, demand the impossible.”

A few days after the Night of the Barricades, millions of workers walked off their job and joined the nation-wide strike. The French Communist Party and its allied labour union organisation, the Confederation Generale du Travail, did their best to keep workers apart from students and to block any potential path to a revolution.

Indeed, like all potential revolutions, this one was also betrayed from within.

To the surprise of many at the time, the May 1968 protests ended in early June when the trade unions accepted a government deal which included generous wage hikes and a shorter work week. Soon afterwards, the student protests also fizzled out.

Nonetheless, the May 1968 protests changed France in fundamental ways.

For starters, the rage behind the protests led to an end of Gaullism, a highly conservative, state-oriented ideology, and converted the country into an open, tolerant and secular society.

Thanks to the spirit and the aims of the May '68 protests, women became socially liberated (before, French women could not even wear pants at work and had to have a husband's permission to open a bank account), while worker militancy secured better conditions of life and work.

It is of little surprise therefore that conservative political leaders in France (and elsewhere) continue to this day to blame the legacy of May 1968 for the overthrow of conservative norms and values.

This spirit of change and openness, however, has not really survived to present

times. Today's France has turned inward, resisting change and embracing xenophobia. French democracy has plunged into crisis.

Students and workers remain politically active, but they lack the rage of their predecessors and are in need of a new vision for the future.

Does this mean then that the legacy of May 1968, like that of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, is now just a memory? Perhaps. But the course of history has fooled us before, and it can fool us again.

In a world of dire need for radical change and social justice, the May revolts of 1968 could still become a source of inspiration. All that it takes is a new generation of rebellious spirit, bold enough to say "Be realistic, demand the impossible!"

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Graham Greene And Mexico ~ A Hint Of An Explanation



Graham Greene 1904 - 1991

In a short letter to the press, in which he referred to Mexico, Graham Greene substantially expressed his view of the world.

"I must thank Mr. Richard West for his understanding notice of *The Quiet*

American. No critic before, that I can remember, has thus pinpointed my abhorrence of the American liberal conscience whose results I have seen at work in Mexico, Vietnam, Haiti and Chile.”

(Yours, etc., Letters to the Press. 1979)

Mexico is a peripheral country with a difficult history, and undeniably the very long border that it shares with the most powerful nation on earth has largely determined its fate.

After his trip to Mexico in 1938, Greene had very hard words to say about the latter country, but then he spoke with equal harshness about the “hell” he had left behind in his English birthplace, Berkhamsted. He “loathed” Mexico...” but there were times when it seemed as if there were worse places. Mexico “was idolatry and oppression, starvation and casual violence, but you lived under the shadow of religion – of God or the Devil.”

However, the United States was worse:

“It wasn’t evil, it wasn’t anything at all, it was just the drugstore and the Coca Cola, the hamburger, the sinless empty graceless chromium world.”

(Lawless Roads)

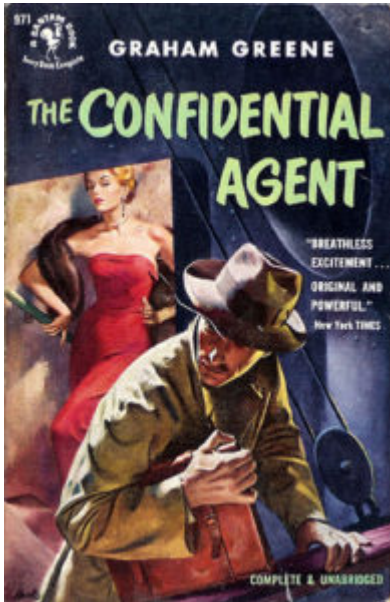
He also expressed abhorrence for what he saw on the German ship that took him back to Europe:

“Spanish violence, German Stupidity, Anglo-Saxon absurdity...the whole world is exhibited in a kind of crazy montage.”

(Ibidem)

As war approached, he wrote: “Violence came nearer – Mexico is a state of mind.” In “the grit of the London afternoon”, he said, “I wondered why I had disliked Mexico so much.” Indeed, upon asking himself why Mexico had seemed so bad and London so good, he responded: “I couldn’t remember”.

And we ourselves can repeat the same unanswered question. Why such virulent hatred of Mexico? We know that his money was devalued there, that he caught dysentery there, that the fallout from the libel suit that he had lost awaited him upon his return to England, and that he lost his reading glasses, among other things that could so exasperate a man that he would express his discontent in his writing, but I recall that it was one of Greene’s friends, dear Judith Adamson, who described one of his experiences in Mexico as *unfair*. Why?



The answer might lie in the fact that he never mentioned all the purposes of his trip.

In *The Confidential Agent*, one of the three books that Greene wrote after returning to England, working on it at the same time as *The Power and the Glory*, he makes no mention whatsoever of Mexico, but it is hard to believe that the said work had nothing to do with such an important experience as his trip there.

D, the main character in *The Confidential Agent*, goes to England in pursuit of an important coal contract that will enable the government he represents to fight the fascist rebels in the Spanish Civil War, though Greene never explicitly states that the country in question is Spain. The said confidential agent knows that his bosses don't trust him and have good reason not to do so, just as he has good reason to mistrust them.

We, who know Greene only to the extent that he wanted us to know him, are aware that writers recount their own lives as if they were those of other people, and describe the lives of others as if they were their own. Might he not, then, have transferred to a character called D, in a completely different setting, his own real experiences as a confidential agent in Mexico?

Besides wishing to witness the religious persecution in Mexico first-hand, his mission might also have been to report on developments in the aforesaid country and regarding its resources -above all its petroleum- in view of the imminent outbreak of the Second World War.

England possessed domestic coal supplies, but did not have enough petroleum reserves to sustain a war against worldwide fascism, which Greene deemed to be a nihilistic view of life that respected nobody and eschewed all rules, being destined to fight against it later as an employee of M16.

We may never know whether Greene worked as a confidential agent in Mexico, but there are some hints that this was indeed the case. Furthermore, in *The Confidential Agent*, he counterbalances the feelings expressed in his account of his travels in Mexico; in England, they call D a "bloody dago", bearing witness to the fact that not only racism, but also violence, could also be found in the latter country where enemy agents roamed freely and the majority of businessmen were only out for personal profit.

Though D fails to get the contract he is after, he does fall in love with a girl and,

in a last attempt to at least make sure that the enemy does not get its hands on the resources that he has failed to secure for his side, travels to Benditch, a coal-mining area beset by economic stagnation and unemployment, to ask the people there to show solidarity with his beleaguered people.

The book contains one scene in Benditch that makes it clear that England was not endowed with its own petroleum resources:

“...an odd metallic object rose over the crest.

He said, ‘What’s that?’

‘Oh, that’, the porter said, ‘that’s nothing. That was just a notion they got.’

‘An ugly-looking notion.’

‘Ugly? You’d say that, would you? I don’t know. You get used to things. I’d miss it if it weren’t there.

‘It looks like something to do with oil.’

‘That’s what it is. They had a fool notion they’d find oil here. We could have told ‘em – but they were Londoners. They thought they knew.’

‘There was no oil?’

‘Oh, they got enough to light these lamps with, I daresay.’ ”

(The Confidential Agent.)

While D does not find the support he is looking for in Benditch, he succeeds in eliciting a response from some young anarchists who cause a big scandal by blowing up a coal mine, thus managing, at least, to prevent the other side from gaining access to the resources that it needs.

In one scene in *The Power and the Glory*, where the “whisky priest” can’t stop the half-breed from confessing his sins, the analogy between the latter character pouring out his sins and a gushing, out-of-control oil has a strong impact on us, because we are aware that petroleum has always played a central role in wars, and continues to do so to this day:

“...the man wouldn’t stop. The priest was reminded of an oil-gusher which some prospectors had once struck near Concepción – it wasn’t a good enough field apparently to justify further operations, but there it had stood for forty-eight hours against the sky, a black fountain spouting out of the marshy useless soil and flowing away to waste fifty thousand gallons an hour. It was like the religious sense in man, cracking suddenly upwards, a black pillar of fumes and impurity, running to waste. ‘Shall I tell you what’ve I done? –it’s your business to listen. I’ve taken money from women to do you know what...’ ”

(The Power and the Glory)

Ever since its colonization, Mexico has been the scene of disputes between the great powers, and, in 1938 the country was a centre for both overt and covert operations by the said powers, including, of course, Nazi Germany.

In *The Lawless Roads*, Greene mentions the presence in Mexico of two rebel fascist generals, Rodríguez in the north and Cedillo in San Luis Potosí. He managed to get an interview with the latter, just before his execution for armed rebellion, through the offices of “an old German teacher of languages” who was close to him and insisted on playing the philosopher: “Motion is life,” he said, “and life is motion,” as if referring to the perpetual motion spouting in the Nazi swastika.

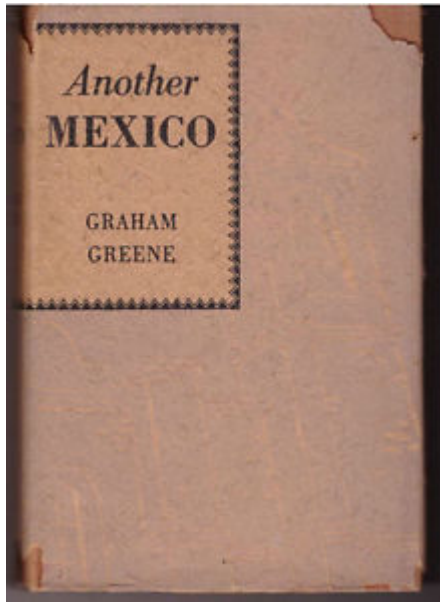
Greene confessed to his readers, but not to the Mexican authorities, that the real purpose of his trip was to observe the religious conflict, and that he had only visited archaeological sites to mislead the authorities. Though the bloody religious war had ended by then, atrocities were still common; The Mexican Catholic hierarchy and General Cedillo belonged to the Mexican right wing, which maintained links with the Spanish Falangists and the German fascists.

In this context, while the Mexican Catholics were to be Greene’s fellows, those in Europe were to be his enemies, so that the distance between him and the European Catholic hierarchy was to be just as great as that between the imprisoned “whisky priest” and the bishop:

“He thought of the old man now - in the capital: living in one of those ugly comfortable pious houses, full of images and holy pictures, saying mass on Sundays at one of the cathedral altars.”

(Ibidem)

There were sympathizers with Germany not only in Mexico but also in many other parts of Latin America, and there were also stark contradictions in the United States, where, between 1938 and 1940, Nazi Germany was an important client of Rockefeller’s petroleum companies and of many other big corporations.



There were German citizens who owned large coffee plantations, on which they hoarded large amounts of military supplies, in the Mexican state of Chiapas, where Greene discovered that people were awaiting the return of a conservative general called Pineda. A visit to the said state would enable him to take note of events that could affect his country when war broke out and in fact he travelled further into its interior than the “whisky priest” did, reaching the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, while the latter travels only a few miles inland, going back to the border between the states of Chiapas and Tabasco to

die.

German interest in Mexico, due to its geographical location and its resources, goes back as far as the First World War, on the eve of which British naval intelligence intercepted and deciphered what is known as the Zimmermann Telegram, which was a diplomatic proposal, made on January 16th, 1917, by Arthur Zimmermann, the Foreign Secretary of the German Empire, that Germany and Mexico form an alliance in the event that the United States entered World War I against Germany. The said telegram read: “We propose that Germany and Mexico form an alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to regain its lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Please draw the President’s attention to the fact that the ruthless deployment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England to make peace within a few months.”

The aims set forth in the German proposal, which was merely meant as a provocation, were unachievable, and Mexico rejected it.

It seems unlikely that Greene could have been unaware of the aforesaid incident when he went to Mexico, since his uncle, Graham, had been Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty under Churchill during the First World War, in addition to which, while still very young, the author had written about the disastrous conditions imposed on defeated Germany under the Treaty of Versailles, opining that the British had been right to disassociate itself from the French thirst for revenge. “Otherwise,” he wrote, “another war is inevitable, and within twenty years.” (*In the Occupied Area. Reflections*)

Greene agreed with the comments made by the famous economist, John Maynard Keynes, about the armistice with Germany:

“But who can say how much is endurable, or in what direction men will seek at last to escape from their misfortunes?”

(The Economic Consequences of the Peace. 1919.)

While nothing now remains of it, what was to be referred to in retrospect as the Mexican Revolution did indeed occur and, for a time, bear fruit, thanks to the leadership of General Lázaro Cárdenas, who was Mexico's president when Greene visited that country.

Cárdenas became president of Mexico in December, 1934, having taken his campaign the length and breadth of the country, calling on its people to join forces. Though his aim was to eventually restore Mexican sovereignty and recover his country's petroleum resources from the foreign companies and governments that then controlled them, he first went about taking care of the people's most pressing needs and making them more confident both in themselves and in their power as a social force. While he was by no means unflawed, nobody can accuse him of religious intolerance, given that it was he who sent the extremist, Garrido Canabal, into exile, along with ex president, Plutarco Elias Calles, who sympathized with Germany.

In 1935 the major task of organizing wage-earning workers was undertaken; company trade unions were transformed into large, industry-wide entities, including the one pertaining to the petroleum industry, while new organizations sprang up where none had previously existed. A wave of strikes and other industrial actions were favourably ruled on by the conciliation and arbitration boards and the courts, with the majority of wage and collective-bargaining disputes being won by the workers.

This major unionization effort was followed in 1936 by radical agrarian reform whereby almost 50 million acres of good arable land previously owned by landlords and foreign companies were split up into cooperatives called *ejidos* or divided into individual lots, in the wake of which came schools, rural teachers, universal primary education, and credits for the purchase of seed, harvesting and crop mechanisation, along with collective mooting of *ejido* projects and problems, and, in not a few cases, weapons to defend the aforesaid gains from the onslaughts of violent landlords and their private armies of paid hoodlums.

Under Cárdenas, Mexico supported the Spanish Republic with guns and money, subsequently granting asylum to exiled supporters of the Republican cause and opening its doors to the victims of political persecution. It denounced the invasion of Ethiopia by the Italian fascists and, on March 18th, 1938, when the petroleum industry was expropriated from the foreign interests that controlled it, it refused to recognize the annexation of Austria by the German fascists.

Notwithstanding the hardships that Mexico suffered as a result of the blockade imposed on it after the aforesaid expropriation, it supplied the allies with petroleum during the war, while Cárdenas' personal support for the Cuban Revolution is common knowledge.

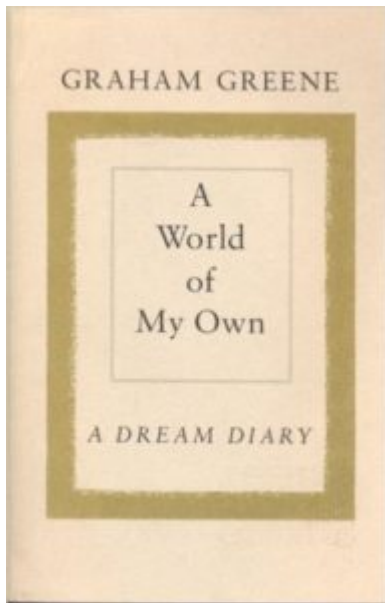
Greene must have realized that the expropriation of Mexican petroleum from the British companies did not mean a gain for Germany, since Cárdenas was anti-fascist. In Mexico this placed him in a stalemate position similar to that in which his character, D, finds himself when he endeavours to procure English coal for his country.

At this time when Mexican petroleum is once more being handed over to the big global corporations, and Mexico is distancing itself from the rest of Latin America, we would do well to recall that Greene acknowledged Mexico to be the country where his faith became far more emotional than intellectual.

In 1990 he wrote about "the dangerous preference for the poor" of the Catholic Church in Latin America and about the things he had seen during his visit to Mexico:

"...as early as 1937, there was a hint in Mexico of what might become the future base communities. As a result of persecution, the church had been a good deal cleansed of Romanism - even drastically cleansed as I had seen in Tabasco where no church and no priest remained, and hardly less so in Chiapas where no priest was allowed to enter a church. The secret Masses held in private houses might be described as middle-class, but when on Sundays the Indians came down from the mountains and tried to celebrate the Mass, as far as they remembered it, without a priest, surely the base communities were already beginning..."

(Church and Politics in Latin America. Foreword. 1990)



He also mentioned Latin America in the speech he gave in the Kremlin:

“...for over a hundred years there has been a certain suspicion, an enmity even, between the Roman Catholic Church and Communism. This is not true Marxism, for Marx condemned Henry VIII for closing monasteries. But this is a suspicion which has reminded. For the last fifteen years or so, I have been spending a great deal of time in Latin America, and there, I’m happy to say, the suspicion is dead and buried, except for a few individual Catholics, nearly as old as I am. It no longer exists. We are fighting -Roman Catholics are fighting together with

the Communists, and working together with the Communists. We are fighting together against the Death Squads in El Salvador. We are fighting against the Contras in Nicaragua. We are fighting together against General Pinochet in Chile.”

Saying “There is no longer a barrier between Roman Catholics and Communism” (*Meeting in the Kremlin*. 1987), Greene expressed a desire that the unity achieved in Latin America might spread all over the world.

Significantly, on one of the pages of his dream diary, *A World of My Own*, he writes: “In January 1983 I was in Mexico attached to a gang of guerrillas pursued by the army.”

But there can be no doubt the Latin American country with which Greene’s most closely identified as a human being was the Panama of Omar Torrijos. An excerpt from a report of his comments to Reuters press agency on December 20th, 1989, the day after the United States invaded Panama, reads:

“Greene said that General Manuel Noriega was not ‘half as bad’ as Washington’s record in Central America. Reached by telephone at his French Riviera home, the 85-year-old writer condemned yesterday’s intervention by US troops, asserting that ‘The United States has no business interfering in Panama’.”

Speaking thus shortly before his death, Greene remained faithful to his wish to die as a fighter...a Latin American fighter...a man with a faith. And a poet.

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About the author:

Rubén Moheno was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México. He is an economist at

the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM, where he also studied Law and Cinematography. He has made a feature film, and numerous documentaries, as director, screenwriter and cinematographer. He is a writer of short stories and essays on literature, film, economics, politics, international affairs, and translator of English and French literature into Spanish, with collaborations in various media, from 1990 to date. He is currently working in the Mexican newspaper La Jornada. He has lectured on Graham Greene and his work. He received the National Journalism Award 2000, awarded by the Journalists Club of Mexico AC, on 9 December 1999, for his essay 'Graham Greene & The Lost Maps'.

Paper read at the Graham Greene International Festival in Berkhamsted, England (September 2014)

David Van Reybrouck ~ Zink (2016) met Mohamed El Bachiri en Een jihad van liefde (2017)



David van Reybrouck

Tekening: Joseph Sassoon

Semah

David Van Reybrouck tekent in 'Zink' het verhaal op van Joseph Rixen, zoon van Maria Rixen, dienstmeisje bij een fabriekseigenaar in Düsseldorf. Nadat ze van hem zwanger was geraakt en verstoet, kwam ze in het najaar 1902 terecht in Neutral Moresnet, "waar meer meisjes naar toe trokken en waar men je met rust liet". Haar zoon groeit op in een pleeggezin, waar zijn naam van Joseph in Emil Pauly veranderd. Hij wordt speelbal van de ontwrichtende (oorlogs)geschiedenis van dit ministaatje, dat van 1816 tot 1919 het buurland was van Nederland, België en Duitsland. Gedurende een ruime eeuw bezat het een eigen vlag, een eigen bestuur, een eigen rijkswacht en een eigen nationaal volkslied in het Esperanto. Ooit

moest het de eerste staat worden waar de officiële taal Esperanto was. Men vond er o.a. zink.

De jonge Emil, verwekt in Pruisen, geboren in neutraal gebied, woont sinds 1915, zonder te verhuizen, voor de volgende drie jaar in het westelijk deel van het Duitse keizerrijk. Na de wapenstilstand in 1918 wordt Brussel zijn hoofdstad; hij is pas vijftien en al aan zijn derde nationaliteit toe. Na zijn dienstplicht in het Belgische leger, trouwt Emil met Jeanne Lafèbre, afkomstig uit Tilburg. Tussen 1934 en 1950 worden elf kinderen geboren, negen zonen en twee dochters. Ze wonen in Kelmis, waar hij bakker is.

In mei 1940 valt Hitler België binnen en annexeert het voormalige Neutraal Moresnet. Inwoners krijgen de Duitse nationaliteit en moeten onder de Wehrmacht gaan dienen. Het nazi bestuur wil Jeanne eren met het 'Ehrenkreuz der Deutsche Mutter', hetgeen ze weigert.

"Wat heeft zij als Nederlandse die naar België is verhuisd te maken met een Führer die beweert dat het gezin 'het slagveld van de moeder' is?" Als het zevende kind is geboren, eist de overheid dat hij als Duits staatsburger de voornaam en het peterschap van Hermann Wilhelm Göring krijgt. Voor de administratie wordt deze zoon Leo gedoopt, voor de kerk naar de Belgische vorst Leopold, de ouders wilden niet al te provocerend zijn. In 1943, na de nederlaag bij Stalingrad, wordt Emil Rixen ingelijfd bij de Wehrmacht; later deserteert hij. Na de bevrijding keert hij terug bij zijn gezin, maar wordt gearresteerd door een ondergrondse verzetsorganisatie. Niet als Belg, verdacht van collaboratie,

maar als Duitser in dienst van de Wehrmacht.



“Zonder ooit in zijn leven te verhuizen is hij Neutraal geweest, rijksingezetene van het Duitse keizerrijk, inwoner van het koninkrijk België en staatsburger binnen het Derde Rijk. Voor hij wederom Belg zal worden, zijn vijfde nationaliteitswissel, wordt hij afgevoerd als Duits krijgsgevangene. Hij heeft geen grenzen overgestoken, de grenzen zijn hem overgestoken.”

Emil, wiens identiteit zó vaak ‘als een klompje zinkerst is gesmolten en omgesmolten’, is onthecht geraakt.

In 1952 moet hij stoppen met werken; hij is op. Tot zijn dood in 1971 slijt hij zijn dagen achter het raam. Inmiddels is Kelmis weer onderdeel geworden van België; en in de jaren daarna heeft de Duitstalige gemeenschap steeds meer politieke rechten gekregen.

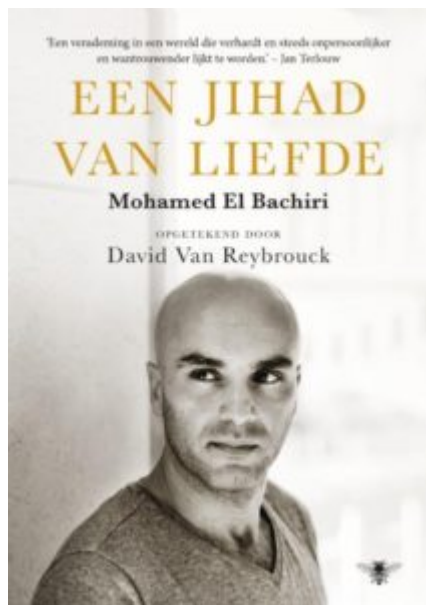
‘Zink’, het boekenweekessay 2016, is onderscheiden met de Prix du Lire Européen 2017.

Een jihad van liefde (2017), heeft David Van Reybrouck samen met de Marokkaanse Belg Mohamed El Bachiri geschreven, die op 22 maart 2016 zijn vrouw Loubna Lafquiri verloor bij de aanslagen in Brussel.

Een paar dagen na de herdenking in de Grote Moskee van Brussel is Loubna begraven in Salé, de stad van haar vader. Later wordt El Bachiri, zijn drie kinderen en schoonmoeder uitgenodigd op bezoek te komen bij de koning van Marokko die diepgeraakt is door de dood van Loubna. “Onze identiteit als Marokkaan”, zei de koning, “bestaat erin dat we goede burgers zijn, waar we ook wonen. Dat is Marokkaans zijn. Het samenleven met elkaar bevorderen. Vanuit die gedachte wil ik me wijden aan het verduurzamen van de vriendschap tussen de twee volkeren die me na aan het hart liggen.”

In het boekje wordt in korte hoofdstukken de innerlijke strijd, ‘de grote jihad’, de

inspanning die iedere moslim moet aangaan tegen zijn eigen hartstochten, belicht. Meer een gedicht, een eerbetoon aan Loubna, een antwoord aan de menselijkheid, een uitdrukking van pijn, maar ook veerkracht door liefde, menselijkheid, en geloof.



Het begint met 'Die dag', de dag dat zij de metro nam, en metrobestuurder Mohamed El Bachiri instortte. Vervolgens probeert hij middels het schrijven over zijn jeugd, geschiedenis en grote liefde dichter bij haar te komen, weer vader te worden van drie jonge zonen en vat te krijgen op zijn situatie, als moslim die bij twee landen hoort, van België en Marokko.

Mohamed is voortgekomen uit de eerste immigratiegolf, geboren in Sint-Agatha-Berhem, vlakbij Molenbeek. Thuis wordt Frans gesproken, hij gaat wel kort naar Arabische les om de Koran te leren reciteren, die hij als poëzie als weergaloos ervaart. Hij zit vervolgens op een katholieke school, met veel kinderen uit de Marokkaanse gemeenschap, en beschouwt Christus als een eerdere profeet.

El Bachiri beschouwt zichzelf als moslim, zowel door geboorte als door overtuiging. Koran is het woord van God, terwijl de Bijbel, het Nieuwe Testament, gewoon een verhaal is. De krijgsvolke passages uit de Koran zijn historisch, en niet meer universeel geldig. Hij is een groot tegenstander van fundamentalisme. Hij moedigt dan ook andere moslims aan barmhartigheid tegenover anderen tentoon te spreiden.

In het hoofdstukje 'Daders' spreekt El Bachiri de daders rechtstreeks aan, die uitgaan van de logica van haat "Als je denkt dat onschuldigen doden en drama's veroorzaken voor jou een vorm van gerechtigheid is, en als dat zelfs de gerechtigheid van God is, dan hebben jij en ik niet dezelfde religie."

"Kosmopolitisme is een cultuur die zich nestelt naast de plaatselijke cultuur, maar haar niet vervangt. Ik breng mijn cultuur mee, maar niet om de cultuur van een ander omlaag te halen. Ik zou willen zeggen: 'Vertel over jezelf, mens uit verre streken. Vertel me het verhaal van je volk'. Ik wil het niet horen om je te veroordelen. Maar omdat jouw verhaal ook het mijne is. Je kunt je cultuur verliezen, je geloof, je land, maar je menselijkheid verlies je niet."

David Van Reybrouck en Mohamed El Bachiri ontvingen voor *Een jihad van liefde* in 2017 het Ereteken van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap.

Zink - ISBN 9789403105604 - De Bezige Bij - Amsterdam

Een jihad van liefde - ISBN 9789023471622 - De Bezige Bij - Amsterdam

Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten

May Day 2018: A Rising Tide Of Worker Militancy And Creative Uses Of Marx



Prof.dr. Jayati Ghosh - Photo:
blogs.lse.ac.uk

International Workers' Day grew out of 19th century working-class struggles in the United States for better working conditions and the establishment of an eight-hour workday. May 1 was chosen by the international labor movement as the day to commemorate the Haymarket massacre in May 1886. Ever since, May 1 has been a day of working-class marches and demonstrations throughout the world, although state apparatuses in the United States do their best to erase the day from public awareness.

In the interview below, one of the world's leading radical economists, Jawaharlal Nehru University Professor *Jayati Ghosh*, who is also an activist closely involved

with a range of progressive and radical social movements, discusses the significance of May Day with C.J. Polychroniou for Truthout. She also analyzes how different and challenging the contemporary economic and political landscape has become in the age of global neoliberalism, examining the new forms of class struggle that have surfaced in recent years and what may be needed for the re-emergence of a new international working-class movement.

C.J. Polychroniou: Jayati, each year, people all over the world march to commemorate International Worker's Day, or May 1. In your view, how does the economic and political landscape on May Day, 2018, compare to those on past May Days?

Jayati Ghosh: Ever since the eruption of workers' struggles on May 1, 1886, commemorating May Day each year reminds us of what organized workers' movements can achieve. Over more than a century, these struggles progressively won better conditions for labor in many countries. But such victories — and even such struggles — have now become much harder than they were. Globalization of trade, capital mobility and financial deregulation have weakened dramatically the bargaining power of labor vis-à-vis capital. Perversely, this very success of global capitalism has weakened its ability to provide more rapid or widespread income expansion. As capitalism breeds and results in greater inequality, it loses sources of demand to provide stimulus for accumulation, and it also generates greater public resentment against the system.

The trouble is that, instead of workers everywhere uniting against the common enemy/oppressor, they are turned against one another. Workers are told that mobilizing and organizing for better conditions will simply reduce jobs because capital will move elsewhere; local residents are led to resent migrants; people are persuaded that their problems are not the result of the unjust system but are because of the "other" — defined by nationality, race, gender, religion, ethnic or linguistic identity. So this is a particularly challenging time for workers everywhere in the world. Confronting this challenge requires more than marches to commemorate May Day; it requires a complete reimagining of the idea of workers unity and reinvention of forms of struggle.

There is a rising tide of worker militancy in many parts of the world, including the US, which is the capital of neoliberalism, although labor unions seem to be on the decline. Do you think that we are in the midst of new forms of class struggle in

the 21st century?

I believe that everywhere the neoliberal economic model has lost popular legitimacy, and the rise of worker militancy in many parts of the world reflects this. But there are simultaneously many other conflicting strands emerging that seek to divert public discontent into other avenues, such as extreme nationalist positions that blame foreigners for many social ills. Mass media (including new social media) have to take a very large share of the blame for this: They feed into systems of resentment that are directed against other people rather than against capital or against systemic injustice.

But also, while there is no doubt that the decline of labor unions has had devastating effects on both societies and possibilities of inclusive economies, there was much that was wrong with the traditional unions — which may explain why they find relatively little traction today. Typical unions in much of the world tended to be male-centric and oblivious to other forms of social discrimination. They focused on men working in defined workplaces and rarely took up the issues and concerns of more casual workers who did not have clearly defined work locations or employers. They did not even recognize the crucial economic activities performed by (unpaid) women within households and communities as work. They rarely bothered about differentials in wages and working conditions for different social categories, and therefore often accentuated these differences across workers.

Reviving such unions would hardly be in the interest of the mass of workers today. Indeed, such unions are even now far more likely to fall into the trap of socially revanchist, nationalist and regressive political forces that generate more unpleasant and more unequal societies. The progressive associations of workers that are necessary in the contemporary world must be quite different: They must recognize, appreciate and value social and cultural differences across workers without allowing those differences to feed into economic inequalities; they must oppose the gender construction of societies and economies by recognizing all those who work to be workers, whether or not they get paid in monetary terms; they must operate in more democratic and accountable ways to keep the trust of their membership; they must take note of inter-generational inequalities in order to attract the youth and respond to their concerns.

This is the context in which the recent eruption of often spontaneous and wildcat

strikes in the US and parts of Europe — as well as farmers movements and other mass protests in many parts of the developing world — provides a source of optimism. What is even more encouraging is that often these protests are finding wider social resonance, as public sympathy shifts increasingly in favor of the valid demands of protesters. While all of this is still very incipient, these could be straws in the wind for broader movements for progressive economic and social change.

Is Marxism still relevant in understanding and explaining global economic developments in the 21st century?

Some concepts developed by Marx are more relevant than ever in understanding contemporary capitalism. The most significant may be commodity fetishism: the idea that under capitalism, relations between people become mediated by relations between things — that is commodities and money. The overwhelming focus on exchange value (rather than use value) means that exchange value gets seen as intrinsic to commodities rather than being the result of labor. Market-based interaction becomes the “natural” way of dealing with all objects, rather than a historically specific set of social relations. This is what creates commodity fetishism, which is an illusion emerging from the centrality of private property that determines not only how people work and interact, but even how they perceive reality and understand social change. The urge to acquire, the obsession with material gratification of wants and the ordering of human well-being in terms of the ability to command different commodities can all be described as forms of commodity fetishism. The obsession with GDP growth *per se* among policy makers and the general public, independent of the pattern or quality of such growth, is an extreme but widespread example of commodity fetishism today.

In terms of geopolitics, several Marxist notions are still hugely insightful. Marx spoke of the creation of the world market, which we now call globalization, as the natural result of the tendency of the capitalist system to spread and aggrandize itself, to destroy and incorporate earlier forms of production, and to transform technology and institutions constantly. Uneven development persists, even though the locations of such development may have changed. Similarly, “primitive accumulation” is a hugely useful concept, not just for understanding the past, but for interpreting the present.

The tendencies for the concentration and centralization of production have very strong contemporary resonance, even when such centralization and concentration is expressed through the geographical fragmentation of production (as in global value chains driven by large multinational companies) or in the sphere of non-material service delivery, or even through the commodification of knowledge and control of personal data for purposes of making profits.

Another concept that is still relevant is that of “alienation.” For Marx, this was not an isolated experience of an individual person’s feeling of estrangement from society or community, but a generalized state of the broad mass of wage workers. It can be expressed as the loss of control by workers over their own work, which means that they effectively cease to be autonomous human beings because they cannot control their workplace, the products they produce or even the way they relate to each other. Because this fundamentally defines their conditions of existence, this means that workers can never become autonomous and self-realized human and social beings under capitalism. Such alienation is blatantly obvious in factory work, but it also describes work that is apparently more independent, such as activities in the emerging “gig economy” that still deny workers effective control despite the illusion of autonomy.

How do you explain the decline of Marxism as an ideology?

It’s interesting that you use the word “ideology” for Marxism, as this is quite different from the way Marx himself used the word — he saw ideology as “false consciousness” in contrast to the objectively true “science” that he felt was embodied in his own work. Whatever one may think of that particular position, it is unfortunately the case that for some time Marxism also became an ideology in the Marxian sense, with quasi-religious overtones and an emphasis on canonical interpretations.

The decline of Marxism as a framework of thought and even belief is the result of a long process. Some factors are the result of the way Marxism itself evolved. For example, there was the reification of Marxist positions, the conversion of Marxist writing into a “canon” around which there have been endless often very esoteric (though no less passionate) debates about precise meanings of terms. In the English-speaking world, such hair-splitting has been all the more bizarre because the arguments were based on English translations from the German original, which was itself often prone to multiple interpretations. This overly scholastic

approach made the ideas very rigid and therefore less interesting. It also possibly dampened the intellectual creativity that characterized so much of Marx's own work.

Another — possibly more powerful — reason, was the very political use of Marx to justify particular strategies by those ruling different countries. This meant that particularly over the course of the 20th century, major political movements, dramatic changes in economic strategy, massive socio-political upheavals and drastic attempts at social engineering were all carried out in the name of Marx. As a result, both good and bad elements of such strategies all became identified with Marxism. Many people across the world who had little or no knowledge of Marx or his writing nevertheless associated him with not just revolutions but also their aftermath, and with particular social and political systems that operated in his name.

This tendency to pay lip service to a particular iconic figure or a set of well-known ideas is scarcely new or unusual. In India, for example, political parties and leaders of all persuasions routinely invoke the name of Mahatma Gandhi even when they indulge in activities that he would have abhorred and condemned. But because so many states in the second half of the 20th century defined themselves as Marxist, all their actions (and particularly their mistakes) then tainted the public image of Marxism. The invocation of his name still continues in some countries like China and Vietnam today, where officials and some scholars refer constantly to Marx without really using his concepts, and declare that because of their adherence to Marxist thought, socialism is inevitable — even as they put in place the most blatantly neoliberal economic policies.

This use of the label of Marxism is hardly designed to attract the intellectually curious, the progressively-minded person in search of radical change or even the young. But what I find interesting is that — despite such misappropriation — the interest in Marx and his work has not completely died down or disappeared. *Das Kapital* (a huge, fiendishly difficult and often barely readable tome) is still in print almost everywhere in the world more than 150 years after its first volume was published. Generations of young people have picked up and still continue to pick up *The Communist Manifesto* and find arguments that appeal to them. The point is to stop thinking of Marxism as equivalent to a religion with irrefutable truths, and instead allow some of the more insightful concepts to inform our thought and analysis in creative ways.

The latest wave of resistance against capitalist globalization seems to be coming from the forces of the right and extreme nationalism. Why did the anti-globalization left movement fail, and should the left fear nationalism?

I hope that it is too early to say that the progressive/left anti-globalization movement has failed. It is true that currently, the forces ranged against globalization are dominated by unpleasant, divisive, extreme right movements that bring to mind (and typically celebrate) the fascist movements of interwar Europe. But they are not the only social/political forces around, and many people flock to these not because they inherently support them but because social democracy has failed so spectacularly in protecting people against the depredations of unregulated capital. History moves in cunning and complicated ways, so we may not always see other, more progressive forces beyond the bend in the river. This makes it easy to despair, but that is neither productive nor necessarily accurate.

One important aspect for progressives to bear in mind is that, while internationalism is essential, nationalism cannot be wished away. Most importantly, the nation-state is still the terrain on which citizenship is defined, which in turn determines the fights for all kinds of rights, including workers' rights, and the possibility of success in realizing such rights. Nation-states must also be the bulwark of the fight against imperialism, which remains as strong as ever despite its predicted demise. Nation-states allowed, enabled and drove neoliberal globalization, and gave greater power especially to large capital; nation-states must be used to claw back the rights of people, and be made more democratic and accountable to the citizenry. Workers of the world (of all kinds: paid and unpaid, recognized and unrecognized) must still unite, but they must first unite within the spaces (the nations) within which they can hope to achieve their rights. The basis for proletarian internationalism therefore has to be progressive and democratic nationalism.

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