

POLITICAL PILGRIMAGES: THEIR MEANING, AFTERMATH, AND LINKAGES¹

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Abstract: Many distinguished Western intellectuals visited communist (or state socialist) countries (such as the former Soviet Union, China under Mao and Cuba under Castro) during the past century with a highly favourable predisposition and wrote admiring accounts of their experiences. These political pilgrimages demonstrated the capacity of intellectuals for wishful thinking and bizarre political misjudgements.

More recently the same underlying attitudes which gave rise to these misjudgements found expression in anti-Americanism and the non-judgmental or sympathetic attitudes towards Islamic radicalism. These misjudgements and the associated illusions compel the revision of widely held conceptions of intellectuals as individuals with highly developed critical faculties capable of distinguishing between appearance and reality.

Keywords: political pilgrimages, anti-Americanism, “political Islam”

I.

In this article I will examine the connections between the phenomenon of the political pilgrimage, anti-Americanism, and the disposition of Western intellectuals toward Islamic fundamentalism, or “political Islam”.

I introduced the term “political pilgrims” in my book of the same title² to refer to the travels of Western intellectuals to various communist countries/ during the 20th century. I called these travelers “pilgrims” because they resembled their religious counterparts of centuries past. The new, secular pilgrims too displayed a reverential frame of mind toward the object of their travels, sought spiritual rejuvenation, and the confirmation of beliefs already held. While their numbers cannot be ascertained many distinguished and well known Western intellectuals, artists and public figures participated in these pil-

¹ This article reflects in part the paper given at a colloquium hosted by the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and for the Memory of the Romanian Exile (Bucharest, June 2010).

² Paul HOLLANDER, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba*, New York, 1981.

grimages. They included Louis Aragon, Simon de Beauvoir, Daniel Berrigan, J.D. Bernal, Noam Chomsky, Basil Davidson, John Dewey, Theodore Dreiser, Walter Duranty, Lion Feuchtwanger, Waldo Frank, John Kenneth Galbraith, Gunter Grass, Julian Huxley, Jonathan Kozol, Harold Laski, Owen Lattimore, Emil Ludwig, Mary McCarthy, Jan Myrdal, C. Wright Mills, Scott Nearing, Pablo Neruda, J. P. Sartre, G.B.Shaw, Upton Sinclair, Edgar Snow, Susan Sontag, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Ella Winter and many others.

“Political tourism” was a related but somewhat different phenomenon although the motivation of the participants was similar. Political tourists were more anonymous and more numerous, they traveled in groups, whereas the political pilgrims – and especially the more distinguished among them – traveled by themselves also assisted (and supervised) by tour guides and interpreters.

The first, and probably the most numerous generation of pilgrims visited the Soviet Union between the 1920s and the late 1940s. Following the death of Stalin in 1953 and especially the so-called Secret Speech of Khrushchev in 1956, these journeys greatly diminished as new information about the human costs of “the Soviet experiment” emerged and already available information of similar nature was authenticated.

The next major wave of similarly disposed travelers visited China under Mao and Cuba under Castro throughout the 1960s, and 1970s. China’s attractions dimmed following Mao’s death in 1976 and the economic reforms introduced by his successors which turned China into a market oriented society that encouraged private consumption and allowed the development of huge income inequalities. Cuba’s appeals proved to be more durable and it continues to bask in the affections of some well known Western intellectuals and entertainers. The appeals of communist Cuba have also been reflected in the remarkable case of an American upper middle class couple who used to work in the State Department and professed to have found meaning in their lives by being unpaid spies for Cuba for three decades, until the recent discovery of their activities³.

Sandinista Nicaragua was another site of such pilgrimages and political tourism throughout the 1980s ending with the electoral defeat of the ruling party in 1990. There were also pilgrimages to North Vietnam during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 70s. However unified Vietnam, following the communist victory ceased to attract many sympathetic visitors, probably because it too embarked on market-oriented reforms and no longer projected the image of a revolutionary society.

Even North Korea was occasionally given the benefit of doubt. Bruce Cumings, a professor of history at the University of Chicago excelled in writing sympathetic studies of North Korea motivated by “the sympathy for the underdog”.⁴ He approvingly quoted an English author who claimed that “the

³ Ginger THOMPSON: “Couple’s Capital Ties Said to Veil Spying for Cuba”, in *New York Times*, June 19, 2009.

⁴ Bruce CUMINGS, *North Korea: Another Country*, New York: New Press, 2004, xiii.

average North Korean lives ‘an incredibly simple and hardworking life but also has a secure and happy existence, and the comradeship between these highly collectivized people is moving to behold.’⁵ Cumings compared favorably the North Korean gulag (“where death from starvation was rare” and “inmates were able to improvise much of their upkeep on their own” and “incarceration with one’s immediate family was survivable”) to American prisons (“...a long-standing, never-ending gulag full of black men...”) ⁶ His warm feelings toward what is probably the most brutal dictatorship at the present time did not seem to harm his career or reputation.

Former President Carter on his visit to North Korea in 1994 also had favorable impressions and praised the supreme leader Kim Il Sung.⁷

Venezuela under Hugo Chavez has become the latest destination of Western intellectuals, celebrities and leftists in search of a social system that would gratify their yearning for a morally superior, anti-capitalist society. Bill Ayers, the former radical Weatherman leader was among them and delivered an encomium “at Hugo Chavez’ side” in Venezuela in 2006. Apparently he found in Venezuela under Chavez a society which fulfilled his political dreams.⁸

Both periods of the most intense pilgrimages coincided with crises in the West. The first, in the late 1920s and early 1930s was the time of economic crisis; in the second period, the 1960s and 70s, a profound political-cultural upheaval shook the Western world, and especially the United States. It was marked by the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement and women’s liberation. Both periods provided new reasons for rejecting existing social arrangements and sparked utopian hopes and longings which also found expression in the creation of numerous short-lived communes, most of them in the United States.

II.

Perhaps the most rewarding and remarkable aspect of these pilgrimages is the new light they shed on our understanding of Western intellectuals, compelling a revision of the conventional wisdom about their defining characteristics. Given the cultural, educational and political importance of intellectuals – the new moralizing elite – in modern Western societies there are good reasons to better understand these defining characteristics.

Karl Mannheim made a notable contribution to a highly idealized image of intellectuals. He perceived them as a stratum of society unburdened by class interest (due to their allegedly “free floating” condition), capable of

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 175–176.

⁷ George WILL: “Carter Misreads North Korea’s Kim”, in *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Northampton, MA, June 24, 1994.

⁸ Juan FORRERO: “Visitors Seek a Taste of Revolution in Venezuela,” in *New York Times*, March 21, 2006.

transcending political conflict and possessing a more rational disposition than the rest of the population as well as a unique ability to grasp objective realities.⁹ It did not seem to occur to Mannheim that intellectuals could also become “true believers.”¹⁰

Mannheim’s view of intellectuals resembled Marx’s conception of the proletariat: torchbearer of truth, embodiment of authenticity – but Mannheim did not conceive of intellectuals as virtuous victims as Marx did of the workers. Mannheim thus greatly contributed to the self-conception of modern intellectuals as truth-seeking “demystifiers” committed to separate illusion from reality, the apparent from the hidden. These attributes were integral to their sense of identity and their roles as social critics and critics of all conventional wisdom. /For much of the past century these views held sway/ and especially that of the intellectual as glorified outsider, the foundation of his supposedly clear sighted social criticism and unbiased political judgement.

The political pilgrimages of the 20th century may be a watershed as regards the conventional view of intellectuals sketched above. The pilgrimages brought to light the intellectuals’ unexpected capacity for making grotesque, and in retrospect highly embarrassing political and moral misjudgements. The pilgrimages further uncovered an overpowering wish to believe and a craving for moral certainties among intellectuals earlier thought to be sceptics and iconoclasts possessing unusually sharp and penetrating critical faculties. It turned out that intellectuals could be as gullible as anyone else, even credulous admirers of political systems which brutally and unhesitatingly repress free expression – the celebrated cornerstone of the calling of intellectuals.

The political pilgrims showed no awareness of being manipulated, nor did they conceive of the possibility that “seeing things with their own eyes” by no means guaranteed an authentic experience of, or exposure to the social realities of the countries they visited.

III.

The sympathetic attitudes of Western intellectuals toward communist systems and movements are deeply rooted. For centuries Western intellectuals felt repelled not only by the huge socio-economic inequalities found in capitalist societies but also by the attitudes of greed, selfishness and impersonal competitiveness fostered by commerce and capitalism.¹¹ They were convinced that capitalism, more than any other social-economic system profoundly corrupted human nature. Norman Mailer wrote: “In America it is not that surplus value is extorted from us so much as that we are spiritually exploited and denied the opportunity to find our true growth”¹²

⁹ Karl MANNHEIM, *Ideology and Utopia*, London: Routledge, 1936.

¹⁰ Eric HOFFER, *The True Believer*, New York: Harper and Row, 1992.

¹¹ Irving KRISTOL, “The Adversary Culture of Intellectuals”, in *Encounter*, October 1979.

¹² Norman MAILER, “Letters”, in *New Yorker*, October 6, 2008.

It was such sentiments that predisposed many Western intellectuals to a sympathetic view of political systems which professed a commitment to the creation of a more humane, just and egalitarian society nurturing unselfish human beings. As Leszek Kolakowski put it: “Marx seems to have imagined that once capitalists were done away with the whole world could become a kind of Athenian agora: one had only to forbid private ownership of machines or land and, as if by magic, human beings would cease to be selfish and their interests would coincide in perfect harmony.”¹³ The intellectuals here discussed believed that communist system succeeded, or were on the way to succeeding in creating such blissful conditions.

Another important component of these attitudes has been a pervasive sense of guilt stimulated by the historic misdeeds of the Western powers associated with colonialism and racism. Over time many intellectuals came to blame the West for every conceivable social problem and evil, from slavery and sexism to environmental destruction, poverty, wars and every deformity of human character. Pascal Bruckner wrote: “Nothing is more Western than hatred of the West, that passion for cursing and lacerating ourselves... we Euro-Americans are supposed to have only one obligation: endlessly atoning for what we have inflicted on other parts of humanity.”¹⁴ Without this feeling of guilt and alienation, affinity with communist systems and ideologies would not have flourished. As Pascal Bruckner further observed “we hate ourselves much more than we love others... the intellectual caste... is the penitential class par excellence continuing the role of the clergy...”¹⁵

Another determinant of the attitudes here discussed is a deep discomfort with modernity that overlaps with the rejection of capitalism. Modernity is blamed, with some justification, for the loss of the sense of community, social solidarity and shared meaning. Communist societies, by contrast, promised to create a new, vibrant sense of community and purpose and appeared to overcome the alienation and dislocation modernization brought about under Western, capitalistic auspices.¹⁶ Susan Sontag epitomized these beliefs in her observation of conditions in North Vietnam she visited during the war: “The phenomenon of existential agony, of alienation, just don’t appear among the Vietnamese... The Vietnamese are ‘whole’ human beings, not ‘split’ as we are.”¹⁷ As this remark suggests the appeal of communist systems combined with the attraction of more traditional, third world societies. Paul Berman wrote:

...gazing at faraway parts of the world, the western intellectuals could hardly do anything more than blink and fall into reveries. People in exotic parts of

¹³ Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, New York, 2005, p. 1209.

¹⁴ Pascal BRUCKNER, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism*, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 33–34.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 216, 221.

¹⁶ Peter BERGER, “The Socialist Myth”, *Public Interest*, Summer 1976.

¹⁷ Susan SONTAG, *Trip to Hanoi*, New York, 1968, pp. 69, 77.

the world were deemed to be spiritually loftier than people near at hand. They were immune to greed. They were selfless. Intuitive instead of analytic... Capable of sagacious insights not accessible to the rigid and inhibited Western mind. Materially poor, but morally wealthy.¹⁸

Last but not least, assessment of these systems was also influenced by mistaken notions of the position of intellectuals in these societies. The visiting Western intellectuals were led to believe that their counterparts in communist states were greatly esteemed, and generously supported by the state, their books published in huge prints, their advice eagerly sought by the holders of power. The latter appeared to welcome the intellectuals' contribution to the building of the new society thereby ending their rootlessness, isolation, sense of inadequacy and marginality. The leaders themselves were often perceived as fellow intellectuals, exceptionally wise, kind and knowledgeable "philosopher kings".

The misperceptions and misjudgements of communist societies were highly patterned and changed little over time.¹⁹ These political systems were thought to be committed to historically unprecedented, benevolent social engineering that included the transformation of human nature; human beings were becoming more altruistic, unselfish and communitarian. These transformations, inspired by the ideas and ideals of Marx and Engels were expected to follow the creation of high levels of socio-economic equality. Communist systems were lauded for their rapid and apparently painless modernization, rational economic planning, and the alleged dramatic improvements of the standard of living. Especially important, these societies were credited with making life meaningful for their citizens.

Participants in the pilgrimages were convinced that the communist governments enjoyed broad popular support and legitimacy, and the citizens had access to genuine political participation. One may wonder if they considered the 99% of votes these governments routinely received in the one-party elections, among the proofs of their legitimacy and popularity.

Furthermore, the social pathologies afflicting capitalist countries – poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, sexism, racism, and the degradation of the natural environment, among others – had vanished (or were in the process of vanishing). The prisons of these police states were devoted to the humane treatment and rehabilitation of their inmates. These delusions were instilled or confirmed by taking the visitors to model prisons.²⁰

¹⁸ Paul BERMAN, *The Flight of Intellectuals*, New York, 2010, p. 269.

¹⁹ Paul HOLLANDER, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba*, New York, 1981; Paul HOLLANDER, "The Pilgrimage to Nicaragua", (Ch.5.) in *Anti-Americanism: Irrational and Rational*, New Brunswick NJ, 1995; Paul HOLLANDER, "Judgements and Misjudgements", in Lee EDWARDS (ed.), *The Collapse of Communism*, Stanford CA, 1999.

²⁰ Jerzy GLIKSMAN, *Tell the West*, New York, 1948.

Most significant, that these were supposed to be societies in which the perennial and seemingly ineradicable conflict between the personal or private, and the social or public interest was largely transcended (or in the process of being transcended).

Three factors seemed to shape these perceptions and assessments. To begin with, these visitors were genuinely ignorant of the nature of these political systems, and the prevailing conditions of life. The conducted tours (or, what I called, “the techniques of hospitality”²¹) deepened and expanded this ignorance. The visiting Western intellectuals never had the experience of living in “an actually existing” communist (or state socialist) society. The morally problematic or outright inhumane attributes of these systems remained either completely unknown, or abstractions which could not compete with the vividness of their familiarity with the defects of their own societies. Second, during these journeys important Western visitors were exceedingly well treated, few appeals to their vanity were overlooked, their sense of importance was nourished and confirmed. Third, and probably most important, these travelers were predisposed to a highly favorable view of these societies as they represented promising alternatives to the perceived corruption, injustice and irrationality of their own social systems. They were ready and willing to give them every benefit of doubt and excuse their shortcomings (if at all noted) as minor blemishes in light of their good intentions and in comparison to the “systemic” ills and evils of Western societies.

IV.

Following the collapse of communist systems and the attrition of pilgrimage sites the political disposition of Western intellectuals here discussed found other expressions. The Collapse and the attendant greater access to information about the communist states stimulated little political soul searching among the erstwhile pilgrims and their spiritual heirs. While it became difficult to locate new, promising alternatives to the devalued Western societies, the underlying animus found renewed expression in anti-Americanism.

Anti-Americanism and anti-capitalism have important commonalities: the United States is the most powerful capitalist country and defender of other capitalist countries; its culture has been particularly deformed – in the critics’ view – by its extreme capitalistic values and practices.

Anti-Americanism overlaps not only with anti-capitalism but also with broader anti-Western and anti-modern impulses. Needless to say, anti-Americanism differs from the rational and well founded critiques of American society or foreign policy. I suggested some time ago that anti-Americanism may be defined as a largely groundless, irrational predisposition, an expression of a deeply rooted scapegoating impulse... related to the problems [and] frustrations... of those entertaining and articulating it... [they] perceive the United

²¹ Paul HOLLANDER, *op. cit.*, 1981.

States as an unmitigated and uniquely evil entity and the source of all, or most, other evils in the world.²²

It is certainly not unreasonable to regard the United States the major source and embodiment of modernity and its numerous problematic or undesirable by-products, such as the loss of taken-for-granted beliefs, the decline of community and social solidarity, the growth of impersonality, the weakening of social bonds, and the misuse of technology, among others. Capitalism can also be blamed for the same phenomena.

In the anti-American perspective the defects of American style capitalism are more pronounced and aggravated by an aggressive competitiveness, widespread and extreme individualism and a rootlessness created by the historic origins of the United States and the social and geographic mobility associated with it.

Anti-Americanism abroad (the better known variety) and at home have many features (critiques) in common but certain distinctions can be made. More typically, the foreign critiques and rejections of the United States culminating in anti-Americanism are stimulated by more tangible, nationalistic, cultural or economic grievances resulting from the global economic, cultural and military presence, and predominance of the United States. Anti-Americanism abroad is also a response to the spread and penetration of American mass culture that undermines indigenous cultures and values.

Domestic anti-Americanism is more closely tied to the problems of modernity noted above, and especially the social isolation and meaninglessness it often creates. Indigenous critics are inclined to blame American society, and particular social institutions, not only for massive social injustices but also for individual unhappiness. These critiques and rejections crested during the 1960s and early 70s but many lingered and became absorbed in mainstream cultural trends and institutions. Educational institutions in particular came to reflect predominantly negative conceptions of American society and history emphasizing inequality, social injustice, irrationality, discrimination and so forth. The academic popularity of a book entitled *Empire* (one of its authors the convicted Italian terrorist Antonio Negri²³) that glorifies anti-capitalist political violence, and the academic celebrity status of Slavoj Žižek, an unembarrassed admirer and advocate of communist revolutionary terror, Stalinist or Maoist²⁴, are further indications of attitudes which have flourished in the postcommunist era and reach back to the time of the Pilgrimages.

The romantic preoccupation with authenticity or its absence is also central to anti-Americanism and is exemplified by European authors like Jean Baudrillard and Harold Pinter and American ones such as Norman Mailer and Susan Sontag. Recalling his travels in the United States Baudrillard wrote

²² Paul HOLLANDER (ed.), *Understanding anti-Americanism: Its Origins and impact at Home and Abroad*, Chicago, 2004, pp. 9, 12.

²³ Antonio NEGRI and Michael HARDT, *Empire*, Cambridge MA, 2002.

²⁴ Adam KIRSCH, "The Deadly Jester", in *New Republic*, December 3, 2008.

that America “is the only country where quantity can be extolled without compunction... Here, everything human is artificial. Furnace Creek [in Death Valley] is a synthetic, air-conditioned oasis...” – as if air-conditioning in one of the hottest place on earth was a reflection of inauthenticity! He also wrote: “it is Disneyland that is authentic here! The cinema and TV are America’s reality!... It [America] is the world center of the inauthentic.”²⁵ For Norman Mailer sliced and packaged bread metamorphized into a symbol of inauthenticity: “The sliced half-loaf... was the... embodiment of...corporation land which took the taste and crust out of bread...”²⁶

Anti-Americanism abroad following the fall of Soviet communism has been reinigorated by the United States becoming the only super power, and by its military assertiveness in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The recent global rise of Islamic fundamentalism has been another major source anti-Americanism, and especially its violent manifestations. Radical Islam abhors the United States designated as the satanic embodiment of soulless, immoral modernity and the promoter of a wide range of depravities, in addition to being the protector of Israel. This intense, Islamic anti-Americanism and anti-Israeli attitudes have increasingly converged and not only in the Arab world.

Present day anti-Americanism has also been reinigorated by anti-globalism – another version of anti-capitalism linked to the political and economic power of the United States and its contribution to global environmental problems.

V.

The heritage of the Pilgrimages, and the associated political attitudes find further expression in the positions taken of late by influential Western intellectuals towards Islamic fundamentalism or radical Islam. There are striking similarities between these attitudes and those of the past toward communist systems. As will be recalled, during the Cold War the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union was often blamed on the United States by those on the left, especially the so-called revisionists. In a similar spirit following the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, (and similar attacks elsewhere) there has been an abundance of assertions holding the United States responsible for these attacks, and for their putative “root causes” supposedly created by American policies and positions. According to Susan Sontag 9/11 was “an attack on the world’s self-proclaimed superpower, undertaken as a consequence of specific American alliances and actions...”²⁷ Barbara Ehrenreich, the popular social critic believed that “terrorism is ultimately

²⁵ Jean BAUDRILLARD, *America*, London and New York, 1988, pp. 87, 66, 104.

²⁶ Norman MAILER, *Presidential Papers*, New York, 1968, p. 77.

²⁷ Susan SONTAG, *New Yorker*, September 24, 2001, p. 32.

rooted...in vast global inequalities ...”²⁸ Barbara Kingsolver, like many social critics used 9/11 to reaffirm her negative views of American society: “...the American flag stands for intimidation, censorship, violence, bigotry, sexism, homophobia... Whom are we calling terrorists here?”²⁹ A group called *Anti-Capitalist Convergence* argued (in the wake of 9/11) that “The fear and desperation that grows [sic] from poverty and oppression is crucial to any understanding of violence throughout the world...”³⁰ As in the days of the Cold War champions of the new moral equivalence ended up finding the United States morally inferior to its enemies.

Also reminiscent of the time when leftists and peace activists pleaded for a better understanding of Soviet fears and phobias (or those of other communist states), following 9/11 detractors and critics of the United States pleaded for renewed attempts to understand those who supported or perpetrated the acts of terror. Paul Kennedy, professor of history at Yale University proposed to his audience “to put themselves in the place of Palestinians celebrating the attacks [on the World Trade Center] and consider ‘How do we appear to them and what would it be like were our places in the world reversed?’ He went on to say that American military, economic and diplomatic might and offensive cultural messages understandably provoked hatred.”³¹ It has been widely held among academic intellectuals and the clergy that if the United States inspired hatred, there had to be good reasons for it.

The second similarity concerns the Western intellectuals’ perceptions of the relationship between theory and practice. As may also be recalled, before the collapse of Soviet communism, those on the left firmly rejected the idea that there was a connection between Marxism and the character of “actually existing” communist states. Instead they insisted that those political systems misused and perverted Marxism and their policies had nothing to do with its spirit and propositions. It is a position that has become especially popular in the post-communist era and central to the efforts to restore the respectability of Marxism which became tainted because of its association with, and use by communist systems. Michael Burawoy, an American sociologist, discussing “Marxism after Communism” spoke of “the magic of Marxism” and its laudable “moral critique of capitalism” and expected its full revival. He observed that “we live in a period that ever more closely conforms to Marxist prognoses of a capitalist juggernaut, a period that cries out for a critical Marxist consciousness.”³²

²⁸ Barbara EHRENDRICH, “Notebooks”, *New Republic*, October 15, 2001, p. 10.

²⁹ Barbara KINGSOLVER, “Notebooks”, *New Republic*, October 22, 2001, p. 10.

³⁰ Michael KAZIN, “After the Attacks, Which Side Is the Left On?”, *New York Times*, October 7, 2001, p. 4.

³¹ Anemona HARTOCOLLIS, “Campus Culture Wars Flare Anew Over Tenor of Debate After the Attacks”, *New York Times*, September 30, 2001, p. 24.

³² Michael BURAWOY, “Marxism After Communism”, in *Theory and Society*, (29), 2000, pp. 154, 151.

I proposed some time ago that while it is debatable *in what ways and to what degree* Marxist theory and communist practices were related, there is no doubt that there was a connection between them [Hollander 1999]. The same applies to Islamist religious beliefs spelled out in the Koran and the Islamic political violence that these beliefs legitimate in the eyes of the instigators and practitioners of such violence. But Western sympathizers and apologists insist that Islam is a “religion of peace” although it has lent itself time and again to use and misuse by violent true believers. Like Marxism it is a voluminous doctrine that allows people of different temperament and political agendas actions to find legitimation for different social and political agendas and attitudes. As Mark Lilla wrote:

...a larger question looms: to what degree does any religion bear responsibility for those who speak in its name?...

...if any religion is to cope with these deviations [i.e. heterodoxies and heresies] it must recognize that they do not arise from nowhere but have roots, however twisted, in the faith itself... That Islamic fundamentalism and its militant offshoots appeal to the Koran is therefore not an incidental matter. It means that they have found a way to breed in the religious space opened up by the revelation Islam presupposes.³³

Likewise Leon Wieseltier argued that “The terrorists are waging a war of ideas, and the ideas upon which they are acting are ideas in the Islamic tradition.”³⁴

It should be noted here that political correctness and the sensibilities it expresses have made it difficult to closely examine and question Islamic beliefs, and their source, the Koran. An American scholar who wished to remain anonymous observed: “Between fear and political correctness, it’s not possible to say anything other than sugary nonsense about Islam’ referring to the threatened violence as well as the widespread reluctance on United States college campuses to criticize other cultures.”³⁵ These comments were supported by an academic requirement at the University of North Carolina introduced in the wake of 9/11 that refrained from exposing students “to the militant, intolerant, dogmatic, conflict-oriented and self-righteous aspects of Islamic beliefs” and from making reference to the Sharia Laws and their brutality.³⁶ Daniel Pipes observed that Islamist radicals made considerable progress restricting free speech in the West as regards any critical scrutiny of Muslim

³³ Mark LILLA, “Extremism’s Theological Roots”, *New York Times*, October 7, 2001.

³⁴ Leon WIESELTIER, “The Incoherence”, *New Republic*, October 29, 2001.

³⁵ Alexander STILLE, “Scholars Are Quietly Offering New Theories of the Koran”, *New York Times*, March 2, 2002, p. 1.

³⁶ Paul HOLLANDER, “An Islamic Requirement on Campus”, in *The Only Superpower*, Lanham MD, 2009, pp. 85–86.

religious values and beliefs while reserving the right to vilify Western culture and religions.³⁷

Symptomatic of these attitudes and reminiscent of old-style pro-communist, fellow traveling, has been the sympathy of influential and well known Western intellectuals, such as Ian Buruma and Timothy Garton Ash, toward Tariq Ramadan and their refusal to recognize his thinly veiled support for Islamic radicalism. Ramadan is a philosopher, author, and major European spokesman for Islamic causes. He campaigned for cancelling a play of Voltaire in 1993 in Geneva judged to be offensive to Islamic sensibilities and he favored Islamic biology over Darwin's. His grandfather Hassan Al-Banna was founder of the extremist Muslim Brotherhood who considered "anti-Zionist violence as a religious duty." Tariq Ramadan is an admirer of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an advocate of the extermination of Jews. Ramadan criticized French authors of Jewish descent whose "public positions" he wrote "concealed a Jewish agenda." While at times he made gestures to distance himself from the most extreme Islamic positions Paul Berman notes that "his personal milieu – his grand father and his father, his family contacts, his intellectual tradition – is precisely the milieu that bears the principal responsibility for generating the modern theory of religious suicide."³⁸ Most notorious has been Ramadan's refusal to condemn the Islamic practice of stoning adulterous women to death³⁹ although he favored a "moratorium" on this practice. He claimed to have taken this position to retain credibility in the Muslem community. Paul Berman compared this position to Sartre's refusal to condemn Stalin and the Soviet system: "Sartre did not want to demoralize the downtrodden [the pro-Soviet French workers – P.H.]... and if the ignorant proletarians of France were going to learn the truth about the Soviet Union, it was not going to be from France's most famous philosopher. And Ramadan is right not to desesperer [demoralize] Brick Lane [metaphor for Muslem neighborhoods – P.H.] by offering a straight-out condemnation of violence against women."⁴⁰ Ramadan advocates "Islamic socialism', an ideology combining religious principles with anticapitalist, anti-imperialist politics... The murderous tyranny to be resisted... is 'the northern model of development'... For Ramadan, global capitalism... is the 'abode of war'..." He was also characterized as "advocating a revolt against Western materialism on the basis of superior spiritual values... he is a Noam Chomsky on foreign affairs and a Jerry Falwell on social affairs..."⁴¹ Despite these observations of his, Ian Buruma wrote in the same article that talking to him "we agreed on most issues."

³⁷ Daniel PIPES, "Two Decades of the Rushdie Rules", *Commentary*, October, 2010, p. 32.

³⁸ Paul BERMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 198, 183, 92, 165, 200.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 218; also see Ian BURUMA, "Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue", *New York Times Magazine*, February 4, 2007.

⁴⁰ Paul BERMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

⁴¹ Ian BURUMA, "Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue", *New York Times Magazine*, February 4, 2007.

The attitudes of Buruma and Ash toward Ramadan have been complemented by their contempt and hostility toward Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali born critic of Islamic religious extremism under death threat from the Islamic radicals. Paul Berman wrote:

The campaign in the intellectual press against Hirsi Ali seems... unprecedented – at least since the days when lonely dissident refugees from Stalin’s Soviet Union used to find themselves slandered in the Western pro-communist press... A sustained attack in the intellectual world on a persecuted liberal dissident from Africa [Hirsi Ali]... a campaign... presided over by the normally cautious and sincerely liberal editors of one distinguished and admired journal after another and faithfully imitated by a variety of other writers and journalists... has come to be accepted as conventional wisdom⁴²

There remains the basic question why these Western attitudes toward radical Islam evolved? The root of them is likely to be found in the collective cultural self-doubts of Western intellectuals and other elite groups, in their readiness to give serious consideration, even warm welcome, to all critiques directed at the West. Western social critics are drawn to critics abroad – radical leftist or Islamic – who share many of their beliefs about the corruptions and injustices of modern Western societies associated with capitalism. There is also the additional component of “multiculturalism” and reverence toward the Third World seen as historically victimized by the Western powers. Given the strong guilt feelings connected with racism and colonialism these Western intellectuals seek to avoid taking a judgmental attitude toward the Third World, including Islamic fundamentalism. At last there is also the factor of fear, especially in Europe where critics of Islam faced not only death threats but murderous violence.

VI.

The major determinant of the attitudes discussed in this essay remains the continued profound aversion to capitalism given more plausibility by the recent global financial-economic crisis and strengthened by the anti-globalist movements. As Berman pointed out

...elements of the old doctrine... linger on... The phenomenon formerly known as Western imperialism has ended up being described as... globalization. And the main concept never seems to change at all – namely the firm belief that wealth is theft and Western success is the source of everyone else’s difficulties, and Western prosperity means non-Western poverty... And so, the spirit of self-hatred persisted and has even deepened and spread...⁴³

⁴² Paul BERMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 263–264.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 271–272.

The hostility toward capitalism in recent times is not primarily the result of its association with exploitation, inequality, or unemployment. Rather, it is its contribution to a spreading sense of meaninglessness and malaise. The latter is the major stimulant of religious extremism and fanaticism. Daniel Bell drew attention to the “cultural contradictions of capitalism” which undermine its capacity to legitimate itself.⁴⁴ In the United States the growing popularity of Christian fundamentalist churches is among the reflections of unmet spiritual needs. In other parts of the world the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism addresses similar wants. There is a connection between the psychological-cultural problems and deficiencies of capitalism and modernity and the intellectuals’ longing for new, sustaining beliefs. As Lewis Feuer has written: “...where a religious vacuum existed among intellectuals, there the emotional soil was best prepared for the planting of ideological seeds. Marx... and Lenin too, both perceived that where religious belief was shattered, the intellectuals would be most prone to become ideologists... to cope with the misery of atheist vacuity and meaninglessness.”⁴⁵

It may be concluded that the revised concept of intellectuals requires the recognition that they are a group distinguished – among other things – by an unusual amount of difficulty coming to terms with the dilemmas and discontents of modernity.

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⁴⁴ Daniel BELL, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York, 1976.

⁴⁵ Lewis S. FEUER, *Ideology and the Ideologists*, New York, 1975, pp. 171–172.