

# Purifying the World: What the New Radical Ideology Stands For

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by Ernest Sternberg

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*Abstract: The past decade has seen the coalescence of a new ideology that envisions social movements in a cataclysmic struggle against global capitalist Empire. Controlled by U.S. militarism and multinational corporations, in cahoots with Zionism, Empire contaminates environments and destroys cultures. Its defeat will bring about a new era of social justice and sustainable development, in which the diverse cultures harmoniously share the earth. Is this a totalitarian ideology? From fascist and communist precedents, we learn that lovers of renewed humanity are not sufficiently motivated by abstract ideals. They must also identify humanity's enemy, the cause of all suffering. Equipped with a scapegoat, diverse communities can achieve solidarity through shared execration.*

**T**he hope with which we entered the twenty-first century was that, whatever new specters we would have to confront, totalitarian ideologies would not be among them. Fascism, communism, and their variants would moulder in their political graveyards. Could it be that we hoped in vain? Could it be that that, from their putrefied bodies, another world-transforming ideology has emerged?

There is plenty of reason to think so. We are in the midst of the worldwide rise of a non-religious chiliastic movement, which preaches global human renewal and predicts apocalypse as its alternative. Like its twentieth-century predecessors, the new ideology provides an intellectual formula through which to identify the present world's depredations, imagines a pure new world that eliminates them, and mobilizes the disaffected and alienated for the sake of radical change. Like the followers of totalitarianisms past, the new ideologues also see themselves as the vanguard for the highest humanitarian ideals. If many of us have failed to recognize the rise of this new movement, the reason may be that we are still trapped in defunct ideological categories.

The new ideology is most clearly identified by what it opposes. Its enemy is the global monolith called Empire, which exerts systemic domination

over human lives, mainly from the United States. Empire does so by means of economic liberalism, militarism, multinational corporations, corporate media, and technologies of surveillance, in cahoots with, or under the thrall of, Empire's most sinister manifestation, namely Zionism. So far there is no controversy—these points will be readily admitted by advocates as well as critics.

There is much less clarity about what the new movement is *for*. My task here is to describe what it is for: to make the case that the new radicalism does have a coherent vision and, in postulating both an evil past and an ideal future, does qualify as a full-fledged ideology. Put starkly, the world it envisions is pure. The earth will be protected, justice will reign, economies will be sustainable, and energy will be renewable. Diverse communities will celebrate other communities, with the only proviso that they accede to doctrine. Far purer than democracies of the past, this future regime will operate through grassroots participatory meetings in which all communities are empowered. As old nation-state boundaries fade away, communities will coordinate with each other globally by means of rectification cadres called non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Hard as it may be to believe, these ideas are not sentimental mishmash but rather the tenets of a more or less well-ordered dogma. This outlook even contains a concept of historical change: the agents of change will be networked bunds called “social movements.” Millions around the world already find this dogma so persuasive that it shapes their politics. For some, this dogma functions as did the fanatical ideologies of the past, as a guide to life's meaning and an inspiration for fanatical commitment and self-sacrifice.

A new ideology it may be, but a totalitarian one? The adherents think of themselves as exemplars of purity, as progenitors of the utmost in democracy and inter-cultural appreciation. Could it be possible that, despite their sincerest beliefs, they are the vanguard of new totalitarian regime? The movement has yet to establish a regime, so we cannot say for certain. After analyzing this ideology, the essay concludes with some of the warning signs and with the prospect of participatory absolutism.

### **A New Movement for What?**

One of the more prominent recent commentators to say that a new totalitarian movement is afoot is Bernard-Henri Lévy, a French author and media-pundit. A self-described man of the Left who could not bring himself even to vote for a centrist presidential candidate, though it was his own friend Nicolas Sarkozy, Lévy is distressed at the changes in the Left. The Left that he supported ever since 1968, the one that sought human liberation from dictators and from ancient prejudices, has been rapidly disintegrating, Lévy writes, and is being replaced by a degenerate version. He sees in this Zombie Left or New

Barbarism (two of his several epithets) the essence of totalitarian thought: the dogmatic belief that the we are living in a time of cataclysmic conflict between, on the one hand, the shining and just society that humanity could bring about; and on the other, the filthy and exploitative order under which humanity now labors.<sup>1</sup>

The New Barbarians observe a sinister global power structure: the world-controlling state-military-corporate-legal-educational-media complex that generates and enforces the world's miseries. And since this makes for quite a large enemy, Lévy points out, the new ideologues' hatred must be focused against something more concrete. The larger concrete enemy is the United States; the smaller but even more demonic one is Israel. While Lévy goes far to describe what New Barbarism is against, he does little or nothing to explain what it is for.

Dismayed left-leaning author Nick Cohen has a similar reaction. "For all the atrocities and follies committed in its name," he writes, "the Left possessed this virtue: it would stand firm against fascism."<sup>2</sup> But after the failure of socialism and revelations of communism's mass crimes, the more alienated members of the Left lost political bearings, without losing their antagonism to the capitalist West. All the more so since the Iraq war of the early 2000s, the Left underwent what Cohen calls a "dark liberation." Leading members were now willing to deny documented genocide against the Bosnians, avert their faces from genocide in Sudan, spread the theories of Jewish-Zionist world conspiracy, ignore massive human rights abuses in the Third World, and excuse even the most brutal theocratic-fascist regime, as long as it opposed the United States and the capitalist status quo. The new Left proved incapable of recognizing any crime that could not be blamed on the capitalist West.

Cohen does not know what to call this new Left. At times, he writes, "I call them *nihilists* because of their willful refusal to put an agenda before the public."<sup>3</sup> He is not satisfied with the name. "Because they don't have a positive programme, it is difficult to think of a better label, although I accept that one is needed because they are the dominant left-wing force today."<sup>4</sup>

Hudson Institute scholar John Fonte does see in this reborn Left a coherent political idea, which he calls "transnational progressivism."<sup>5</sup> Led by

<sup>1</sup> Benard-Henri Lévy, *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism* (NY: Random House, 2008). Some of the wording in this and the next paragraph replicates my book review, Ernest Sternberg, "A Revivified Corpse: Left-Fascism in the Twenty-First Century," found on the *Telos* journal website at [www.telospress.com/main/index.php?main\\_page=news\\_article&article\\_id=288](http://www.telospress.com/main/index.php?main_page=news_article&article_id=288).

<sup>2</sup> Nick Cohen, *What's Left? How the Left Lost It's Way* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, *What's Left?*, p. 14, italic in the original.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, *What's Left?*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> John Fonte, "Liberal Democracy vs. Transnational Progressivism: The Future of the Ideological Civil War Within the West," *Orbis*, Summer 2002, pp. 1–14.

NGOs, which are unaccountable to an electorate and escape political checks and balances, these progressives want to establish global laws that overcome U.S. constitutional jurisdiction. To Fonte the new progressives also favor “post-democracy,” a polity based (among other features) on group consciousness instead of individual rights.<sup>6</sup> Though Fonte has proved to be an early and astute observer, his insight is partial: there is more to the new movement than transnationalism.

It is hard to tell what the movement is for in part because its purported intellectual leaders fall into contending factions. Said to be the most prominent, Noam Chomsky attacks U.S.-led world capitalism without saying what should be put in its place, other than that it should not be led by the United States, capitalist, and unjust. Most of the theorists manage to marginalize themselves through obscurantism. As ever, theoretical obscurity invests the activist movement with a seemingly profound pedigree, while sheltering it from prying questions. Still, if one trolls through the activists’ practical literature, while conscientiously avoiding its theorists, a coherent political vision does emerge. It needs a name.

### **What to Call It**

To call this movement neo-this or neo-that, or to keep using hyphens is as tiresome as it would have been to say Darwinian-National-Neo-Romanticist Movement against International Plutocracy for what came to be known as Fascism.

Bernard-Henri Lévy’s colorful terms (alongside ones already mentioned) include neoprogressivism, oxymoronic Left, cadaverous Left, and red fascism.<sup>7</sup> Among other writers, too, the older term left-fascism has reappeared, having brief currency after the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas used it in 1968 to label young radicals willing to suppress speech, excuse Stalinism, and condone violence in opposition to the capitalist state.<sup>8</sup> The term is now found in more elaborate forms, such as red-brown-green coalition, with the green referring to radical environmentalism or radical Islamism or both.<sup>9</sup> The colors are arrayed in various sequences, sometimes with black thrown in for good measure, to refer to anarchism. Their combination is sometimes termed the “coalition” or, more tellingly, “synthesis” of the extremes.<sup>10</sup> On the

<sup>6</sup> Fonte, “Liberal Democracy vs. Transnational Progressivism,” p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Lévy, *Left in Dark Time*, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Jurgen Habermas and Peter Dews, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jurgen Habermas*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.: London: Verso, 1992), p. 233.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandre Del Valle, “The Reds, The Browns and the Greens or The Convergence of Totalitarianisms,” *Internationale Politique*, (2004), tr. Erich von Abele; found on del Valle’s website at [www.alexandrevalle.com](http://www.alexandrevalle.com).

<sup>10</sup> Dave Rich, “Antisemitism and the Coalition of the Extremes,” November 2004, Community Security Trust (UK) webpage: [http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/rich\\_essay\\_nov\\_04.pdf](http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/rich_essay_nov_04.pdf).

antifascist Right, David Horowitz calls it neo-communism and unholy alliance, the latter phrase referring specifically to the Left-Islamist axis.

As for the movement's proponents, they think of their cause as the anti-globalization (or "alter-globalization" or "no-borders") movement, eco-socialism, grass-roots globalism, global resistance, global justice movement, global intifada, transnational activism, protest networks, movement of movements, peace and justice movement, and coalition of the oppressed.<sup>11</sup>

The proponents' labels are not much good either. The term "anti-globalization" has led to the misunderstanding that the movement simply opposes the expansion of international trade. This is incorrect on several levels, the most basic being that the world economy has been globalized for centuries. Furthermore, the movement is in itself explicitly global: adherents actively seek to forge international links among their factions. At the same time, this ideology is found within the U.S. in local political affairs. Advocates for low-income housing, food purity, illegal immigrants, restrictions on genetic engineering, and pollution controls often see each other pursuing a common ideological cause, without even thinking about transnational links.

Nor can the movement claim distinctiveness through its appeals to peace and justice, which all political persuasions espouse. Nor, again, is the movement adequately defined by the fact that many groups have a part in it—that it is a movement of movements—since, as a matter of course, democracies routinely see coalitions arise and dissolve for the opportunistic pursuit of overlapping interests. What should be more important in giving this movement a name is the vision driving it.

What the movement actually opposes is not global connections, *per se*, but a sinister force extending its mechanical feelers through all local communities and thereby exerting unjust power over them. Though a mouthful, *world purificationism* would do well in expressing what the movement wants. It wants to achieve a grand historical vision: the anticipated defeat of imperial capitalist power in favor of a global network of beneficent culture-communities, which will empower themselves through grassroots participatory democracy, and maintain consistency across movements through the rectifying power of NGOs, thereby bringing into being a new era of global social justice and sustainable development, in which the diverse communities can harmoniously share an earth that has been saved from destruction and remade pristine.

### **The Movement's Extent**

It is hard to know how to make the case that a new ideology is on the rise, has worldwide scope, and intends to reinvent humanity. Such things do not

<sup>11</sup> Such terms found, for example, in Tom Mertes and Walden F. Bello, *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London: Verso, 2004).

happen often, so there are few historical precedents. An ideological movement is also variegated and complex, with internal differences and tensions, thus defying simple summary. What is more, purificationism is still evolving.

A hundred years ago, Marxism and Fascism evolved distinct identities out of the late nineteenth century's mire of anti-capitalist ideas.<sup>12</sup> Purification is just now emerging from the post-communist ideological swamp. It seems to be at the turning point when activists have graduated from fringe gatherings of the alienated. They lead hundreds of activist groups and NGOs, conduct seminars and hold marches at international conferences, receive support from governments and eleemosynary institutions, enjoy various despotisms as their cheerleaders, are woven into the workings of the UN and the EU, have loyal following within the United States and, as we shall see, subscribe to a coherent though not uniform doctrine.

For the unconvinced, the following exercise works: in the United States attend a meeting of the nearest "peace and justice group" or "peace center," or of any of a number of "greens" or "left greens" or "activists" for "solidarity" and "global justice," and have a political conversation. The activists invariably will express a version of the ideological package to be described here. Needless to say, the curious can also find countless web pages.<sup>13</sup>

A representative domestic gathering took place when 10,000 activists met in Atlanta in 2007. As is typical, many agendas converged: urban community organizing, prison abolition, food faddism, Palestine, immigrant rights, refugee rights, street theater, something called transformative justice, feminism, environmental activism, and hybrid causes such as Queers for Environmental Justice. A correspondent for the *Nation* magazine reported that the "event is building a left that is grassroots and democratic," full of ideas "for a radical remaking of this country," though the remaking is by no means assured, since the meeting's only memorable outcome, aside from the networking, was the slogan "Another US is Necessary."<sup>14</sup>

Alongside protests, the activists have established platforms some call "counter-institutions." These include Indymedia, self-described as "a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth. We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media's distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity."<sup>15</sup>

The World Social Forum, which last met in January 2009 in Belém, Brazil, states on its webpage that it is not a group or organization, but rather an

<sup>12</sup> A. James Gregor, *The Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press: 2000).

<sup>13</sup> An easy start is to use any of the proponents' names for their movement, enter it into Wikipedia, and follow the links. The site [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org) can also serve as a start.

<sup>14</sup> Dan Berger, "An Even Newer Left," *Nation*, June 30, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Indymedia website, <http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml>.

open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically. . .and network for effective action.<sup>16</sup>

The webpage claims that the 2009 meeting had 113,000 participants (including those in marches and demonstrations), from 114 countries, representing 5,800 organizations, with 2,500 journalists in attendance.<sup>17</sup> These numbers were, however, lower than in previous years, perhaps because of the year's economic crisis, and the majority were from Latin America, many just Brazilian leftists.

The meetings are not confined to loosely affiliated activists. Fonte reports that nearly a year before the 9/11 attacks, fifty NGOs including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch petitioned the UN to "to hold the United States accountable for the intractable and persistent problem of discrimination" and numerous U.S. NGO's at the 2000 UN sponsored Durban Conference against Racism signed on to a resolution denouncing capitalism as a "fundamentally flawed system."<sup>18</sup> Under impetus from despotic regimes and using UN organizations dominated by human-rights abusing despots, with the collaboration of international NGOs, the Durban 2000 event (less so the repeat performance in Geneva in 2009) turned into an anti-Western and anti-Semitic circus.<sup>19</sup>

A watershed statement on the new role of world NGO's was that of Irene Khan, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, once the world's most respected and venerable human rights organizations. As she told the *Financial Times*:

if you look today and want to talk about human rights, for the vast majority of the world's population they don't mean very much. To talk about freedom of expression to a man who can't read the newspaper, to talk about the right to work to a man who has no job; human rights means nothing to them unless it brings some change on these issues.<sup>20</sup>

Apparently not just an off-the cuff remark but a reflection of principle, this astounding assertion seems to mean that political prisoners (on whose behalf Amnesty International gained worldwide respect) are insufficient in themselves to merit a humanitarian campaign when so many hungry and unemployed people do not care about them. The NGO, it seems, must be a

<sup>16</sup> World Social Forum, [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=19&cd\\_language=2](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=19&cd_language=2).

<sup>17</sup> World Social Forum, [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias\\_01.php?cd\\_news=2556&cd\\_language=2](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias_01.php?cd_news=2556&cd_language=2) and [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias\\_01.php?cd\\_news=2558&cd\\_language=2](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/noticias_01.php?cd_news=2558&cd_language=2).

<sup>18</sup> Fonte, "Liberal Democracy vs. Transnational Progressivism," p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> For coverage, see the website [www.ngomonitor.org](http://www.ngomonitor.org).

<sup>20</sup> Reported in Cohen, *What's Left*, p. 324. The quotation appeared originally in an interview by Hugh Williamson, entitled, "Free Thinkers," *Financial Times*, May 21, 2005.

campaigner not merely for political dissidents in dungeons, but for global economic change.

Widely supported by NGO's, the World Social Forums in Belém concluded in one of its joint declarations that "In order to overcome the crisis we have to grapple with the root of the problem and progress as fast as possible towards the construction of a radical alternative that would do away with the capitalist system and patriarchal domination."

A few nation-states, too, have started flying the purificationist banner. Most prominent is Venezuela, its strongman, Hugo Chavez, being a prominent speaker at World Social Forums, and a proponent of counter-globalization. Chavez himself revealed his ideological stance in September 2006 when he accused George W. Bush of being the devil and brandished Noam Chomsky's anti-Empire volume, *Hegemony and Survival*, much as Nikita Khrushchev once banged his shoe.

The variety of participants, the geographical scope, and the large crowds give credence to claims of the new movement's appeal and influence. The question is whether a coherent ideology, possibly totalitarian, drives this movement.

### **Totalitarian Ideology: The Precedents**

Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* remains the foremost statement on the nature of totalitarian ideology. Totalitarianism, for her, is the application of a fixed logic by which initiates understand how the present fits into the course of history. Such an ideological outlook reveals a decadent past about to perish; it explains how the present opens up opportunity for radical change; and it predicts the ideal future. The ideologue becomes the actor on whose ferocious commitment the historical turn will hinge.

Thanks to ideological indoctrination (e.g., Nazi youth camps, communist re-education camps), the adherent develops the refined sense by which to perceive historical momentum in daily events and detect secrets and conspiracies where none would meet the uninitiated's eye. He so thoroughly integrates this logic that events become sharp and unambiguous. Surprises, complexities, uncertainties, and even the variety and richness of personal life disappear. Mentally equipped with the new ideology, he can remain untouched by personal experience to the contrary,<sup>21</sup> that being the very reason that Marxist intellectuals could maintain their communist allegiance for decades after purges, famine-genocides, and gulags became evident.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; San Diego: Harvest Books, 1985), pp. 468–471.

Note that what is at issue is totalitarian *ideology*, not a totalitarian *regime*. What constitutes a totalitarian regime is itself an important and much contested question. Writers since World War II have offered various definitions. Communist, Nazi and other fascist regimes eliminate representative government, hate bourgeois culture, establish single-party rule and cult of personality, build massive projects through pharaonic armies of laborers, and try to enforce conformity through both indoctrination and terrorization. They display militarism, bellicosity, Xenophobia, irredentism, and loathing of bourgeois culture. And they consign not just suspected individual enemies but entire categories of persons to concentration camps and genocide.<sup>22</sup> But totalitarian regimes vary, so historians are far from unanimous in classifying them.

For us, what is at stake is the ideology, the fixed logic that motivates a political movement and may one day come to legitimize its political rule. We can reasonably discuss an ideology, even if it has not yet achieved a regime.

Unmentionable for decades in progressive scholarly company, the similarity between totalitarianisms has once again received academic attention, in part because of interest in comparing Soviet, Maoist, Khmer, and Nazi genocides.<sup>23</sup> The new work has renewed appreciation that fascism and communism did not just have similar regimes. They also shared parallel ideologies.

Fascism and communism claimed the mantle of the century's greatest utopia, namely socialism, and each claimed to speak with the party's sole voice for all "people." Both strived to submit individuals to the communal whether it was the international workers' fraternity (whose triumph was assured by socialist science) or a particular folk-community (its supremacy assured by race science).<sup>24</sup> To those who hold conventional beliefs about the left-right divide, the comparison is startling: how could intellectual commonality exist between two militarized movements that were, during decisive periods, at each others' throats?

Emilio Gentile writes that, while both kinds of totalitarianism spurn traditional religion, each confers sacred status to an earthly concept, such as nation or race or proletariat "and exalts it as the supreme ethical precept of

<sup>22</sup> For one such list, admitting how controversial the lists are, see "Totalitarianism," in Philip P. Weiner, ed., *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973–74). For a fine general introduction to the leading scholarship on totalitarianism, from Friedrich von Hayek through Vaclav Havel, see Simon Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny: Interpretations of Totalitarianism* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> On the rather recent willingness of scholars to explore parallels between communist and Nazi genocides, and to acknowledge the gargantuan extent of Stalinist and Maoist crimes, see the editors' introduction to Helmut Dubiel and Gabriel Motzkin, eds., *The Lesser Evil: Moral Approaches to Genocide Practices* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Martin Malia, "Nazism-Communism: Delineating the Comparison," in Dubiel and Motzkin, *Lesser Evil*, p. 19.

public life.” This concept “becomes an object for veneration and dedication, even to the point of self-sacrifice.”<sup>25</sup> The movement also develops a myth that foresees an “anthropological revolution” in which new men achieve cataclysmic change.<sup>26</sup> The protagonists in each kind movement hold the fanatical belief that they are:

the forebears of a new humanity, the builders of a new civilization, the interpreters of new truth, the repositories of the discrimination between good and evil, and the masters of the destinies of those caught up in their enterprise.<sup>27</sup>

Convinced that they have this unique mission, they must motivate hatred of opponents. They carry out or at least legitimize ruthless violence. And they assert the privilege to shape life’s purpose and meaning for millions.<sup>28</sup> “Their ultimate goal,” Gentile writes, “is to create a *new civilization* along expansionist lines beyond the Nation-State.”<sup>29</sup>

Roger Griffin, too, finds in fascist ideology a mythic core. He comes to the conclusion that there is indeed a generic fascist ideology (not just historically distinct Italian Fascism, Spanish Fascism, Nazism, etc.) and that its core attribute is the “palingenetic” myth—the word referring to renewed or repeated birth.<sup>30</sup> The myth is that it is possible now, amid present corruption and degradation, to build a glorious New Rome.<sup>31</sup> To Griffin, fascist ideology imbues its followers with: the sense of living through an imminent turning point in contemporary history, when the dominance of the allegedly bankrupt or degenerate forces of conservatism, individualistic liberalism and materialist socialism is finally to give way to a new era in which vitalistic nationalism will triumph.<sup>32</sup>

To overcome degeneracy and eliminate parasitical elites who have held the nation back, violence is necessary. Though tactical concessions may be made to parliamentary process, the aim is organic national regeneration—so party contestation and plurality of belief are anathema. To build momentum, the masses are to be forged into an organic community, purged of

<sup>25</sup> Emilio Gentile, tr. Robert Mallett, “The Sacralization of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 18–19.

<sup>26</sup> Gentile, “Sacralization of Politics,” p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19, italics as in original.

<sup>30</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991), pp. 32–33. The Greek prefix *palin*-can mean “again” or “backward” as in *palindrome*.

<sup>31</sup> One of the weaknesses in Griffin’s otherwise fine book is that he fails to distinguish totalizing palingenesis, meant to suddenly regenerate humanity, from rather ordinary appeals within democratic debate to a valued past or desired ideal. Hence Griffin thinks he sees an ominous palingenetic myth in the first President George Bush’s call for a New World Order. If palingenesis is so loosely defined, then even routine Fourth of July calls to uphold Founding Fathers’ values may be taken to have a sinister implication.

<sup>32</sup> Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, p. 44.

contamination, and taught the heroism and self-sacrifice needed to achieve the collective rebirth.<sup>33</sup>

Griffin's book, published in 1991, attributed the palingenetic myth also to the Marxist-Leninist hope for the creation of a new communist man, but does so only in passing and otherwise has little to say about communism.<sup>34</sup> By 2002, however, Griffin was explicit that palingenesis forms the mythical core of regimes as varied as Ceaucescu's Romania, Gadhafi's Libya, and Pol Pot's Cambodia.<sup>35</sup> "Palingenesis" now encompasses the myth of making a new society, not just remaking it from a mythical past (and this does add to the word some etymologically unwarranted girth<sup>36</sup>). The palingenetic political community need no longer be nationalist; it is quite consistent with Griffin's more recent ideas to conceive of a transnational palingenesis.

Whereas Griffin derives his conclusions mainly from studies of fascism, Luciano Pellicani reaches essentially the same result from studies of communism. To Pellicani, the twentieth century's worldwide movement in search of a stateless and classless paradise was the modern period's shattering event. Its driving force was an overwhelming chiliastic passion: to overthrow the existing order in order to establish an absolutely and abstractly pure world.

The instigators of this passion were alienated intellectuals who enjoyed the special privilege that modernity had provided, that of working professionally and without restriction in the realm of ideas. Their alienation stemmed, Pellicani states, from the low regard that the modern capitalist world had for their utopias, even though, to the intellectuals, these imagined worlds were self-evidently superior to the existing order. Equipped with theoretical apparatus and accompanying jargon unavailable to other men, they could claim what Pellicani calls a *gnosis*—an arcane and speculative knowledge of history's dynamic—that would illuminate the road toward the transfigured society.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35. Discussing the overly loose way in which the term "fascism" has been used to impugn hated groups, while leaving communism off the hook, James Gregor observes that if the various definitions of generic fascism are consistently applied, then Stalinism, Maoism, Leninism, and PolPotism fall neatly under them. See A. James Gregor, *The Search for Neofascism: The Use and Abuse of Social Science* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–53.

<sup>35</sup> Roger Griffin, "The Palingenetic Political Community: Rethinking the Legitimation for Totalitarian Regimes in Inter-War Europe," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* Vol. 3, No. 3 (Winter 2002), p. 35.

<sup>36</sup> So neo-genesis (new birth) would work as well as, or better than, palingenesis, as would alter-genesis (changed birth), and allo-genesis (different birth). It is to be hoped that purificationist movement does not portend another teratogenesis (birth of the monstrous).

<sup>37</sup> Luciano Pellicani, *Revolutionary Apocalypse: Ideological Roots of Terrorism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), especially pp. xi–xii and 1–28. For some reason, Pellicani does not explicitly link his work to that of Eric Voeglin, the most distinguished scholar to have examined the gnostic elements in extremist ideologies.

In a world that is corrupt and abusive, the revolutionary gnostics predict a historical rupture, a cataclysmic break with a degenerate past, a revolution that rights wrongs and remedies injustices, “restoring the great universal harmony destroyed by the desire for profit.”<sup>38</sup> What is more, “The gnosis knows how and when the world was invaded by evil; it knows how and when it will be purified,”<sup>39</sup> and hence those imbued with recondite knowledge function as guides to social transfiguration. They can gather the angry, the disaffected, the oppressed, the depressed, the discontented and the offended in a march meant to liberate humanity, this liberation to occur upon the present, diabolical system’s termination.

The revolutionary march proceeds, however, not just by having an ideal city as its destination, but also by projecting an enemy against which to march. Alongside propaganda and indoctrination, Pellicani writes, “*batred* is another powerful factor of unity and mobilization.”<sup>40</sup> He cites the great Bolshevik-sympathizing author, Maxim Gorky, to explain that the motives for revolution were purely humanitarian. But since humanity commonly fails to live up to the ideals that its lovers expect of it, the love’s necessary counterpart is hate for humanity’s enemies.<sup>41</sup>

This hate is likely to have more direct consequences than love because humanity is abstract, while the accursed enemies of humanity are real living beings who can, with correct analysis, be readily identified and targeted. For the Nazis the enemies were racial parasites. Under Marxists-Leninists, they were kulaks, traders, and entrepreneurs and miscellaneous objects of the great leader’s paranoia. And under Asian communisms, they were city dwellers and middle peasants. Camps, gulags and mass murders were necessary for social transfiguration.

To Arendt, the totalitarian ideology establishes a fixed logic by which to interpret present times; to Gentile it imposes an apocalyptic political religion; to Griffin, it’s a palingenetic myth; to Pellicani, a revolutionary gnosis. The question now is whether world purificationism is another such movement preaching total transformation.

### **The Many Marxes**

In search of an answer, one obvious place to go is the movement’s theorist. With militant socialism, the curious could at least go to Marx and his line of followers to try to understand world purificationism. But this is only a partial aid because no single theoretical language gives coherence to the movement.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 232, italic in the original.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

Authors Hardt and Negri do deserve special mention for a theoretical amalgamation. They argue that social movements function currently for global capitalism the way that the proletariat was supposed to work for industrial capitalism.<sup>42</sup> But Marx and Engels they are not, at least not yet.

The chief theoretical contenders are anarchists, radical feminists, deep ecological theories, and world-systems analysis, each calling for global change. Also in the running is one faction in German critical theory (that of Herbert Marcuse), which accuses Western capitalism of being the true totalitarianism—though other factions support liberal democracies. Adding to the mix of anti-Western ideology are anti-colonial theory (of self-realization through bloodshed), postcolonial theory (accusing the West of spreading forms of knowledge that humiliate subject peoples and make them lose their identity), anarcho-Marxism and autonomist theory (militant opposition through dispersed bottom-up groups rather than organized parties), some variants of critical race theory (seeing subordination as the key to public affairs), and anti-enlightenment theory (associated with Michel Foucault, which regards modern rationalism as a form of oppression).<sup>43</sup>

That these theories contradict each other need not impede the movement. As Pellicani tells us, abstruse theory is useful because it imbues simple beliefs with gnostic mysteries. The details of the theoretical arcana matter mainly to the intellectual fringe. Rank-and-file followers only need to know how to put events in their proper framework; the leadership must exhibit mastery only of the correct polemic. What is critical, as Hannah Arendt put it, is the practical mental framework: the logic that illuminates history, the more garishly the better, and gives off practical agendas for action.

To understand purificationism, we should turn away from the theorists and look to the activists' literature. It is from extensive reading of the practical material that the following ideological précis is assembled.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>43</sup>For an activist's guide to the theories, see Cynthia Kaufman, *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup>The following is a reconstruction—I am imagining the kind of world that the activists have in mind. Sources include Tom Mertes and Walden F. Bello, *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London: Verso, 2004); Daniel Burton-Rose, Eddie Yuen and George Katsiaficas, *Confronting Capitalism* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2004); David Solnit, *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2003); Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2005); and Derek Wall, *Babylon and Beyond: The Economics of Anti-Capitalist, Anti-Globalist and Radical Green Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

## **The Tenets of Purificationism 1: The Toxic**

Like ideologies past, purificationism contrasts the degenerate present with the ideal future. Though its writings do not put it just this way, they do present history divided between the toxic and the pure.

According to this doctrine, the world is divided between the empowered global system which is the purveyor of toxicity and disempowered communities that suffer its consequences. The world system that perpetuates oppression is known as Empire. It exercises domination through corporate tentacles, media manipulation, state power, and military prowess. It is selfish, greedy, ruthless, racist, and exploitative, and heedlessly pollutes the earth. It imposes its media-saturated culture, dehumanizing technologies, and exploitative production systems on subject peoples.

The outlook that upholds Empire is “liberalism” (known in the United States as conservatism). Someone who has sympathies with liberalism might associate it with, among other things, individuals’ rights to freely express political beliefs under laws that protect such expression; and the freedom to contract with others for personal and business affairs under legal institutions that protect contract and property. To the new ideologues, however this is wrong. Liberalism panders to desires for freedom, while it actually contaminates human motivations, making people greedy and selfish.

As educated Europeans are expected to know, the Great Depression discredited liberal economic policies, but liberalism made an unexpected and wholly unwelcome comeback in the 1980s, referred to by the new radicals as “Neoliberalism.” Neoliberalism once again sings the praises of free markets, eschews social welfare, and denigrates large public sectors. It breaks up communities and causes social injustices on a global scale. It also brings to mind Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and is, therefore, all the more odious.

Under the thrall of Neoliberal Empire, people live in poverty, food is contaminated, products are artificial, wasteful consumption is compelled, indigenous groups are dispossessed, and nature itself is subverted. Invasive species run rampant, glaciers melt, and seasons are thrown out of kilter, threatening world catastrophe. At Empire’s forefront is the United States, which ingests the bulk of the world’s resources; uses advanced military technologies to police the world; flexes its global fingers to scratch profits from the poor; and uses surveillance technologies and anti-terror laws to keep its own citizens in check. Whereas Empire’s overseers are white (or symbolically so, if for example they happen to be black or Asian), the weak are people of color, proving that the system is racist.

To entrench itself around the world, Empire uses means of communication and transportation to coordinate assets. However, it is also dependent on the peoples and environments it exploits, so it becomes susceptible to movements of resistance by the oppressed. Where the system cracks, seeds of

resistance take root; agitators for a purer life proliferate. Whether by identity, locality, issue, or particular outrage, they form impassioned bunds, known as “social movements.” They gain leverage by finding affinities with other bunds and networking across communities, borders, and cultures.

## **The Tenets of Purificationism 2: The Pure**

Through bundist struggles, “A Better World is Possible” (the World Social Forum’s slogan). That world will be environmentally clean, culturally harmonious, and politically just. The new life’s advent will occur when networked bunds triumph over Empire and purge societies of their toxicity.

Whereas capitalism creates and destroys and is constantly changing, the new order will be sustainable. It will run on alternative energy, organic farming, local food markets, and closed-loop recyclable industry, if any industry is needed. People will travel on public transit, or ride cars that tread lightly on the earth, or even better, ride bicycles. They will occupy green buildings constructed of local materials and inhabit cities growing organically within bioregions. Life will be liberated from carbon emanations. It will be a permanent, placid way of life, in which economies are integrated into the earth’s ecosystem.

The new world will also achieve cultural purity. By “culture” purificationism does not mean interesting folkways, nor simply heritage, and certainly not any literary and musical canon. Rather, culture is the offspring of folk-spirit: that mysterious life-source from which identity, meaning, and pride emerge. It is found in indigenous life-style, local habitat, feeling of community, and the heady experience of fringe art. Even communities that may have little left by way of traditions can look inward, perhaps just to their shared experience of oppression, for the folk-spirit from which to extract identity and pride.

While global corporations produce the artificial pseudo-culture that serves the Empire’s interests, communities possess or can rediscover real culture. These culture-communities are organic in two senses. First, like organic food, they are pure rather than adulterated. Second, they are integral totalities rather than associations of free individuals.<sup>45</sup>

In this new world, individuals’ beliefs will grow naturally from their cultures. As against rampant Americanization, indigenous ways of life become secure. What is more, communities will be protected from criticism leveled at them by means of abstract, rationalist reasoning.

Were it not for this cultural protection, Empire would define communities with first-world stereotypes, turning diverse peoples into Westerner’s

<sup>45</sup> On multiculturalism as a resurrection of *Volkgeist*, see Alain Finkielkraut, *The Defeat of the Mind*, tr. Judith Friedlander, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), especially parts one and two.

preconceptions of subjugated Orientals. It would subject them to rationalist expectations, impose onto them corporate media products, and make them to adhere to Western conceptions of freedom—which are Trojan horses for cultural hegemony. By dressing up its system as if it were a universal culture, Empire reveals its racism and chauvinism. In doing so, Empire undermines a culture's indigenous dignity, defiling what would otherwise be pure. Indigenous peoples are like endangered species. And their cultures are like sensitive ecosystems, subject to destruction by Neoliberal contamination.

In the run-up to the new world, victims especially enjoy the status of ethereal purity. They do so by dint of their victimhood, a sign that they are antagonists of Empire. Allies of Empire who claim to have been victims (i.e., Zionists) are merely using their alleged victimhood to justify oppression, since they are constituents (or overlords) of Empire, and Empire only empowers itself; it cannot victimize itself. It should be clear, though, that when acts of resistance occur against Empire and cause mass civilian casualties, the maimed and the dead are not victims of purity, something that is, by definition, impossible. Rather, such casualties are understandable blowbacks of Empire's aggression.

In the new world to come, multiple cultures will flourish, saved from global homogenization. Persons of diverse ethnic communities, conditions of ability or disability, and gender and transgender statuses will live with each other in harmony and mutual appreciation. Varied views will be expected and welcome, as long as they stand in opposition to Empire. All religions will be welcome as long as they celebrate other religions. A religion that fights Empire is, however, exempt from having to celebrate another culture; instead, it will express understandable anger against its subjugation to Empire.

The new world will have political structures very different from the republican regimes that lead Empire. Republics have institutional checks and balances that are removed from the people; they reach decisions through political contestation and adjustment; they fight over policies; they meet problems with technological solutions and muddle through; and the markets they uphold are in constant flux and have outcomes that are inequitable across groups. In contrast, the new world will be purely democratic. It will be a grass-roots democracy in which participants will have direct voice through the bund with which they identify, and no bund will dominate others. The democratic process will proceed through meetings freed from the manipulative reins of law, procedure, precedent, and hierarchy. These will be forums in which non-hegemonic discourse will flourish. And the forums will be assuredly democratic because bona fide grass-roots progressives will facilitate them.

On a world scale, oppressed peoples' bunds will discover commonalities across borders. Transnational rules will increasingly overcome chauvinist laws bounded by nationality. Climate and energy flows will come under transnational management; rules regulating labor will transcend borders; nation-states will weaken. Organized cadres of rectifiers, known as NGOs, will serve as the world's humanitarian enforcers and equalizers.

Imperial revanchists will counterattack, to be sure. They will exert military might, financial power, and media control to discredit the advocates of purity. They will raise the specter of economic downfall; allege terrorist threats from the dispossessed; and incite fears of sham dangers, such as weapons of mass destruction. So the path to purity will require struggle. The new purifiers contend that struggle is rapidly spreading, even within the interstices of global capitalism. It spreads because racism, colonialism, patriarchy, oppression, militarism, and the destruction of nature spur movements of resistance. What definitively reveals that a social movement (a new bund) exists is that social movers have announced themselves. The new purifiers can start by agitating within communities. Then to gain leverage, they can network. They can form coalitions across movements and across borders, show solidarity for distant intifada-makers who take the risks of violence to build better worlds. These transnationally networked teams of idealists are the vanguards of world transformation.

### **A Totalitarian Ideology?**

Here is a recap: purificationism posits a world on the cusp between a foul past under the thrall of pernicious masters, and an exhilarating future to be achieved through the efforts of righteous idealists. By Hannah Arendt's definition, the movement's tenets very clearly qualify it as totalitarian ideology.

For adherents of the movement, the ready retort to the charge of totalitarianism is ridicule. To favor human rights, to want to prevent ocean pollution, to desire inter-cultural understanding, to strive for peace—these are totalitarian? The very thought would be ridiculous if that were the point.

But it is not. I, too, may support equal legal protections for homosexuals, restoration of polluted streams, land set-asides for Amazonian tribes, alongside other causes. The republican legal framework allows me to contest freely for such causes. Through this framework, positions are contested, disagreements tolerated, successes achieved, setbacks suffered, and compromises grudgingly accepted, while civic life stumbles along. One who pursues causes within electoral democracy, within the republican framework of checks and balances, is certainly no totalitarian ideologue.

The new ideology hinges, rather, on one's subscribing to the following world view. First, that the various environmentalist, pacifist, and multi-cultural ideals form a package: an achievable political ideal. Second, that its advocates are righteous and its opponents evil. Third, that the failure to have achieved this ideal exposes sinister and conniving global forces. Fourth, that this failure, if it continues, will have horrific consequences, including ruin of the earth. Fifth, that the world's diverse peoples want a purer world, but this better world remains unachieved. Sixth, that the failure of the world's peoples to achieve what they really want proves that the so-called democracy enjoyed in the West

is not really democratic, so communities must be empowered with ultra-democracy. And seventh, that to open up possibilities for a better world, coalitions of movements must resist and overcome global oppression. This world view defines purificationist ideology.<sup>46</sup>

The movement's defenders can also offer a more important criticism. Arendt and the other authors were looking in retrospect, with knowledge of the regimes that resulted from totalitarian ideologies. We, by contrast, are looking ahead at a new movement that is still coalescing. What is more, the new movement's organizational forms differ markedly from totalitarianisms past. Unlike old fascist or communist movements, it still has no rigid hierarchy (networking is supposed to substitute). It eschews military symbolism (though fists are fairly common and "resistance" is a virtue). It does not even have a unitary party (though the Green parties serve unifying functions in Europe). It seeks cultural diversity (with exceptions, such as Neoliberals, Zionists, Christian conservatives, and people who identify with consumer culture).

Whereas the old totalitarian wanted to subject the masses to the party's discipline and the leader's direction, the new ideologues want communities politically empowered (though empowerment appears to be something different than legally-structured government). They imagine grass-roots participatory democracy, the purest kind of democracy that can be conceived (though so-called community-based democracies around the world have served at the strongman's pleasure). They want a world freed from hegemonic discourses (though it is unclear who determines what is hegemonic and how to stop them). And though there are various heroes, among whom Che Guevara is the most famous, as of 2009 the purificationist movement has no cult of the leader (except in Venezuela).

Since the new movement makes do so far without the old totalitarian apparatus, perhaps the ideological parallels alleged here are simply spurious resemblances. To call it totalitarian it must exhibit the kind of reactionary bile that one would expect from the movement's enemies. And we could leave the debate there, were it not for the totalitarian warning signs.

### **The Warning Signs**

In 2005, British parliamentarian George Galloway was interviewed while on an electioneering visit to Bangladesh (many of his constituents were from there), the interview published in a pro-Saddam news website, since defunct. Commended "for his resolute stance against capitalist globalization, fascism and all forms of racism including Islamophobia," he was asked

<sup>46</sup>To use a technical term, this package is an "ideal type," a synthesis of common elements meant to reveal internal coherence in an otherwise confusing collection of instances. Some adherents, no doubt, subscribe to less than the full package or to muddled versions of it.

whether it was possible to unite Muslim and progressive forces around the world. According to Galloway,

Not only do I think it's possible but I think it is vitally necessary and I think it is happening already. It is possible because the progressive movement around the world and the Muslims have the same enemies. . . They have the same interest in opposing savage capitalist globalization which is intent upon homogenizing the entire world turning us basically into factory chickens which can be forced fed the American diet of everything from food to Coca-Cola to movies and TV culture. . . So on the very grave big issues of the day—issues of war, occupation, justice, opposition to globalization—the Muslims and the progressives are on the same side.<sup>47</sup>

Two months later, appearing on *Al Jazeera*, Galloway accused U.S., British, Japanese, and Italian heads of state of being criminals responsible for mass murder and deserving to be tried, because of their support for Israel and:

their support for a globalized capitalist economic system, which is the biggest killer the world has ever known. It has killed far more people than Adolph Hitler. It has killed far more people than George Bush. The economic system which these people support, which leaves most of the people in the world hungry, and without clean water to drink.<sup>48</sup>

Several motifs are apparent in these quotes. Most transparent is a desire to fix contemporary radicalism's big problem: how to forge solidarity across very different groups. Though the speaker is on record as a passionate supporter of the Soviet Union, Galloway displays little evidence of communist sympathy except for enmity toward capitalism. Capitalism's crime is not worker exploitation *per se*, but mass-murder. To be sure, Galloway's mass-murder allegation is bereft of factual meaning, but it does make sense according to the following logic: capitalism is responsible for causing all the deaths that a better world would eliminate. By such logic the United States is the greatest of evils, without need for evidence.

This kind of accusation is common among the new radicals. Those who believe it, and take it to heart, could plausibly launch the most fanatical response, since the world's greatest possible evil is alleged. With this in mind, we can identify the totalitarian warning signs.

<sup>47</sup> Mohammad Basirul Haq Sinha, "Galloway calls for global unity between Islamic and Left forces," *Iraq News Network*, April 25 2005 (transcript of interview conducted in Bangladesh on March 9, 2009), [www.iraq-news.de](http://www.iraq-news.de) [site no longer exists in 2009 but can be retrieved via the "wayback machine" at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org), consulted in July 2009]. The original contained asterisks of unclear meaning at various points. These are omitted here. I first saw this quotation on one of David Horowitz's websites.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Al-Jazeera on June 1, 2005. Available at Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Special Dispatch No.918, dated June 8, 2005, [www.memri.org](http://www.memri.org), consulted on May 2, 2009. These and other examples are meant of course as suggestive illustration, not as proof about the nature of the new ideology.

## **The Enemy of Humanity 1: The United States**

This is the first warning sign: that purificationism has found the new enemy of humanity. For former ideologies, it was the global parasitical race or brutal master class. It is now the fiendish, U.S.-dominated global system that kills untold numbers, keeps billions in misery, threatens environmental cataclysm, subverts cultures, and blocks the advent of world harmony. Note that, in the Galloway quotes, the United States' monstrousness cannot rest simply on its savagery in having caused so many deaths. It is also guilty of killing cultures.

Disregard the United States' fecundity in spawning artistic works, providing livelihood to innumerable artists and musicians, giving them the opportunity to work without fear of persecution, and generating a historically unprecedented outpouring of genres and styles, all made possible because artists could become artistic entrepreneurs independent of patrons and because the United States was history's first society freed from the sanction of official culture—disregard that, and it becomes clear that the United States has no culture. It is a wasteland of commercial advertisement, corporate-homogenized products, franchise restaurants, theme parks, processed chickens, and so forth. Not only does the United States have phony culture, it strangles the real cultures around the world. For the committed purifier the only plausible conclusion is that social justice will triumph upon the death of the United States, the destroyer of cultures.

A number of fine works that have examined the resurgence of anti-Americanism in the past decade have indeed identified anti-globalism as a conspicuous factor. Scholars have documented the veritable glee, even among some radical U.S. citizens and Europeans, with which the 9/11 attacks were received.<sup>49</sup> In the popular media, anti-Americanism is almost always attributed to the United States' hubris, militarism, decadence, unilateralism, etc. Yet the ideological logic examined here suggests another cause: the rise of an impassioned post-communist world-transformative movement that has identified the United States as the world's villain.

## **The Enemy of Humanity 2: Israel**

Another warning sign is that Anti-Zionism pops up in the most unlikely places and in remarkably virulent forms. At the World Social Forum meeting at

<sup>49</sup> See Josef Joffe, *Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006); Russell A. Berman, *Anti-Americanism in Europe: A Cultural Problem* (Stanford, Cal.: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), esp. pp. 115–146; Jean-Francois Revel, *Anti-Americanism* (San Francisco, Cal.: Encounter, 2003), ch. 2; Paul Hollander, ed., *Understanding Anti-Americanism: Its Origins and Impact at Home and Abroad* (Chicago, Ill.: Ivan R. Dee, 2004); Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, *Hating America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

the mouth of the Amazon, 5,000 miles from Jerusalem, packed with over 100,000 purifiers from around the world, demonstrations against Israel count as one of the three foremost accomplishments.<sup>50</sup> In Durban, South Africa, hundreds of governmental groups and NGOs meet allegedly to fight racism, but ignore its genocidal manifestations in Africa, and can agree only to condemn Israel. In the United States the Green party condemns Israel as its sole piece of foreign policy. In Britain, unionized academics vote each year to boycott Israel. In Toronto, a demonstration for equal wages displays anti-Israel placards as does a demonstration in France against the loss of appellation for Roquefort cheese.

What does “the defense of the true Roquefort,” asks Pierre-André Taguieff—France’s premier author on anti-Semitism—have to do with Palestinians or Israelis? His answer is the “neo-communism that does not speak its name.” The neo-communists, as Taguieff calls them, thrive on the myth of the Palestinians as the authentic humiliated people, “the offended par excellence,” the pure representation of the “dominated and the oppressed.” Correspondingly, in “the demonized figure of Jews-Israelis-Zionists supported by the Americans,” the new ideologues have “Zionism as an incarnation of absolute evil.”<sup>51</sup>

Why Israel? The clue is the variety that Taguieff observes in the new movement: Islamists, Arab Nationalists, post-Christian humanitarians, third-worldists, and anti-globalizers of various stripes.<sup>52</sup> This is the movement’s ticklish problem: how to keep so much diversity in check. If Empire is too abstract as a nemesis, and the United States seems too formidable, Israel represents a scapegoat manageable enough in size, and devilish enough in the popular imagination.

Israel is the only Western nation under such a permanent threat that it has had to fight ongoing wars to survive. Stripped of all context, Israel’s actions fit the needed image of aggressor. And even if, for some haters of Israel, hatred of mere Jews is not the motive, totalitarianism has depended on anti-Semitism. Hannah Arendt pointed out that Stalin renewed the tradition after World War II by inventing the concept of a Zionist world conspiracy.<sup>53</sup> This then is the second warning sign, that purifiers have rediscovered that old enemy of humanity, the satanic cosmopolitan. He is the Goldberg against whom transnational movements can build solidarity through execration.

<sup>50</sup> Pauline Imbach, “A New Start with the 2009 WSF: An interview with IIRE Fellow Eric Toussaint,” International Institute for Research and Education (Amsterdam), <http://www.iire.org/content/view/161/>.

<sup>51</sup> Michael R. Shurkin, “France and Antisemitism,” *Zeek* November 2003, p. 4. The author is quoting in Pierre-André Taguieff in translation from various French magazine sources. Taguieff’s full work on the subject is *Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe*, tr. Patrick Camiller, (Chicago, Ill.: Ivan R. Dee, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Shurkin, “France and Anti-Semitism,” p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. xxi.

## Violence by Proxy

A turning point—a critical sign to watch for—will come when purifiers no longer satisfy themselves with joy at foreign resistance, nor with just spiking an occasional tree or bombing a laboratory in the nighttime, but finally stand true to their cataclysmic rhetoric, and strap on suicide belts or take up arms to become martyrs for global survival. The older generation of activists has been in no rush, perhaps because they no longer trust historical inevitability.

Cynthia Kaufman, a professor of philosophy at De Anza College in California, makes the strategic calculation that campaigns of violent overthrow against global capitalism are best kept to places where the majority is likely to support it. “Most people on the left agree,” she writes, that “armed struggle against the U.S. state is not a possibility in the near future, but debates continue about the role of U.S.-based activists in supporting armed groups in other countries.”<sup>54</sup> Note her convenient sidestep in shying away from domestic violence. If Empire is truly global, then could revolution ever succeed if farmed out to the Zappatistas, rather than brought home to the imperial metropole?

While regretfully steering clear of domestic violence, Kaufman does turn wistful at missing out on the excitement. “There is something exhilarating about watching movements in which people, using any means necessary, are making real changes in their societies,” she writes, but warns that even violence must be accompanied by other slow and painful work to solidify the revolution.<sup>55</sup>

Even this much forthrightness about violence is rare. The movement’s literature constantly, pervasively, touts “resistance,” but is ever coy about specifics. In London in 2003—to cite one of thousands of instances—when European Social Forum speakers repeatedly praised Iraqi Resistance (briefly called Iraqi Intifada, later renamed Iraqi Insurgency) to the audience’s enthusiastic support, what did resistance mean? No one asked embarrassing questions about decapitators and kidnappers, or about the suicide bombers immolating children in the Baghdad marketplaces.<sup>56</sup> Western anti-globalizers have met in Beirut and elsewhere with front-line militants/terrorists,<sup>57</sup> but the Westerners’ support has remained so far vocal only.

The strained demonization of Western influence, the invented body counts attributed to the United States, the rubbing of the wounds of Arab and African humiliation and the hysterical accusations about global firms serve to incite and further aggrieve those already aggrieved. That may well be the movement’s interim solution, namely to outsource the violence: Make angry

<sup>54</sup> Kaufman, *Ideas for Action*, p. 289. She cites a statement by Martin Luther King Jr for backing.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289–90.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, *What’s Left?*, p. 301.

<sup>57</sup> Ely Karmon, “Hizballah and the Anitglobalization Movement: A New Coalition?” *Policy Watch* 949, January 27, 2009. Retrieved from [www.washingtoninstitute.org/](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/).

Orientalists the proxies in the global revolution that the first-world purifiers will not dirty themselves to fight.

### **The Degradation of Humanitarianism**

For twentieth-century century fascism and communism, science supplied the best justification, whether socialist science or race science. Today's justification is humanitarianism. Words once used to attack racism, apartheid, torture, and genocide, are routinely appropriated to level against Empire, or the United States, or Israel.<sup>58</sup> The converse tactic is to minimize, disguise, or hide actual apartheid, as that against women in Saudi Arabia; actual genocides such as that in the Sudan; tortures daily practiced in Iranian and North Korean prisons; and a war quietly killing millions in the Congo.<sup>59</sup>

Purificationist ideology must soft-pedal mass crimes that occur in societies that dogma classifies as subordinate, for fear that undue attention will distract recruits from the depredations properly assigned only to Empire. This feature of the revived Left has most infuriated its own recent apostates. Referring to the ideological concept of Empire, Bernard-Henri Lévy goes so far as to say "It's certain that its only real function is to annihilate whole chapters of contemporary history, killing, one more time, millions of men and women, whose whole crime was being born and whose second was dying the wrong way."<sup>60</sup> This then is the fourth warning sign: the ideologically-induced corruption of language, such that humanitarian terms become weapons by which to attack the flaws of liberal democracies, while self-professed humanitarians excuse the pervasive crimes of despots.

Impassioned hatred of enemies combined with self-exculpatory moral deception about mass violence—these are the early portents of a movement that claims the purest of world-transformative ideals.

### **On Participatory Absolutism**

If one idea gives common ground to the movement's many groups (other than Islamist ones, if they can be considered true members) it is participatory democracy, also known as grass-roots democracy. In activist circles and among politicized academicians, the word "participation" almost

<sup>58</sup> A website that tracks NGO's just with respect to Israel is [www.ngomonitor.org](http://www.ngomonitor.org); of course extensive documentation would be needed to formally substantiate this point.

<sup>59</sup> Both Lévy, *Left in Dark Time*, pp. 137–145; and Cohen, *What's Left?*, pp. 158–168 and 178–179, document this astonishing neo-progressive trend. Of particular interest is Noam Chomsky, who has given comfort and credibility to a Holocaust denier, wrote a book (later detracted) to deny the Cambodian genocide, and lent supported to those trying to question genocide in the disintegrating Yugoslavia.

<sup>60</sup> Lévy, *Left in Dark Time*, p. 145.

has the sacrosanct quality that socialism once did. In the literature of third-world development and poverty relief, participation and the empowerment thought to flow from it have achieved near-mythic status.

The activists do not mean electoral participation, but peoples' active engagement in political matters that affect their lives. Whether a road to be widened, school curriculum to be introduced, beach to be redeveloped, crime to be reduced, or employment to be increased, community members should, it is thought, be directly involved in making the policy decision.

More often than not, grass-roots participation takes the form of a meeting in which much talk goes on and then a consensus is announced by the meeting's facilitator, without any troublesome recourse to parliamentary rules of order. To some advocates of participation, the very fact that allegedly subordinated communities (or rather the activists who claim to represent them) were present at a street protest and made demands is proof of grass-roots democracy.

In the United States, progressives have made headway by inserting participation requirements into policy making. The requirements are usually fulfilled by comment periods and dreary hearings at which everyone speaks while bureaucrats conspicuously take notes, whether or not they ever intend to read them. The hearings have some minor effect, here and there giving an insight that legislators previously lacked, or more often adding cost and delays, but are ultimately marginal to public decisions. In the language of the new dogmatists, this is not true participation at all, and they are quite right. So when a policy fails, or involves effects some regard as unfair, the onus can be easily placed on the undemocratic way in which the policy was made. "Undemocratic" refers, of course, to the lack of the community empowerment that should have determined the policy.

This is the new movement's high ethical road: the idea that its form of democracy will be purer and more just than that of liberal democracies, which depend on parliaments, judiciaries, checks and balances, and the rule of law, and are mere emanations of Empire. The ambiguity of the ultra-democratic ideal has served the movement well, allowing it to avoid hard questions.

Who has standing to participate? Who represents whom? Do resolutions, if there are any, have to be put in writing? Should there be rules for voting, enumeration, record keeping, recognizing speakers, tabling resolutions, and so forth? From the purificationist literature, no answers are needed. After all, the folk-community has organic value over and above that of its individual members; the "community" should not be construed as an assembly of individuals. Rather, meetings can and should express its collective desire through acclamation, and if the desire is ambiguous, a progressive facilitator should be sensitive and caring enough to elicit the community's underlying intent.

We can readily predict that the participatory ideal will turn out to be one of the movement's internal contradictions. Purifiers do in fact declare

universal positions against which, when details are announced and push comes to shove, some factions have vociferous objections. How do you really make the world sustainable and eliminate corporate media culture? Must people stop driving, stop eating meat, and turn off the TV set? Of course, people must stop nuclear power, since the fear of radiation (a symbol of toxicity) trumps worries over global warming, but they must also stop burning oil and coal. Since airplanes guzzle barrels per minute, maybe flights should be prohibited, except for the purificationist elite. One of the movement's hidden contradictions, then, is that sustainability will require coercion.

Coercion is a universal feature of the state; all states regulate and enforce, even the most democratic ones. When it finally gains the power to enforce, purificationism will undergo its true test. The precedents are not promising. The places to look at are the countries where republican institutions have been weak or absent, but grass-roots mass-participation has flourished under the sanction of the powerful. Sukarno's localist "guided democracy" in the 1960s was touted as a "non-western" democracy following the traditions of Indonesian mutual agreement, and had the additional advantage, from the autocrat's point of view, of bending easily to his will. Venezuela claims the creation of 12,000 "communal councils" to create "grassroots democracy," at the same time that anti-government news outlets are suppressed. Libya's "peoples' committees" and Cuban local participation have similar functions, under the leader's and his henchmen's watchful eyes.

We should not be so jaundiced as to think that the pure new regime will simply replicate these crude autocracies of the past. The purificationist leader must in fact be nothing like a dictator or strongman. She must, instead, be a caring facilitator, one always ready with a smile and kind word, one who has the sensitivity and charisma, and has the dedication to the purest of ideals, to be able to express her constituent folk-communities' genuine intentions. Should occasional friction develop among communities, with even some regrettable bloodshed, she will blame the enemies of humanity. And should further conflict arise and some communities prove themselves intransigent, then her regime will have to put principle temporarily aside, and place the highest possible priority, at whatever cost, on securing those on whom all future purity and justice depends, the global palingenetic community itself.

### **Down the Ideological Vortex**

For over a decade now, the press has treated global activists on their own terms, as effusive young idealists, and has failed to ask where such world-transforming enthusiasm has led in the past. What passes for scholarship on the subject almost always comes from the keyboards of sympathizers. With rare exceptions, U.S. conservatives, too, have been off the mark, viewing the agitators as socialists or (in the U.S. sense) extreme liberals. These are faulty

images of an adversary that has radically changed. The new ideologues should be studied, if only to better understand contemporary world affairs. They should be watched all the more to see how they sort out the contradictions in their dogma, to see whether the seeds that the last-century's totalitarians planted will once again bear their poisonous fruit.

In anticipating the contours of a purificationist regime, we should have little doubt about rank-and-file purists' and their theoreticians' capacity for self-delusion. Totalitarian ideologues past have proven their remarkable imperviousness to self-reflection. To retain the dogma's mythic force, its ideological character must be opaque to the ideologues themselves. Dogmatically politicized activists and intellectuals can—as Pellicani put it—no more achieve self-understanding than Baron Munchausen could pull himself out of the marsh by means of his own whiskers.<sup>61</sup>

At this date we cannot know what the new global radicalism will bring. Even if it dies out faster and less catastrophically than its predecessors, it has already set the course for an eventual reckoning, in which many will suffer. In the meantime, even in the United States, some of the harm is done. On U.S. campuses and in the nation's alternative-lifestyle neighborhoods, the youth are already seduced and another generation thrills to the romance of world transformation.



<sup>61</sup> Pellicani, *Revolutionary Apocalypse*, p. 2, citing R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enlarged ed. (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 561.