

History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism

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As is well known, the period since the early 1970s has been one of massive historical structural transformations of the global order, frequently referred to as the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism (or, better, from Fordism to post-Fordism to neoliberal global capitalism). This transformation of social, economic, and cultural life, which has entailed the undermining of the state-centric order of the mid-twentieth century, has been as fundamental as the earlier transition from nineteenth-century liberal capitalism to the state-interventionist, bureaucratic forms of the twentieth century.

These processes have entailed far-reaching changes in not only Western capitalist countries but communist countries as well, and led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and European communism in addition to fundamental transformations in China. Consequently, they have been interpreted as marking the end of Marxism and of the theoretical relevance of Marx's critical theory. And yet these processes of historical transformation have also reasserted the central importance of historical dynamics and large-scale structural changes. This problematic, which is at the heart of Marx's critical theory, is precisely that which eludes the grasp of the major theories of the immediate post-Fordist era—those of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jürgen Habermas. Recent transformations have revealed those theories to have been retrospective, focused critically on the Fordist era, but no longer adequate to the contemporary post-Fordist world.

Emphasizing the problematic of historical dynamics and transformations

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Public Culture

casts a different light on a number of important issues. In this essay I begin to address general questions of internationalism and political mobilization today in relation to the massive historical changes of the past three decades. Before doing so, however, I shall briefly touch upon several other important issues that become inflected differently when considered against the background of recent overarching historical transformations: the question of the relation of democracy to capitalism and its possible historical negation—more generally, of the relation of historical contingency (and, hence, politics) to necessity—and the question of the historical character of Soviet communism.

The structural transformations of recent decades have entailed the reversal of what had appeared to be a logic of increasing state-centrism. They thereby call into question linear notions of historical development—whether Marxist or Weberian. Nevertheless, large-scale historical patterns of the “long twentieth century,” such as the rise of Fordism out of the crisis of nineteenth-century liberal capitalism and the more recent demise of the Fordist synthesis, suggest that an overarching pattern of historical development does exist in capitalism. This implies, in turn, that the scope of historical contingency is constrained by that form of social life. Politics alone, such as the differences between conservative and social democratic governments, cannot explain why, for example, regimes everywhere in the West, regardless of the party in power, deepened and expanded welfare state institutions in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, only to cut back such programs and structures in subsequent decades. There have been differences between various governments’ policies, of course, but they have been differences in degree rather than in kind.

Such large-scale historical patterns, I would argue, are ultimately rooted in the dynamics of capital and have been largely overlooked in discussions of democracy as well as in debates on the merits of social coordination by planning versus that effected by markets. These historical patterns imply a degree of constraint, of historical necessity. Yet attempting to come to grips with this sort of necessity need not reify it. One of Marx’s important contributions was to provide a historically specific grounding for such necessity, that is, for large-scale patterns of capitalist development, in determinate forms of social practice expressed by categories such as commodity and capital. In so doing, Marx grasped such patterns as expressions of historically specific forms of heteronomy that constrain the scope of political decisions and, hence, of democracy. His analysis implies that overcoming capital entails more than overcoming the limits to democratic politics that result from systemically grounded exploitation and inequality; it also entails overcoming determinate structural constraints on action, thereby expanding the realm of historical contingency and, relatedly, the horizon of politics.

To the degree we choose to use “indeterminacy” as a critical social category, then, it should be as a goal of social and political action rather than as an ontological characteristic of social life. (The latter is how it tends to be presented in poststructuralist thought, which can be regarded as a reified response to a reified understanding of historical necessity.) Positions that ontologize historical indeterminacy emphasize that freedom and contingency are related. However, they overlook the constraints on contingency exerted by capital as a structuring form of social life and are, for this reason, ultimately inadequate as critical theories of the present. Within the framework I am presenting, the notion of historical indeterminacy can be reappropriated as that which becomes possible when the constraints exerted by capital are overcome. Social democracy would then refer to attempts to ameliorate inequality within the framework of the necessity imposed structurally by capital. Although indeterminate, a postcapitalist social form of life could arise only as a historically determinate possibility generated by the internal tensions of capital, not as a “tiger’s leap” out of history.

A second general issue raised by recent historical transformations is that of the Soviet Union and communism, of “actually existing socialism.” Retrospectively, it can be argued that the rise and fall of the USSR was intrinsically related to the rise and fall of state-centric capitalism. The historical transformations of recent decades suggest that the Soviet Union was very much part of a larger historical configuration of the capitalist social formation, however great the hostility between the USSR and Western capitalist countries had been.

This issue is closely related to that of internationalism and antihegemonic politics, the theme of this essay. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War opened the possibility of a reinvigorated internationalism that is globally critical. Such an internationalism would be very different from those forms of “internationalism” characteristic of the long Cold War, which were essentially dualistic and, in terms of their form, nationalistic; they were critical of one “camp” in ways that served as a legitimating ideology for the other, rather than regarding both “camps” as parts of a larger whole that should have been the object of critique. Within this framework, the post-1945 world contained only one imperialist power—the hegemon within the other “camp.” This basic pattern also holds true for supporters of China following the Sino-Soviet split, with the difference that the other “camp” was constituted by two imperialist powers—the United States and the USSR. Nevertheless, the critique of imperialism remained dualistic: a critique of one camp from the standpoint of another camp.

Yet the first decade of the twenty-first century has not been marked by the strong emergence of a post-Cold War form of internationalism. Instead it has

Public Culture

seen a resurgence of older forms, of hollowed-out after-forms of Cold War “internationalism.” This essay presents some very preliminary reflections on this resurgent dualistic “internationalism,” as an expression of an impasse reached by many antihegemonic movements, while reflecting critically on different forms of political violence.

The impasse to which I am referring has been dramatized recently by many responses on the Left, in the United States and in Europe, to the suicide bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, as well as by the character of the mass mobilizations against the Iraq War. The disastrous nature of the war and, more generally, of the Bush administration should not obscure that in both cases progressives found themselves faced with what should have been viewed as a dilemma—a conflict between an aggressive global imperial power and a deeply reactionary counter globalization movement in one case, and a brutal fascist regime in the other. Yet in neither case were there many attempts to problematize this dilemma or to try to analyze this configuration with an eye toward the possibility of formulating what has become exceedingly difficult in the world today—a critique with emancipatory intent. This would have required developing a form of internationalism that broke with the dualisms of a Cold War framework that all too frequently legitimated (as “anti-imperialist”) states whose structures and policies were no more emancipatory than those of many authoritarian and repressive regimes supported by the American government.

Instead of breaking with such dualisms, however, many who opposed American policies have had recourse to precisely such inadequate and anachronistic “anti-imperialist” conceptual frameworks and political stances. At the heart of this neo-anti-imperialism is a fetishistic understanding of global development—that is, a concretistic understanding of abstract historical processes in political and agentive terms. The abstract and dynamic domination of capital has become fetishized on the global level as that of the United States, or, in some variants, as that of the United States and Israel. It goes without saying that the disastrous, imperial, and imperious character of the Bush administration has helped mightily in this conflation. Nevertheless, it is unfortunately ironic that, in many respects, this worldview recapitulates one of a century ago in which the subject positions of the United States and Israel were occupied by Britain and the Jews. However counterintuitive this similarity—between a critique of hegemony today that understands itself as a critique from the Left and what had been a rightist critique of hegemony—it points to overlapping fetishized understandings of the world and suggests that such understandings have very negative consequences for the constitution of adequate antihegemonic politics today.

This reawakened Manichaeism—which is at odds with other forms of anti-globalization, such as the antisweatshop movement, that developed over the previous decade—has been accompanied by the reappearance of a deep confusion regarding political violence that had, at times, plagued the New Left. The result is a form of opposition that highlights some difficulties faced by antihegemonic movements in formulating an adequate critique in the post-Fordist era. This dualistic form of antihegemonic opposition is not adequate to the contemporary world and, in some cases, can even serve as a legitimating ideology for what a hundred years ago would have been termed imperialist rivalries.

Let me elaborate by first turning briefly to the ways in which many liberals and progressives responded to the attack of September 11. The most general argument made was that the action, as horrible as it may have been, had to be understood as a reaction to American policies, especially in the Middle East.¹ While it is the case that terrorist violence should be understood as political (and not simply as an irrational act), the understanding of the politics of violence expressed by such arguments is, nevertheless, utterly inadequate. Such violence is understood as a *reaction* of the insulted, injured, and downtrodden, not as an *action*. While the violence itself is not necessarily affirmed, the politics of the specific form of violence committed are rarely interrogated. Instead, the violence is explained (and at times implicitly justified) as a response. Within this schema, there is only one actor in the world: the United States.

This sort of argument focuses on the grievances of those who carry out such actions without engaging the framework of meaning within which those grievances are expressed. The actions that flow from those meanings are taken simply as expressions of anger, however unfortunate.² Such arguments neither interrogate the understanding of the world that motivated this violence nor critically analyze the sort of politics implied by violence directed intentionally against civilians. Consequently, such arguments can become implicitly apologetic rather than politi-

1. The following articles are exemplary of the sort of position I am outlining: Naomi Klein, "Game Over," *Nation*, October 1, 2001, www.thenation.com/doc/20011001/klein; Robert Fisk, "Terror in America," *Nation*, October 1, 2001, 7, www.thenation.com/doc/20011001/fisk; Noam Chomsky, "A Quick Reaction," *Counterpunch*, September 12, 2001, www.counterpunch.org/chomskybomb.html; Howard Zinn, "Violence Doesn't Work," *Progressive*, September 14, 2001, www.progressive.org/webex/wxzinn091401.html.

2. The absence of any sustained critical analysis of movements such as al-Qaeda or Hamas, or of regimes such as those of Baathist Iraq or Syria, suggests that this sort of "chickens come home to roost" position involves the projection of political opposition to American policies by Western critics onto the actors in the Middle East. The suffering and *misère* of those actors are taken seriously, but their politics and ideologies are bracketed.

Public Culture

cal; they make little attempt to understand the strategic calculations involved—not so much of the bombers as of their handlers—and ignore issues of ideology. It is a serious error, for example, to interpret the felt grievances underlying a movement like al-Qaeda in narrow terms, as an immediate reaction to American policies and Israeli policies. This ignores too many other dimensions of the new jihadism. For example, when Osama bin Laden speaks of the blow inflicted on the Muslims eighty years ago, he is not referring to the founding of the state of Israel but to the abolition of the caliphate (and, hence, of the purported unity of the Muslim world) by Ataturk in 1924—long before the United States was involved in the Middle East and before Israel was established. It is noteworthy that the vision he expresses is more global than local, which is one of the salient features of the new jihadism, in terms of both the struggles it supports (transforming them into manifestations of a single struggle) and its driving ideology. And an important aspect of the global character of that ideology has been anti-Semitism.

Addressing anti-Semitism is crucially important when considering issues of globalization and antiglobalization, even if it can be subject to misunderstandings because of the degree to which the charge of anti-Semitism has been used as an ideology of legitimation by Israeli regimes in order to discredit all serious criticisms of Israeli policies. It is certainly possible to formulate a fundamental critique of those policies that is not anti-Semitic, and, indeed, many such critiques have been formulated. On the other hand, criticism of Israel should not blind one to the existence today of widespread and virulent anti-Semitism in the Arab/Muslim world. As I will try to elaborate, anti-Semitism poses a very determinate problem for the Left.

The aftermath of September 11 revealed the degree to which anti-Semitic motifs have become widespread in the Arab world. (In this essay I will not also address the issue of resurgent anti-Semitism and implicit Holocaust denial in Europe.) Expressions of this ideology include the idea—widespread in the Middle East—that only the Jews could have organized the attack on the World Trade Center, and the widespread dissemination in the Arab world of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—the infamous czarist fabrication distributed widely in the first half of the twentieth century by the Nazis and Henry Ford, purporting to expose the Jewish conspiracy to rule the world. The extensive and intensive spread of such global conspiratorial thought was dramatically revealed recently by the Egyptian television series *Horseman without a Horse*, which made use of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a historical source, and the spread in the Arab media of medieval Christian blood libel charges—that Jews kill non-Jewish children in order to use their blood for ritual purposes.

This development should be taken seriously. It should neither be treated as a somewhat exaggerated manifestation of an understandable reaction to Israeli and American policies, nor should it be bracketed as a result of the dualistically grounded fear that focusing on it can only further Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Grasping its political significance, however, requires understanding modern anti-Semitism. On the one hand, modern anti-Semitism is a form of essentializing discourse that, like all such forms, understands social and historical phenomena in biologicistic or culturalistic terms. On the other hand, anti-Semitism can be distinguished from other essentializing forms, such as most forms of racism, by its populist and apparently antihegemonic, antiglobal character. Whereas most forms of race thinking commonly impute concrete bodily and sexual power to the Other, modern anti-Semitism attributes enormous power to Jews, which is abstract, universal, global, and intangible. At the heart of modern anti-Semitism is a notion of the Jews as an immensely powerful, secret international conspiracy. I have argued elsewhere that the modern anti-Semitic worldview understands the abstract domination of capital — which subjects people to the compulsion of mysterious forces they cannot perceive — as the domination of International Jewry.

Anti-Semitism, consequently, can appear to be antihegemonic. This is the reason why a century ago August Bebel, the German Social Democratic leader, characterized it as the socialism of fools. Given its subsequent development, it could also have been called the anti-imperialism of fools. As a fetishized form of oppositional consciousness, it is particularly dangerous because it appears to be antihegemonic, the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination.

It is as a fetishized, profoundly reactionary form of anti-capitalism that I would like to begin discussing the recent surge of modern anti-Semitism in the Arab World. It is a serious mistake to view this surge of anti-Semitism only as a response to the United States and Israel. This empiricistic reduction would be akin to explaining Nazi anti-Semitism simply as a reaction to the Treaty of Versailles. While American and Israeli policies have doubtlessly contributed to the rise of this new wave of anti-Semitism, the United States and Israel occupy subject positions in the ideology that go far beyond their actual empirical roles. Those positions, I would argue, must also be understood with reference to the massive historical transformations since the early 1970s, to the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism.

An important aspect of this transition has been the increasing importance of supranational (as opposed to international) economic networks and flows, which has been accompanied by a decline in effective national sovereignty — by the

Public Culture

growing inability of national state structures (including those of national metropolises) to successfully control economic processes. This has been manifested by the decline of the Keynesian welfare state in the West and the collapse of bureaucratic party states in the East. It has been associated with increasing vertical differentiation between the rich and the poor within all countries, and among countries and regions.

The collapse of Fordism has meant the end of the phase of state-directed, nationally based development—whether on the basis of the communist model, the social-democratic model, or the statist-developmental Third World model. This has posed enormous difficulties for many countries and huge conceptual difficulties for all those who viewed the state as an agent of positive change and development.

The effects of the collapse of the midcentury Fordist synthesis have been differential; they have varied in different parts of the world. The relative East Asian success in riding the new wave of post-Fordist globalization is well known, as is the disastrous decline of sub-Saharan Africa. Less well known is the steep decline of the Arab world, which was dramatically revealed in the *United Nations Arab Human Development Report* of 2002, according to which per capita income in the Arab world has shrunk in the past twenty years to a level just above that of sub-Saharan Africa. Even in Saudi Arabia, for example, the per capita GDP fell from \$24,000 in the late 1970s to \$7,000 at the beginning of this century.

The reasons for this decline are complex. I would suggest that an important framing condition for the relative decline of the Arab/Muslim world has been the fundamental historical restructuring alluded to above. For whatever reasons, the authoritarian state structures associated with the Arab nationalism of the postwar Fordist epoch proved incapable of adjusting to these global transformations. These transformations, it could be argued, weakened and undermined Arab nationalism even more than did the military loss to Israel in 1967. Such abstract historical processes can appear mysterious “on the ground,” beyond the ability of local actors to influence, and can generate feelings of powerlessness.

At the same time, for a variety of reasons, progressive social and political movements directed against the status quo in the Middle East have been inordinately weak, or, as in Iraq or the Sudan, violently suppressed. (It has been the additional misfortune of such progressive movements that the secular authoritarian regimes suppressing them were either regarded as progressive within the dominant Cold War framework or, at the very least, were not the objects of sustained progressive critical analysis.) A vacuum was created by the failure of Arab

nationalist as well as putatively traditional monarchist regimes, both of which suppressed progressive oppositions. This vacuum has been filled by Islamicist movements, which purport to explain the apparently mysterious decline people in the Arab/Muslim world have been experiencing, one that has generated a palpable sense of disillusionment and political despair.

A contributing factor to this ideological, reactionary mode of understanding the crisis of an entire region is the degree to which the Palestinian struggle for self-determination has been functionalized for decades by Arab regimes as a nationalist lightning rod to deflect popular anger and discontent. (Again, to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings—to say that Palestinian struggles have been functionalized does not discredit those struggles themselves.) The tendency to attribute the *misère* of the Arab masses and, increasingly, the educated middle classes, to evil external forces, however, has become much more intense with the recent decline of the Arab world. The ideological framework that was already available to make sense of this decline was formulated by thinkers such as the ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyed Qutb, who rejected capitalist modernity and regarded it as a plot created by Jews (Freud, Marx, Durkheim) to undermine “healthy” societies. Within his anti-Semitic imaginary, Israel was simply the bridgehead for a powerful and pernicious global conspiracy. This sort of ideology had been supported and promoted by Nazi propaganda efforts in the Middle East in the 1930s and the 1940s. It was strongly reinforced by Soviet Cold War ideology after the 1967 war, which introduced anti-Semitic motifs into its critique of Israel and which contributed to the spread of a form of anti-Zionism, strongly informed by anti-Semitic themes of singular abhorrence and conspiratorial global power, that became widespread in the Middle East and within segments of the Left—especially in Europe—in the past three decades.

The greatly increased extent and importance of the anti-Semitic worldview in the Middle East in recent decades, however, should also, in my view, be seen as the spread of a purportedly antihegemonic ideology in the face of the negative and disruptive effects of apparently mysterious historical forces. I am suggesting, in other words, that the spread of anti-Semitism and, relatedly, anti-Semitic forms of Islamicism (such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian offshoot, Hamas) should be understood as the spread of a fetishized anticapitalist ideology which claims to make sense of a world perceived as threatening. This ideology may be sparked and exacerbated by Israel and Israeli policies, but its resonance is rooted in the relative decline of the Arab world against the background of the massive structural transformations associated with the transition

Public Culture

from Fordism to neoliberal global capitalism. The result is a populist antihegemonic movement that is profoundly reactionary and dangerous, not least of all for any hope for progressive politics in the Arab/Muslim world.

Rather than analyzing this reactionary form of resistance in ways that would help support more progressive forms of resistance, however, many on the Western Left have either ignored it or rationalized it as an unfortunate, if understandable, reaction to Israeli policies in Gaza and the West Bank. This basically uncritical political stance, I would argue, is related to a fetishized identification of the United States with global capital. There are many implications of this conflation. One is that other powers, such as the European Union, are not treated critically as rising cohegemon/competitors in a global capitalist dynamic order, whose rising positions help shape the contours of global power today. Rather, the role of the EU, for example, is bracketed or Europe is implicitly treated as a haven of peace, understanding, and social justice. This form of misrecognition is related to the tendency to grasp the abstract (the domination of capital) as concrete (American hegemony). This tendency, I would argue, is an expression of a deep and fundamental helplessness, conceptually as well as politically.

Let me try to elaborate by reflecting on the mass antiwar mobilizations in so many parts of the world against the American war in Iraq. At first glance, recent mobilizations appear to be a reprise of the great antiwar movement of the 1960s. Yet, I would argue, there are fundamental differences between them. Considering those differences may shed light on the current impasse of the Left.

The antiwar movements in the 1960s were spearheaded by many people for whom opposition to the war waged by the United States in Vietnam was intrinsically related to a larger struggle for progressive political and social change. This, arguably, was also the case of movements opposed to the American policies toward the regime in Cuba, the socialist government in Chile, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the ANC in South Africa. In all these cases, the United States was regarded as a conservative force opposed to such change. American opposition to movements of national liberation was criticized particularly strongly precisely because such movements were regarded positively. It is the case that there were important differences among those who regarded movements of national liberation as forces for progressive change. One important difference was between those who regarded such movements positively because they were seen to be at the forefront of the expansion of the “socialist camp,” hence part of the Cold War, and those for whom such movements were important because they were regarded as autochthonous liberation movements that undermined the bipolarity of the Cold War and whose positive relation to the USSR was contingent—a function

of American hostility. Nevertheless, in spite of their differences, both general positions had in common a positive evaluation of such movements within a global context. Regardless of how one judges such positive evaluations today, then, what characterized the antiwar movements of a generation ago was that opposition to American policy was, for many, one expression of a more general struggle for progressive change.

The recent massive antiwar mobilizations appear at first glance to be the same. But closer consideration reveals that, politically, they are very different. Their opposition to the United States has not been in the name of a more progressive alternative. On the contrary, the Baath regime in Iraq—a regime whose oppressive character and brutality far exceeded that of, for example, the murderous military regimes in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s—could not be considered progressive or potentially progressive in any way. It is the case that only a few sectarian groups like ANSWER (that, unfortunately, did exert some influence on the larger antiwar movement) positively affirmed the regime of Saddam Hussein. Nevertheless, that regime was not and had not been the object of sustained political analysis and critique on the Left. Instead, its negative character was largely bracketed in the formulation of antiwar positions. This means, however, that recent antiwar mobilizations no longer had the same sort of political meaning that the antiwar movement had earlier, for those recent mobilizations did not express any sort of movement for progressive change. Indeed, the entire discourse of change has been ceded to the Right.

This does not, in any way, mean that proponents of progressive change should have supported the Bush administration and its war. But recent mass mobilizations neither expressed nor helped constitute what, arguably, was called for in this context—a movement opposed to the American war that, at the same time, was a movement for fundamental change in Iraq and, more generally, the Middle East. In the United States, very little political education was undertaken that extended beyond the crude slogans proffered. It is significant in this regard that, to the best of my knowledge, none of the massive demonstrations against the war featured oppositional progressive Iraqis who could provide a more nuanced and critical perspective on the Middle East. And this, I would argue, represents a telling political failure on the part of the Left.

One of the ironies of the current situation is that, by adopting a fetishized “anti-imperialist” position, one where opposition to the United States no longer is bound to advocacy of progressive change, liberals and progressives have allowed the American neoconservative Right in the Bush administration to appropriate and even monopolize what traditionally had been the language of the Left, the

Public Culture

language of democracy and liberation. It is the case, of course, that, although the Bush regime speaks of democratic change in the Middle East, it will not really help effect such change. Nevertheless, that only the Bush administration raised this issue reveals starkly that the Left did not do so.

If a generation ago, opposition to American policy consciously entailed supporting struggles for liberation deemed progressive, today the opposition to American policy in and of itself is deemed antihegemonic. This, paradoxically, is, in part, an unfortunate legacy of the Cold War and the dualistic worldview associated with it. The spatial category of “camp,” which expressed a global version of the Great Game, was substituted for temporal categories of historical possibilities and of emancipation as the determinate historical negation of capitalism. This not only helped blur the idea of socialism as the historical beyond of capitalism but also helped skew understandings of international developments.

Inasmuch as the progressive camp was defined by a spatial, essentially dualistic framework, the content of the term *progressive* could, on the international level, become increasingly contingent, a function of a global balance of power. What the Cold War seems to have eradicated from memory, for example, is that opposition to an imperial power is not necessarily progressive, that there were fascist “anti-imperialisms” as well. This distinction was blurred during the Cold War in part because the USSR aligned itself with authoritarian regimes, for example, in the Middle East, that had little in common with socialist and communist movements, that, if anything, had more in common with fascism than communism and that, in fact, sought to liquidate their own Left. Consequently, anti-Americanism per se became coded as progressive, although there had and have been deeply reactionary as well as progressive forms of anti-Americanism.

Why did many on the Left—including those who did not regard the Soviet Union affirmatively—adopt this dualistic Cold War framework, retaining its shell even after the Cold War? How did so many progressives back themselves into a corner where it appeared that the only political issue globally was U.S. policy, regardless of the nature of other regimes?

I would like to begin addressing this problem indirectly, with reference to the issue of political violence. As I mentioned, those who were critical of the enormous tide of anger and nationalism that swept the United States after September 11 frequently noted that there was a great deal of rage directed against the United States, especially in Arab and Muslim countries. This general position, however, usually sidestepped analyzing the *sort* of politics the attack on September 11 expressed. It is significant that such an attack was not undertaken two or three decades ago by groups that had every reason to be angry at the United States—for

example the Vietnamese Communists or the Chilean Left. It is important to note that the absence of such an attack then was not contingent, but an expression of political principle. Indeed, an attack directed primarily against civilians was outside of the horizon of the political imaginaries of such groups.

The category of “anger” is not sufficient to understand the violence of September 11. Forms of violence have to be understood politically, not apologetically. Let me give an example: in the mid-1980s, there was internal political pressure on the central committee of the African National Congress to begin a campaign of terror against white South African civilians. Such demands expressed the desire for revenge as well as the idea that white South Africans would agree to dismantle apartheid only if they suffered just as black South Africans had suffered. The ANC central committee refused to countenance such demands, not only for tactical, strategic, and pragmatic reasons (the effects of such forms of violence on postapartheid civil society and on the regime), but also for reasons of political principle. It was argued that movements for emancipation do not choose the civilian population as their main target.

I would like to suggest that there is a fundamental difference between movements that do not target civilians randomly (such as the Viet Minh and Viet Cong and the ANC) and those that do (such as the IRA, al-Qaeda, and Hamas). This difference is not simply tactical but profoundly political; a relation exists between the form of violence and the form of politics. That is, I want to suggest that the sort of future society and polity implicitly expressed by the political praxis of militant social movements that distinguish military from civilian targets differs from that implied by the praxis of movements that make no such distinction. The latter tend to be concerned with identity. In the broadest sense they are radically nationalist, operating on the basis of a friend/foe distinction that essentializes a civilian population as the enemy and closes off the possibility of future coexistence. For that reason, the programs of such movements present little in the way of socioeconomic analysis aimed at transforming social structures (which should not be conflated with social services, which movements may or may not provide). In such cases, the twentieth-century dialectic of war and revolution is transformed into the subsumption of “revolution” under war. My concern here, however, has less to do with such movements than it does with contemporary metropolitan opposition movements and why they apparently have had difficulty distinguishing between these very different forms of “resistance.”

The attack of September 11, 2001, calls into question some notions of violence and resistance that spread among parts of the New Left in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as fundamentally as the Soviet invasion of Prague in August 1968 and

Public Culture

then, finally, the collapse of European Communist states between 1989 and 1991 called into question Leninism as a hegemonic discourse and marked the end of the trajectory that began in 1917.

Looking back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s, we can discern an important political shift when what was then the New Left moved from a loose movement advocating nonviolent resistance and social transformation to a fragmented militant movement. Some of those fragmented groups began glorifying armed struggle or perpetrated violence themselves. Relatedly, there was an increase in support for groups like the provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army) and the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), groups that had little in common with the communist and socialist movements that earlier had characterized and informed the Left. Increasingly a form of violence was promulgated domestically and supported internationally that was fundamentally different from that which generally had been hegemonic on the Left for much of the twentieth century.

The way violence became conceptualized had a great deal in common with the view of violence promulgated by Georges Sorel at the beginning of the twentieth century. In *Reflections on Violence*, he presented violence as a cleansing act of self-constitution directed against the decadence of bourgeois society. A similar notion of violence as a redemptive act of regeneration, a political expression of the dictates of pure will, was, of course, central to the fascist and Nazi notion of the new man and the new order.

After World War II this complex of attitudes became adopted by some on the Left, transmitted in some cases via the medium of existentialism. This was particularly the case in the late 1950s and 1960s, as social critique focused increasingly on technocratic bureaucratic forms of domination and as the Soviet Union increasingly became perceived as sharing in a dominant culture of instrumental rationality. Within this context violence became seen as a nonreified, cleansing force erupting from the outside, identified now as the colonized, attacking the very foundations of the existing order.

An irony involved in this “radical” stance, in the idea of violence as creative, cleansing, and revolutionary, is that it expresses and affirms a central characteristic of capitalism: its ceaseless revolutionizing of the world through waves of destruction that allow for creation, for further expansion. (Like the liberal notion of the rational actor, the existentialist and anarchist notions of the self-constitution of personhood through violence entail a projection onto the individual of that which characterizes corporate entities in capitalism.)

Hannah Arendt provided a telling critique of the sort of thinking about vio-

lence found in the works of Georges Sorel, Vilfredo Pareto, and Frantz Fanon. Those thinkers, according to Arendt, glorified violence for the sake of violence. Motivated by a much deeper hatred of bourgeois society than the conventional Left for whom violence could be a means in the struggle for a just society, Sorel, Pareto, and Fanon regarded violence per se as inherently emancipatory, as a radical break with society's moral standards. Retrospectively, we can see that the sort of existentialist violence promulgated may have effected a break with bourgeois society—but not, however, with capitalism. Indeed, it seems to acquire most importance during transitions from one historical configuration of capitalism to another.

Thinking with Arendt, I will briefly consider the resurgence in the late 1960s of Sorelian-type glorifications of violence. The late 1960s were a crucial historical moment, one when the necessity of the present, of the current social order, was fundamentally called into question. Viewed retrospectively, it was a moment when state-centered Fordist capitalism and its statist “actually existing socialist” equivalent ran up against historical limits. Attempts to get beyond those limits were, however, singularly unsuccessful, even on a conceptual level. As the Fordist synthesis began to unravel, utopian hopes were nourished. At the same time, the target of social, political, and cultural discontent became maddeningly elusive and all-pervasive. The felt pressures for change were present, but the road to change was very unclear.

In this period, students and youth were not so much reacting against exploitation as they were reacting against bureaucratization and alienation. Not only did classical workers' movements seem unable to address the burning issues for many young radicals, but those movements—as well as the “actually existing socialist” regimes—seemed to be deeply implicated in precisely what the students and youth were rebelling against.

Faced with this new historical situation, this political terra incognita, many oppositional movements took a turn to the conceptually familiar, to a focus on concrete expressions of domination, such as military violence or bureaucratic police-state political domination. Such a focus allowed for a conception of oppositional politics that was itself concrete and, frequently, particularistic (e.g., nationalism). Examples were concretistic forms of anti-imperialism as well as the growing focus by some on concrete domination in the communist East. As different, and even opposed, as these political responses may have appeared at the time, both occluded the nature of the abstract domination of capital just when capital's regime was becoming less state-centric and, in that sense, even more abstract.

The turn to Sorelian violence was a moment of this turn to the concrete. Vio-

Public Culture

lence, or the idea of violence, was seen as an expression of political will, of historical agency, countering structures of bureaucratization and alienation. In the face of alienation and bureaucratic stasis, violence was deemed creative, and violent action per se became viewed as revolutionary. In spite of the association of violence with political will, however, I would argue, as did Arendt, that the new glorification of violence of the late 1960s was caused by a severe frustration of the faculty of action in the modern world. That is, it expressed an underlying despair with regard to the real efficacy of political will, of political agency. In a historical situation of heightened helplessness, violence both expressed the rage of helplessness and helped suppress such feelings of helplessness. It became an act of self-constitution as outsider, as other, rather than an instrument of transformation. Yet, focused as it was on the bureaucratic stasis of the Fordist world, it echoed the destruction of that world by the dynamics of capital. The idea of a fundamental transformation became bracketed and, instead, was replaced by the more ambiguous notion of resistance.

The notion of resistance, however, says little about the nature of that which is being resisted or of the politics of the resistance involved—that is, the character of determinate forms of critique, opposition, rebellion, and “revolution.” The notion of resistance frequently expresses a deeply dualistic worldview that tends to reify both the system of domination and the idea of agency. It is rarely based on a reflexive analysis of possibilities for fundamental change that are both generated and suppressed by a dynamic heteronomous order. In that sense it lacks reflexivity. It is an undialectical category that does not grasp its own conditions of possibility; that is, it fails to grasp the dynamic historical context of which it is a part. Relatedly, it blurs important distinctions between politically very different forms of violence.

What I have characterized as a turn to the concrete in the face of abstract domination is, of course, a form of reification. It can take various shapes. Two that have emerged with considerable force in the past 150 years have been the conflation of British and, then, American hegemony with that of global capital, as well as the personification of the latter as the Jews. This turn to the concrete, together with a worldview strongly influenced by Cold War dualisms (even among leftists critical of the Soviet Union), helped constitute a framework of understanding within which recent mass antiwar mobilizations operated, where opposition to a global power did not even implicitly point to a desired emancipatory transformation, certainly not in the Middle East. Such a reified understanding ends up tacitly supporting movements and regimes that have much more in common with earlier

reactionary—even fascist—forms of rebellion than they do with anything we can call progressive.

I have described an impasse of the Left today and sought to relate it to a form of reified thought and sensibility that expressed the disintegration of the Fordist synthesis beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In my view this impasse expresses a complex crisis of the Left related to a perception that the industrial working class was not and would not become a revolutionary subject. At the same time, this crisis was related to the end of the state-centric order. The power of the state as an agent of social and democratic change was undermined, and the global order was transformed from an international to a supranational one. I would like to briefly outline an additional aspect of the reification associated with the impasse of the Left in the face of the collapse of Fordism. Neoliberal global capitalism has, of course, been promoted by successive American regimes. To completely conflate the global neoliberal order and the United States would, nevertheless, be a colossal mistake, politically as well as theoretically. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the hegemonic role of Great Britain and the liberal world order was challenged by the growing power of a number of nation-states, most notably Germany. These rivalries, which culminated in two world wars, were referred to as imperialist rivalries. Today we may be seeing the beginnings of a return to an era of imperialist rivalry on a new and expanded level. One of the emerging ongoing areas of tension is between the Atlantic powers and a Europe organized around a French-German condominium.

The war in Iraq can, in part, be seen as an opening salvo in this rivalry. Whereas a century ago, the Germans sought to challenge the British Empire by means of the Berlin–Baghdad Railroad, more recently the Iraqi Baath regime was on its way to becoming a Franco-German client state. It is very significant that in 2000, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq became the first country to replace the dollar with the euro as the currency mediating the sale of oil. This substitution, of course, challenged the dollar’s position as a world currency. At issue is not whether the Euro Bloc represents a progressive or regressive alternative to the United States. Rather, it is that this action (and the American reaction) may plausibly be seen as expressing the beginnings of an intercapitalist rivalry on a global scale. “Europe” is changing its meaning. It is now being constructed as a possible counterhegemon to the United States.

The American attempt to reassert control over the Gulf and its oil should be understood as preemptive, but in a different sense than the way the term was used by the ideologues of the Bush administration and their critics. The American

Public Culture

action is, I would argue, a preemptive strike against the possible emergence of Europe or China (or any other power) as a rival military as well as economic superpower, that is, as an imperial rival. The reemergence of imperialist rivalries calls for the recovery of nondualistic forms of internationalism.

However objectionable the current American administration is—and it is deeply objectionable on a very wide range of issues—the Left should be very careful about becoming, unwittingly, the stalking horse for a would-be rival hegemon. On the eve of World War I, the German General Staff thought it important for Germany that the war be fought against Russia as well as France and Great Britain. Because Russia was the most reactionary and autocratic European Power, the war could then be presented as a war for central European culture against the dark barbarism of Russia, which would guarantee Social Democratic support for the war. This political strategy succeeded—and resulted in a catastrophe for Europe in general and for Germany in particular. We are very far from a prewar situation like that of 1914. Nevertheless, the Left should not make a similar mistake by supporting, however implicitly, rising counterhegemons in order to defend civilization against the threat posed by a reactionary power.

However difficult the task of grasping and confronting global capital might be, it is crucially important that a global internationalism be recovered and reformulated. Retaining the reified dualistic political imaginary of the Cold War runs the risk of constituting a form of politics that, from the standpoint of human emancipation, would be questionable, at the very best, however many people it may rouse.