Class Struggle and This Thing Named

Named

'The Middle East'

by Melancholic Troglodytes

نوشتهٔ غارنشینان مالیخولیایی

Zanj   **class struggle**   *Bahrain*   lebanon   syria

Godfather   nationalism   anarchism   *Dune*

native   americans   Carmathians   *situationism*

Anton Pannekoek   ثورة   sadomasochism   WAR

racism   riots   *workers' councils*   islam   Pakistan

Louis Farakhan   *water*   kitsch   media   lies   Saudi

Arabia   OIL FETISHISM   wage slavery   الله اصغر

انقلاب   atheism   We   ❤   Amy Pond   Al Pacino   revolution

kitsch iraq   James Tiberius Kirk   feminism   alienation   god   Gaddafi

"In my youth," Father William replied to his son,
"I feared it might injure the brain;
But, now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
Why, I do it again and again."

- Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

To boldy go where no revolutionary has gone before!

Class Struggle and This Thing Named 'The Middle East'

First edition

By Melancholic Troglodytes

Leeds, United Kingdom

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By way of a preface

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أقف مذهولا مباغتا
من يجسر على كسر هذا البياض الجميل

ـ قاسم حداد

Before the paper
I stand amazed and surprised
Who dares to violate this beautiful whiteness?

- *Qāssim Haddād (Bahraini poet)*

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: have recent events in the 'Middle East & North Africa' confused your pretty little brains? Do you want to understand the class struggle better?

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: as niffy-daffy Gaddafi takes a bow, Saudi troops torture Bahraini rebels, Syrian capitalists mow down proletarians, Egyptian generals deposit their medals in secret offshore accounts, protestors take over Tel Aviv Habima Square, as Osama meets his mama and the mullah-bourgeoisie turban-defecates, as the US-British-Israeli elites shriek "Lordie, lord! What's happening?", as a Norwegian Neo-Nazi butchers Norwegian social democrats and blames it on foreigners and as London rioters ruin the prime minister's fiesta, we offer to share our proletarian wizardry with you. Consider yourselves privileged.

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: one swallow does not a summer make, nor does obligatory attendance at an 'adopt-a-nationalism' spectacle a revolutionary create. A Hilton tour of the fucking 'Holy sites' doesn't forge a Middle Eastern expert and a tired Leninist account of 'the rentier state' doesn't shake the tyrants in their sandals. Conferences on 'Psychotherapy and the Middle East' prove less effective than a Prozac overdose and a knee-jerk western *bourgeois* atheism merely serves to enhance the careers of washed-up professors of biological determinism. Drenching yourself in Ambre Solaire at Sharm el-Sheik doesn't turn you into an authority on the Tahrir Square carnival, and a subscription to *Jane's Defence Weekly* does not make you a counter-terrorist warrior. Over-pronouncing the already guttural languages

of the Middle East does not endear you to your audience, even if it helps fool the old buzzards into giving you the TV Journalist of the Year award! Yet another lame call for a one-and-a-half-state or even a two-state solution will not solve the 'Arab-Israeli conflict' and the robotic chant to abolish wage-slavery, money and the state only ends up competing with other chants in the mantra-bazaar of fool-fucks!

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: your stupidity offends our sensibilities. Your ugliness pains our eyes. Get off your high horse. Stop preaching to working class camel-jockies. We're preacher maxed-out. Yes we're talking to you, you shit-for-brains liberal tossers; you war-mongering media asshats; you psychologically damaged Nazi in-breeds; you fascist Ayatollah sheep-shaggers; you Archbishop kiddie-lovers; you potty-untrained US pastors; you fistfucking Talmud-thumpers; you smelly anarchist asswipes; you Mensheviki mother-suckers; you cuntish Bolsheviki father-fuckers; you Che-Guavarist fucktarches; you left-communist fundamentalist fuckwits; you council communist arse munchers; you pretentious Pro-Situ posers; you Autonomist Marxist two bob cunts; you libertarian communist douchbags; you pantywaist arm-chair generalissimos; you identity-craving YELLOW BELLIES; you …

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: with a wallop of malice and a cherry of *schadenfreude* we inform you that while no one was watching, we got smart- smarter than you'll ever be! We are now ready to inflict upon an unsuspecting world the first edition of a planned trilogy of texts aimed at escalating the class struggle. So, zip up that Jabba the Hutt cake hole of yours and marvel at the proletarian genius that is … *Melancholic Troglodytes!*

Melancholic Troglodytes (in a dark, witless mood), Chicago, 18ᵗʰ October 2011.
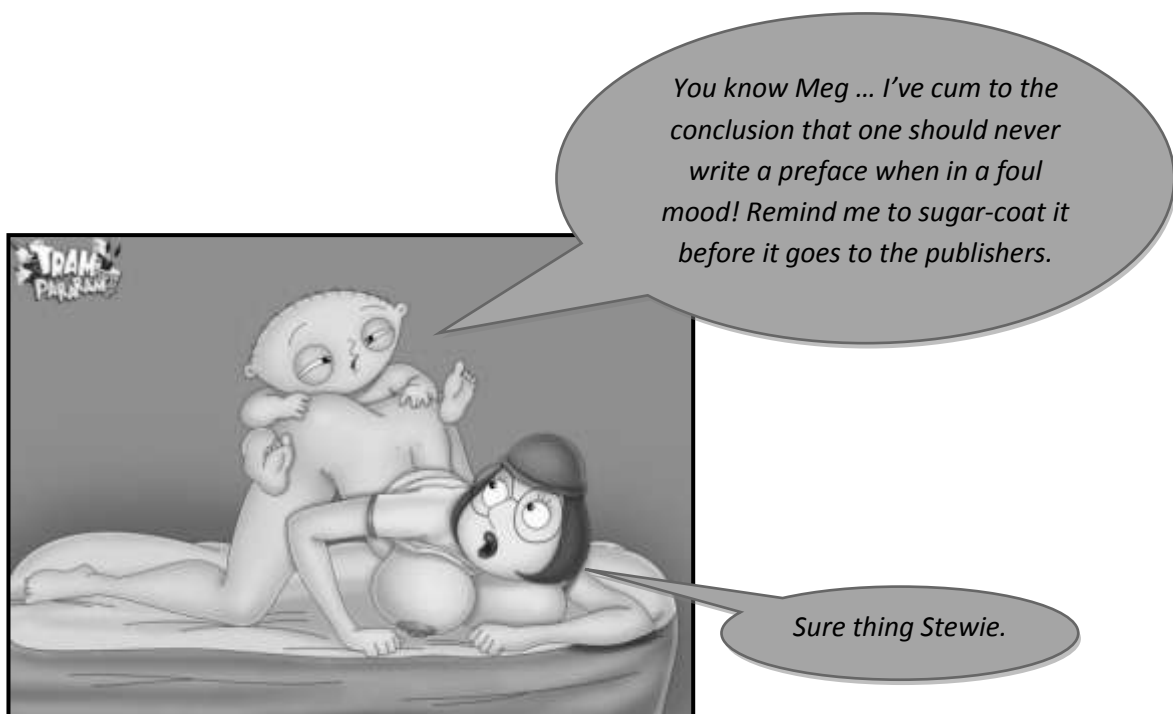
"AFGHANISTAN: A Potted Social History" began life as a leaflet handed out at various anti-war demonstrations in 2001. It meanders between past and present events in order to construct a different narrative. The original allusion to Kipling's poem is concretised here through a parodied version of *"If..."*. Errors have been corrected (e.g. our underestimation of Taliban's longevity) and material added to take account of changes during the last decade.

As insecure cross-burning Afghani Muslims are once more provoked into performing victimhood by insecure Koran-burning American pastors, the proletariat must posit a world beyond all sacred artifacts. We argued in 2001 that Afghanistan will be increasingly treated based on a geographic division between mineral rich north-eastern provinces and cheap labour and opium rich southern regions. Energy companies seem to have finally got their act together in order to exploit Afghanistan's resources (see online text "Could Osama's Death Really Mean the end of Afghanistan's Occupation?"). We also showed how the US was simultaneously backing both Pakistani and Saudi trained warlords (after all why should the US back only one gang of cutthroats when it possesses the resourcefulness and moral ambiguity to back two)?! Finally, we indulged in a little bit of armchair military forecasting and postulated a new mode of warfare (called *postmodern warfare*). The contours of this new model of mayhem have become clearer. References have not been included in keeping with the leaflet's original style.

If

If you can keep your legs when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on IEDs,
If you can bear to hear the lies you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things others gave their life to, broken,
And stoop and bash 'em up with semi-smart Cruise:

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If no men count with you, but some too little,
If you cannot fill the unforgiving hour
With sixty minutes' worth of truth,
Yours is the Pentagon and everything that's in it,
And–which is more–you'll be a Butcher, my son!

— *(with no apologise to) Rudyard Kipling*

AFGHANISTAN: A Potted Social History

I

If the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing, it is about playing hard to get when capital turns on the charm: a mainly small-holding peasantry and artisanal population that spurns the joys of wage-slavery; imposed treaties by foreign powers; saturated carpet bombings by external foes (sometimes in conjunction with the Afghani government) that fail to crush the smuggling operations of the mountain people; the transformation of peasants into refugees and refugee camps into right-wing guerrilla fighters; civil wars and the restricted nature of export crops making (non-drug related) industrial agriculture untenable; bandits collecting taxes from all sides in return for protection, making the state's tax collectors green with envy; meticulous social engineering plans to divide the country into northern-eastern (oil, gas, and minerals reserves estimated at a staggering one trillion US dollars) and southern (cheap labour and soaring opium harvest) spheres of influence, overwhelmed by ethnic/tribal/religious complications.
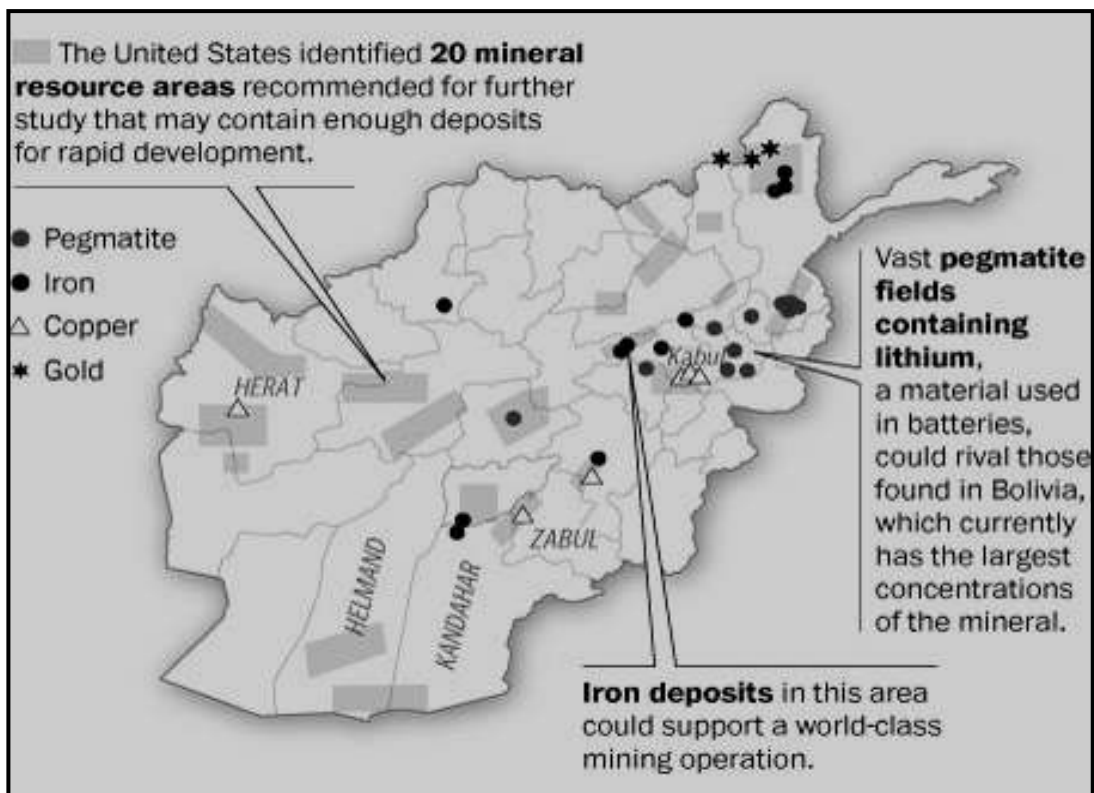

Mineral wealth in Afghanistan
SOURCE: U.S. Geological Survey | *The Washington Post* **– 15 June 2010**

Like the Columbian *communeros* (common land) and the Russian *obshchina*, the self-subsistence Afghani local *jirga* (now completely devoid of its communitarian structures) proves a formidable obstacle to 'progress'. The small amount of surplus secured by the state makes the seizure of power a dubious victory. On the few occasions when the native bourgeoisie has tried to develop the country independently, its plans for universal education, limited secularism, and women's rights have run into an entrenched conservative clerical opposition. Such was the fate of King Amanullah Khan (1892-1960) whose attempts to copy Ataturk in Turkey and Reza Khan in Iran were only partially successful. Capital has *almost* given up creating modern structures of domination in Afghanistan; instead of 'nation-building', it tries to negotiate a settlement with traditional northern jirgas in pursuit of mineral wealth, oil and oil pipelines deals (the latter a speciality of the little runt, President Karzai), and a different settlement with southern local warlords for the regulation of labour power and a drug trade that account for half of the country's GDP (allegedly a speciality of Karzai's recently assassinated half-brother)! In 2001 General Dostum, the Uzbek warlord, massacred 2-3,000 Taliban and Arab prisoners to seal his deal with the US. The 2010 US accord with the Shinwari tribe to fight against the Taliban bypassed the central government altogether. The Shinwari are the same tribe that in 1928 were bribed by the British state into forcing the modernising King Amanullah to abdicate!

II
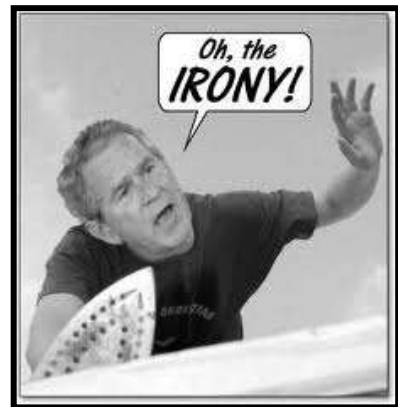
If **the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing,** it is about the nauseating counter-revolutionary stitch up that is known as the 'Congress of the Peoples of the East' (Sept 1920, Baku). Through the Congress, the subordination of proletarian interest to the capitalist Bolshevik state became entrenched. Basically the circus intended to muster nutritional and military support, amongst the region's workers, for the fledgling Russian state.
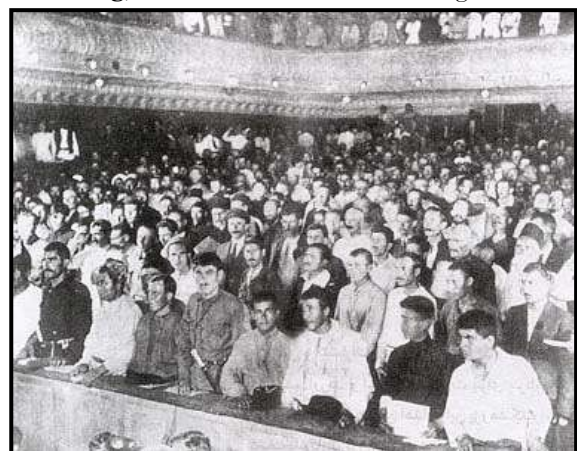
Congress of the Peoples of the East (September 1920, Baku)

The Bolsheviks plummeted abysmal depths of opportunism during the Congress by calling for a *holy jihad* to save the USSR, whilst adopting the Koran as a political platform! The *Shariat*

(Islamic law) was credited with promoting the common ownership of land and *waqf* (charitable endowments and at best an intra-classist mechanism of wealth distribution between the mosque and the state), hailed as a real gain for the poor! The self-serving Bolsheviki call was unambiguous: "Now we summon you to the first real holy war, under the red banner of the Communist International. We summon you to a holy war for your own well-being, for your own freedom, for your own life!" (*Manifesto of the Congress to the Peoples of the East*, Zinoviev chairing, December 1920).

The few dissenting voices from this policy of class collaboration were fighting a losing battle. Narbutabekov whilst observing etiquette, criticised Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev for denying 'Moslem working people' a voice whilst John Reed criticised Bolshevik demagogy somewhat more forthrightly. M. N. Roy's attitude was the most clear-sighted. He saw the stitch up for what it was and simply refused to attend.

III

If **the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing,** it is about Ibn Khaldun's distinction between *asabiyya* (here, tribal solidarity) and *umma* (the fictive Muslim community). From time to time an integrationist wave of rural Muslims storm the citadels of urban power, which has become 'weak' through corruption, laxity, and the loss of warrior spirit. Once the state's booty is divided amongst the victors, the city's rulers undergo a fresh cycle of decay until they in turn are overthrown by the next wave of puritanical 'incorruptibles'. Thus urbanisation is followed by de-urbanisation and development by de-development. As soon as victory over a common enemy (be it the USSR bourgeoisie or the Kabul elite) is in sight, all the tribal, ethnic and religious divisions resurface. Fragmentation ensues and the equilibrium re-establishes itself.

After the US led invasion, the Taliban went through an internal version of this trend with Pakistani Taliban and the pro-Mullah Omar clerical network renewing the movement, some now call 'neo-Taliban'. Taking advantage of the widespread dissatisfaction with the Kabul government and US heavy-handedness, this rural neo-Taliban movement is now 'encroaching' on non-Pashtun areas as well as urban centres. The harshness of the government's security forces, the frequency of US drones assault on civilians, and the viciousness of ground operations is highly correlated with the waves of new recruits for the Taliban. The further infusion of their ranks with Tajik and Uzbek fighters is a symptom of their growing popularity. All this despite the fact that their bombs and use of human shields have killed 31% more civilians in 2010 compared to the same period in 2009. According to a UN report, May 2011 was the deadliest month since 2007, with 961 civilians killed or injured.

IV

If **the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing,** it is about a contending historical trajectory of class struggle that manifests itself sporadically but emphatically. Occasionally Afghan proletarians (rural as well as urban) express their class interests autonomously and in so doing generate a contending political discourse. Some 2,000 meetings and demonstrations have been catalogued between 1965 to 1973 alone. These were sometimes led by reactionary Stalinists and Maoists but at other times began spontaneously and led to small victories in terms of pay and improved working conditions. Worker and student rebellions had to struggle against both the state and right-wing Islamists throughout this period. The CIA intensified its 'covert' backing of Islamic reactionaries around 1973-74.

The 1978 *Saur* (April) Revolution was, of course, nothing more than a military take-over of the state apparatus by 'leftist' officers and Stalinist/Maoist 'intellectuals.' Its legacy was increasing reliance on USSR capitalism and a few concessionary liberal and social democratic reforms such as limited trade union representation and peasant debt reduction.

When female proletarians exert their autonomy the misogyny of traditional men reacts through random acid attacks, rape, drive by shootings and more recently poisonous gas attack on young school girls. More girls are attending school (around 57%), but more schools are burned to the ground (20 during a 6-month period in 2010). This is occurring not only in the south but also in Kabul. Significantly, Afghani women's situation is even more desperate amongst some refugee camps in Pakistan. It is not clear how much longer women have to pay the price of men's sense of economic, sexual and psychological insecurities.

The sad truth is that current Afghani proletarians are struggling against insurmountable odds. They have to contend with a mixture of foreign occupiers, warlords, drug smugglers, corrupt state authorities and capitalists, conservative clerics as well as reactionaries amongst their own ranks. No proletariat is strong enough to exert its autonomy in such a hostile environment.

V

If **the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing,** it is about the dream of Sultan Galiev (1892-1940), a Muslim Tatar who joined the Bolsheviks in November 1917 and worked under Stalin's 'People's Commissariat for the Nationalities'. Galiev saw 'Muslim societies' as collectively oppressed (with the exception of a few big landlords and bourgeois elements). He, therefore, argued against fanning the flames of class war inside such societies.

He envisioned a petty-bourgeois cadre leading his new Muslim Communist Party. His attempt to synthesise Islam, nationalism and Bolshevism was genuine but very confused. He believed the Comintern's emphasis on the West as the engine of the world revolution was misplaced. Later he advocated a Communist Colonial International for non-industrial countries to counteract both the 'West' and Russian Chauvinism. Once the Bolsheviks were finished using him against Koltchak, his unorthodox views became burdensome. Arrested three times in 1923, 1928 and 1937 he served varying sentences for pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic tendencies. He was probably killed around 1940 on Stalin's orders. Many of today's Mojahedin (Sunni Afghanis from northern provinces) are more reactionary versions of Sultan Galiev.

VI

If the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing, it is about the fact that in the 1980's Afghani clergy could have come to an accommodation with the USSR bourgeoisie at any time (in fact many of them did just that!).

In so far as some engaged in the 'anti-colonial' struggle, the ploy accomplished three aims: Firstly, the war had devastated craftsmen, textile makers, weavers and peasants. The mullah's traditional power base was both shrinking and spinning out of control. New cross-sectional alliances had to be forged to ensure the mullah's class privileges. The war was an opportunity to forge this new alliance.

The so called 'ethnic' make-up of Afghanistan

Secondly, the 'anti-imperialist' movement provided the perfect cover for liquidating competitors. Sufi *pirs* (elderly sages) with their masonic matrix of patronage mediating between devoted *murids* (disciples), landlords, village leaders, and government officials became the silent victims of various waves of Islamic integrationism. The Pashtun aristocracy had begun to lose its hegemony to the new elite of Islamic intellectuals, mullahs, and small warlords inside Afghanistan. However, to complicate matters further, in the 1990's this group, in turn, was marginalized by (mostly Pashtun) neo-fundamentalist intellectuals amongst the emigrants to Pakistan. The Taliban movement signified the victory of the US-Pakistan axis of emigrants over the US-Saudi axis of urban Islamic graduates and northern groups supported by Iran. The undermining of Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Masood's assassination completed this phase.

And, thirdly, the 'anti-colonial' jihad was waged to nip the risk of agrarian reform and women's reforms in the bud and to divert proletarian dissatisfaction into safer alternatives. The clergy emerged from the victory over USSR in a stronger position than before and were able to frustrate proletarian/peasants demands. In Afghanistan, class imperatives and 'ethnic' disagreements remain better criteria for predicting the clergy's behaviour than theological conflicts between Sunni and Shi'a.

VII

If **the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing,** it is about capital's preference for field-mines to fence off enclosures over the more traditional barbed wire (in 2000 around 20-25 Afghani were killed/injured by land-mines on a daily basis).

Another useful bourgeois map

A contrast with neighbouring countries is telling: oil producing Middle Eastern countries used their massive riches for rapid urbanisation. Soon they engineered two modes of capital domination- *formal* domination in rural areas and *real* domination in the cities. Deprived of easy 'petro-dollars' and faced with stiffer resistance to the development of productive forces, the Afghan state could only manage a precarious formal domination in some urban areas, whilst the inaccessible rural environment retained many 'pre-capitalist' social relations, including bonded labour.

The mineral wealth recently surveyed may change this scene. Chinese capitalists are already working to exploit the Aynak valley copper-reserves near Kabul but the less stable mountain and rural reserves may just as easily provoke a new wave of conflicts reminiscent of wars over cobalt-mines in Zaire. Since the US invasion, Unocal, a consortium of US oil companies (now a subsidiary of Chevron Texaco) and the Saudi-owned Delta company have been very active in the construction of pipelines. In fact, Unocal made their initial proposal to build a pipeline through Afghanistan, with the co-operation of the Taliban who were flown to California for talks, in the late 1990s. Unocal were outbidded by an Argentinean company, Bridas, offering a more lucrative deal. Bridas even proposed an open pipeline accessible to warlords and local users, whilst Unocal's proposed pipeline was closed. Unocal withdrew their bid and soon after classified the Taliban as an illegitimate government. Both Zalamy Khalilzad (US ambassador to the UN and ambassador to Afghanistan under Bush II) and Hamid Karzai (current president of Afghanistan) are former Unocal consultants and Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, was a corporate board member of Chevron Texaco.

However, the war against the USSR forged a new entrepreneurial elite in the countryside, which ironically was more 'advanced' than its city counterpart (Osama Bin Laden was one such example). These 'old men of the mountain' are plugged into the international capital circuit overseeing the distribution of arms, subsidies, humanitarian aid and drugs. Moreover, during peacetime they turn their attention to real estate speculation (similar to the warlords' activities during the reconstruction of Beirut). In today's Afghanistan, the limited 'reconstruction' that does take place involves corrupt foreign companies and warlords. Some 97% of GDP derives from international military and aid. As foreign troops are withdrawn, so will a great deal of this reconstruction aid. The war and 'counter-insurgency' drive has pushed al-Qaeda further into Pakistan, weakening them vis-à-vis their Taliban 'allies'. Taliban too use Pakistan as safe haven (e.g., the city of Quetta which ironically was turned into a garrison town by the British state in 1876 has become a convenient cross-border residence), the difference being that they enjoy greater strategic and military support from the Pakistani state. Time and again we see how pretenders to power in Afghanistan use war to move up the ladder at the expense of rival capitalists. And how once there, they use control of poppy production to retain their position. The one trillion US dollars estimated as Afghanistan's mineral wealth (plus newly discovered oil fields) is making the warlords salivate more frantically than Pavolv's dogs.

VIII

If the history of Afghanistan is about any one thing, it is about contending models of warfare: Tribal war, Jihad, Modern warfare and now 'post-modern' warfare.

Tribal war is typified by a unity (admittedly hierarchical at times), which is directed against the formation of the state (and political society). Troops are presented and paraded, confrontation and retreat are conducted within limits; most of the time battles are avoided altogether and if unavoidable then conducted at a specific time and with a minimum of casualties. These are 'low intensity' conflicts that might become more destructive only under conditions of forced migration and competition for water or mineral wealth. Both the US and Taliban wish to secure tribal loyalties in order to extend their influence by stealth, with the former offering greater monetary enticement.

The *Jihad*, on the other hand, is the expression of a civil society (camouflaged by a false religious unity) in pursuit of political power. Asabiyya (tribal solidarity) is broken up in favour of umma (Islamic imagined community). The tribal obsession with symmetry and balance no longer applies. Shariat and discipline are imposed through jihad and a wider range of military tactics are deployed in pursuit of political clout.

In *Modern* warfare civil society is temporarily suppressed in favour of a total mobilisation of political society. For instance, at the beginning of the Afghan War the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations decided to postpone their demonstration in the USA and George W. Bush launched an attack on Non-Governmental Organizations accusing them of being terrorist fronts. Total war recognises no boundary, either in space, time, or between categories of the population. Afghanistan has proved itself a quagmire for such professional, disciplined armies, as the Russian and British states would attest. Pentagon strategists know this, which is why they are groping towards a new mode of warfare: *'post-modern'* warfare, which combines policing, assassination squads and commando raids with hi-tech intelligence and PR. The modern dimension of the US military response found expression against the Taliban, whilst (most of) its *postmodern* facets were directed against the rest of Afghanistan and the outside world in a relentless propaganda-war.

This 'postmodern' impulse must include many NGOs and 'humanitarian' agencies, most of whom can no longer be distinguished from the capitalists ruling Afghanistan. Today, food control systems and discriminate utilities services are an integral part of the regulation mechanisms aptly described by warmongers through bestial metaphors such as the 'carrot and stick' approach. Likewise, bodies such as the American Psychological Association (APA) have voluntarily become active collaborators in CIA torture practices. In the 'postmodern' model, therefore, civil society is not suppressed, but mobilised militarily. This mode of warfare accentuates the privileging of the executive at the expense of not only American citizens and Afghani non-citizen but also the judicial and legislative branches of the state. The very public

debate in the USA about the pros and cons of torturing 'terrorists' is a deliberate attempt to normalise the hitherto shadowy part of the executive and erode the rule of law.

Whilst some features of 'postmodern' warfare are novel, others are merely developments of modernist warfare. In parallel with twentieth century warfare, 'postmodern' warfare is a conflict simultaneously waged on at least four fronts: in its most immediate and obvious manifestation it is a war against all those targeted as the 'enemy' (e.g., al Qaeda, Taliban, Iraqi insurgents, etc.); secondly it is a proxy war against all those potentially threatening US capitalism (e.g., Chinese, Russian, Iranian capitalism certainly but also despite appearances French and German 'allies'); thirdly it is a war against US citizens (irrespective of their allegiance) who have already seen their living standards and freedoms curtailed drastically; finally, it is also an intra-classist war between the executive (especially senior Washington politicians, Pentagon and security services) and the courts and law-makers.

Ironic then that as this process of executive empowerment gathers pace and as General McKiernan gives way to General McChrystal (who recently described the US view of Afghanistan as "frighteningly simplistic") and he, in turn, is replaced by General Patraeus in a strategy favouring evermore dollops of 'brainpower over firepower', the US control over Afghanistan becomes increasingly tenuous. This cannot possibly be due to a ragtag army of 20,000 Taliban fighters and 200 al-Qaeda key operatives (a recent report puts the number of al-Qaeda fighters inside Afghanistan closer to 100). Just like the French in Algeria, it is possible for the insurgency to be defeated militarily through coercive measures but for the public backlash to render the occupation unsustainable. The euphemistic Pentagon double-speak of COIN (population-centric COunter-INsurgency) is a coercive and brutal war mainly against unarmed civilians. It relies heavily on the strategy proposed by French officer David Galula and General Massu for fighting Algerians as well as British Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer during the 1952 'counter-insurgency mission' in Malaya. It was Templer who coined the 'hearts and mind' expression. Despite a more nuanced 'postmodern' version of these manoeuvres being adapted for the more rugged terrain of Afghanistan, the brutality of war is unhindered. Consequently, NATO and Afghan armies are rightly seen as enemies of the people. In addition, Karzai's corrupt network of cut-throat capitalists are hated and despised in equal measure by Afghanis. The gap between the bourgeoisie and feudal lords on the one hand and workers and peasants on the other is growing by the day. No amount of 'heart and mind' canvassing is going to alter this perception.

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published as a leaflet on 20.9.2001
Expanded and groovyfied on 29.09.2011

Because we're *so* worth it!
Source: Taliban photo by Thomas Dworzak

20

"Reservation Politics: the Palestinian Experience through the Historical Monocle of Native Americans" was published in April 2007. The current plight of Palestinians increasingly resembles the tragic demise of Native Americans. To have become refugees in their own land, hounded and derided by a qualitatively superior military and economic entity, and to have endured mostly apathy from the outside world as well as the inevitable corruption and authoritarianism of 'their own leaders' are markers of both experiences. The aim of this short essay is to demonstrate (some of) the commonalities and differences that have shaped these two struggles. The latest leaked documents showing the extent of concessions offered by Palestinian bureaucrats to their Israeli counterparts (Milne and Black, *The Guardian*, 23 January 2011), vindicates everything we have said in this piece. The sight of Abbas roaming the diplomatic merry-go-round with his begging-bowl only serves to remind us of the weak hand Palestinians have been dealt.

This latest version of the essay has been expanded in order to overcome a number of gaps and shortcomings that the first version suffered from.

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1817

Palestinians dressed as Native Americans during a protest addressed to visiting U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the Hawara checkpoint in the West Bank town of Nablus Sunday, January 14, 2007

Reservation Politics: the Palestinian Experience through the Historical Monocle of Native Americans

The current plight of Palestinians increasingly resembles the tragic demise of Native Americans. To have become refugees in their own land, hounded and derided by a superior military and economic entity, and to have endured mostly apathy from the outside world as well as the inevitable corruption and authoritarianism of 'their own leaders' are markers of both experiences. The aim of this short essay is to demonstrate (some of) the commonalities and differences that have shaped these two struggles.

'Why is it that the Apache wait to die - that they carry their lives on their fingernails?'
(Cochise, Apache leader, in Brown, 1972: 169).

If today, notwithstanding the bombastic posturing of Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004), nationalism runs rampant, it is because we are weak. Anton Pannekoek put it in a nutshell: "As has often been pointed out, the working class is not weak because it is divided; on the contrary, it is divided because it is weak" (Pannekoek, 1936). In other words, if we consciously foreground our class interests in our daily lives, the shibboleths of the bourgeoisie - nationalism, racism, religion- would be unable to take root.

Cochise

Benedict Anderson (1990) described nationalism as an 'imagined community'. Imagined because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1990: 16). Perlman reminds us that it is a common Leninist misconception to suggest imperialism is relatively recent and the 'latest stage of capitalism'. Furthermore, the misconception leads to an erroneous cure: "nationalism is offered as the antidote to imperialism; wars of national liberation are said to break up the capitalist empire" (Perlman, 1984: 2). In practice, he continues, nationalism is not the opposite of imperialism but "a methodology for conducting

the empire of capital" (Perlman, 1984: 11). Nationalism domesticates the workers and plunders the alien. For *nationalism* to appeal to the proletariat it must be contrasted favourably with its cruder appendages: the *reservation*, the *ghetto* and the *concentration camp*. So much of contemporary 'western' political discourse is geared toward foregrounding this contrast. More specifically, today we observe a concentric relationship between the nation-state, reservation, ghetto and concentration camp. The four circles are intertwined and at the same time placed on hierarchically organised layers. They expand and contract, weave in and out of each other and in the process keep the threat of a borderless communist community at bay. In short, they provide the bourgeoisie with a fantastically simple and effective regulating mechanism. And since through the establishment of borders capitalism acquires a 'law-like' character, the plethora of borders going up all over the world are also indicative of a drive to modernise the Law as a more effective weapon of suppression (cf. Mitropoulos, 2006: 40). Below we attempt to unpack this concentric, multi-layered relationship.

'One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.'
(Crazy Horse, leader of Oglala Lakota, quoted in Brown, 1972: 217).

It is common knowledge how the British bourgeoisie erected modern internment camps during the Second Boer War (1899-1902), although they do not seem to have been the first. The Spanish ruling class used them in the Ten Year' War (1868-1878) against slaves in Cuba and the US government used them to devastating effect against 'insurgents' in the Philippine-American War (1899-1913). However, the British use of camps against Boer internees and black Africans (and they were detained in separate camps) signifies the first large-scale example of internment camps. They were originally set up for "refugees whose farms had been destroyed by the British *Scorched Earth* policy ... However, following Kitchener's new policy, many women and children were forcibly moved to prevent the Boers from re-supplying at their homes ..." (Wikipedia, 'Second Boer War').

It was left to the Nazis to establish a firm division of labour amongst camps. Under their rule there were three types of camps: *concentration* camps like Buchenwald which were huge prisons, organised for the purpose of control; *work* camps such as the huge IG Farben camp at Auschwitz which employed over 15,000 Jewish slaves on average at any time; and, *extermination* camps like Treblinka specially designed to "biologically remodel the human race" (Traverso, 1999: 67; also see Postone 2000, for an interesting take on concentration camps). This categorisation was "marked by a constant tension between extermination and exploitation, each advocated by a different sector of the SS and Nazi regime" (Traverso, 1999: 58).

Warsaw ghetto

During the 20th century the configurations of choice for dealing with Palestinians were the *work* and *concentration* camps- the former for those wage-slaves beneficial to the Israeli economy and the latter for the reserved army of unemployed. In recent times, Israel's conscious strategy to limit its 'dependence' on Palestinian workers has transformed many work camps into concentration camps. This means Israeli capitalism is not even keen to use Palestinian proletarians as generators of absolute surplus value anymore, as was clearly indicated in March 1993 when 130,000 Palestinian workers were barred indefinitely from their jobs in Israel.[1]

In the case of Native Americans, the same two camp configurations were occasionally

morphed into extermination camps with predictable results. If it is true that the Palestinians put up a greater fight against internment than Native Americans ever did, it is probably due to spatial anomalies. Native Americans lived in a continent with vast unchartered territories making escape and exodus a more attractive option. The Palestinian camp internees have nowhere to run to and quite literally 'nothing to lose but their chains'. This desperation incidentally also throws light on the more uncompromising attitude of camp refugees to negotiations with Israel compared to Palestinian villagers who live under a (relatively) less draconian military occupation and depend on the good will of the Israeli state for their agricultural activities.[2]

If this was the division within camps, there is also a distinction between all camps on the one hand and two other forms of regulation: *ghettoes* and *reservations*. By comparison to the camps, ghettoes offered their inmates a modicum of 'self-sufficiency'. A ghetto was a part of the city (usually the poorest part) designated for the habitation of a 'racially' or 'ethnically' specific group of people (usually Jews between the 16th and 19th centuries but more recently extended

to other 'races' such as 'blacks' in the USA or Roma in the Czech Republic). Ghettoes usually had their own justice system. For example, the Israeli elite were content to allow Palestinian ghettoes to be ruled by Arafat and his cronies. He had fostered groups based on clan loyalties, with their own militias- various *dakakin* (shops) ranging from pro-USSR Stalinists to Saudi-dependent, to US stooge (Abu Khalil, 2006). This intentionally organised chaos suited his autocratic style of 'leadership'. It is the collapse of Arafat's network of patronage that contributed to the inter-clan fighting between Hamas and Fatah in recent times[3] (Lederman, 2006: 3).

Ironically, the reappearance of ghettoes during W/W II initially gave a false sense of security to inmates since some were lulled into believing that the separation of Jews and non-Jews might result in less direct intimidation[4] (Bresheeth et al, 1997: 59). The essentialism practiced by the dominant force against ghetto inhabitants requires a coherent, homogenous culture and/or religion at its point of contact. For this approach to be effective, class struggle within the ghetto has to be covered up. The fact that the ghetto was a space within an existing city, isolated from the dominant 'race' or 'ethnicity' and revolved around wage-slavery (as opposed to the direct slavery of the artificial camps) offered some prisoners the illusion of safety. The Warsaw ghetto, for instance, included 73 streets out of 1800 where 55,000 inmates were paid some sort of wages (Traverso, 1999: 82). The ghetto was encouraged to elect its own Jewish Council to ensure compliance with Nazi authorities and run services such as food distribution, Jewish policing, hospitals, sanitation and the work places. Consequently, when the Nazis decided to transport the inmates to extermination camps many voted against resistance believing they would be allowed to go on producing. In fact, the internalisation of authority was so intense that one marvels at the bravery and daring of all those who did finally resist their captors in the 1941-43 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (cf. Edelman, 1994).

The transfer of Bedouins from their Negev lands to areas attached to Israeli towns like Ramle or Beersheva is a more contemporary example of ghettoization. The semi-nomadic Bedouin has finally been made into a wage-slave eking a precarious existence at the mercy of

The Masada shall not fall again!
We must not allow a mine-shaft gap!
Mein Führer! I can walk!
I'll be back! So will Mubarak!

the Israeli boss. Those Bedouins who are deemed surplus to requirement are shunned onto semi-permanent concentration camps instead of ghettoes. Some of their land is taken over by bourgeois ranchers (e.g., former Prime Minister Sharon owned a large ranch in the Negev desert); some of the land is re-populated by poor Jewish farmers who have to be financially induced to relocate and the rest given to the army. This long-running, low-intensity war against Bedouins was also the main strategy employed against 'non-combative' Native American tribes.

When camps and ghettos are deemed impractical and the granting of 'full national sovereignty' not a viable solution, reservations become the regulating mechanism of choice.[5]

Reservations are sometimes imposed through coercion[6] and sometimes sold to their inhabitants as a lifestyle, with their own permanent governing bodies and 'culturally sensitive' structures. Today, some Native American reservations have been graciously granted license to experience the joys of capitalism first-hand by setting up a string of tourist-friendly casinos. More commonly as Howard Hughes (2001: 18) describes: "Indian reservations ... look more like caravan sites ... a huge trailer park, with 4x4 pick-ups parked outside ... But how did the Indians end up in such a predicament- second-class citizens in their own land?" The answer, of course, is deceptively banal: unlike nationalism which can be sold as a viable commodity on the market, the reservation, ghetto and camp are a hard sell. Rather they have to be imposed and maintained through coercion and fear of starvation.

When following the discovery of gold in the Black Hills (around 1868-1877), the Native Americans refused to sell their land or become wage-slaves, President Grant treated all as antagonists and ordered them to be rounded up in reservations (Hughes, 2001: 52). The tactics of hostage-taking and the human shield were added to the repertoire of the US army by General Custer. Today in Kosova, reservations are policed by the KFOR multinational 'peacekeeping' force, a process charmingly referred to as 'enclavization'. Likewise, the West Bank is a reservation rather than a viable economic territory. The labyrinthine roadblocks and 760 Israeli checkpoints are testimony to this reality which is accurately captured by the Arabic term *Ihtilal*- the Suffocation. Israel prevents Palestinians from operating a seaport or an airport, limits the movement of goods, confiscates the Palestinian Authority's tax revenues and stops Gaza's supply of fuel and electricity almost at will (Grossman, 2006: 2). Israeli deputy defence minister's comment about Palestinians risking a 'shoah' if they did not give up armed struggle[7] or the recent Israeli army's storming of a Turkish aid ship bound for Gaza are merely more spectacular manifestation of the Suffocation. The Egyptian uprising has resulted in the new government permanently opening the Rafah border crossing in May 2011, easing the blockade on Gaza established four years ago.

For years, the West Bank and Gaza were propped up artificially by outside money. Hamas was *perceived* a few years ago as slightly less corrupt and subservient than Fatah which explains its electoral gains. Before the 2006 Hamas election victory, European capitalism was the biggest donor with $600 million a year followed by the US at $400 million. Since then Hamas has failed to pay its bureaucrats on time leading to anti-Hamas demonstrations.[8] The recent anti-drug and anti-corruption campaigns organised in Gaza are transparent attempts by the Hamas leadership to draw attention away from these basic tensions. Meanwhile, the Iranian mullah-bourgeoisie has attempted to win influence by allocating millions to Hamas. This is a ploy that resonates favourably with Palestinians who are extremely critical of the corruption and inefficiency of Palestinian non-governmental organizations. In all three examples cited above (the Black Hills, Kosova and the Occupied Territories), the maintenance of reservations allowed mafia-style gangs to strengthen their power-base at the expense of both the proletariat and orthodox bourgeois 'governance'.

The accumulation of capital requires blood as well as sweat which is why traditionally the US and Israeli armies have played such a crucial role in pacifying Native Americans and Palestinians respectively. Whilst political discourse has attempted to limit the optimum notion of freedom to nationalism, military subjugation has forced Native Americans and Palestinians on a merry go-round of camps, ghettos and reservations. This state of permanent emergency was the subterfuge under which US enclosures were expanded at the expense of Native Americans. A similarly induced strategy of tension is responsible for justifying the Israeli 'security' Wall and the land-grab it promotes.[9] It is to a brief analysis of these military manoeuvrings that we now turn our gaze.

> *'I now think a little powder and lead is the best food for [the Indians]'*
> (S. Colley, U.S. Indian agent, quoted in Brown, 1972: 62).

The similarities between US and Israeli armies are startling- this is evident both in terms of tactics and strategies.[10] Both armies had their roots in militias; both were reorganised for fighting guerrilla warfare; both evolved through massacres, terrorism, assassinations, bounty hunting, scorched earth policies, collective retribution and economic co-option of the enemy; both armies are at the cutting edge of technical advancement and warfare theory[11]; and, finally, both were directly politicised in the process of land grab and primitive capital accumulation necessary for the expansion of US and Israeli capitalism in a hostile environment. It is these factors far more than the magical power of Hollywood propaganda (cf. Churchill, 1998) that explains the deep-seated affinity of large segments of the US and Israeli populace with their respective armies.[12]

The massacres at Sand Creek (1864) and Deir Yassin (1948) have eerie similarities. The Sand Creek massacre is sometimes dismissed as the result of the machinations of a racist ex-preacher, Colonel

Deir Yassin (1948) - "We created terror among the Arabs" (Begin)

Chivington, who "seeking fame ... deliberately stirred up trouble between the whites and the Indians, providing him with the excuse to attack the peaceful camp of Black Kettle" (Hughes, 2001: 11). Likewise the massacre at Deir Yassin is at times simplistically blamed on the over-zealous Zionist militia of Menachem Begin (Rose, 1986: 53). Both incidents, however, were part and parcel of capital's march towards expansion and consolidation. They were also examples of what nowadays is referred to as 'ethnic-cleansing'- psychological and/or physical acts of terrorism calculated to change the demographics of conquered land. Chaim Weizmann referred to it as "a miraculous clearing of the land" (cf. Rose, 2004: 150). An alternative method of terrorism was to delegate responsibility to fringe groups thus exonerating the state from blame. For example, in 1982 the Israeli army used Lebanese fascists to "methodically slaughter" the inhabitants of Sabra and Shatilla Palestinian refugee camps (Chomsky, 1983).[13]

The superiority of the US and Israeli armies vis-à-vis their antagonists was underlined through a series of vicious tactics.[14] Assassination of recalcitrant guerrillas was rife. Kicking Bird of the Kiowas had his coffee poisoned. At least he died with no 'collateral damage'. Today 'trigger happy mobile phones', 'hit squads' and 'smart missiles' are deemed a more cost-effective method of dispatching Palestinians. Water supplies are destroyed/contaminated/stolen in a bid to both slow down enemy advance and/or limit the economic self-sufficiency of reservations.[15] Each time the primitive accumulation of (Palestinian) capital approaches critical mass, a well is destroyed, rerouted or cordoned off.[16]

Bounty-hunting which used to remove troublesome elements such as pirates and bandits deemed to be obstacles in the path of 'progress' has become an everyday occurrence designed to police entire nations. The Israeli army uses Druze Bedouins as 'low-ranking desert trackers' against other Arabs in a re-run of US use of 'Indian scouts'. The Bedouin population has been

Indian policemen

subjected to waves of military 'transfer' from its Negev Desert grounds. Again in a bizarre replay of the story of Native Americans, the reclaimed Negev Desert is used by the Israeli army for its nuclear reactors and most of its nuclear arsenal (Cook, 2003). The use of torture in prison against Palestinians by Israel and Native Americans by the US was sanctioned at the highest levels with the aim of breaking the enemy. The recent Hamas electoral victory in Palestine has allowed the US/Israeli axis to ignore some of the real differences between the historically non-religious Palestinian struggle and modern Islamists (cf. Achcar, 2010). The closer the Palestinian proletarian archetype merges with the Islamist in public perception, the easier it is for Israel and US to legitimise the torture and assassination of *all* political opponents.

Both US and Israeli armies have been instrumental in not only defeating 'the natives' but also grabbing land and expanding the boundaries of capitalism. The so-called wars of independence are a case in point. The War of 1812 led by land speculators such as Andrew Jackson was not "just a war against England for survival, but a war for the expansion of the new nation, into Florida, into Canada, into Indian territory" (Zinn, 1999: 127). Likewise a cursory look at the maps depicting Israeli expansion between 1947-49 shows clearly how wars were used to expand the frontiers of Israeli settlements and establish camps, ghettoes or reservations for the defeated Arabs. In the US West one method of transforming reservations into camps was to allow cattle barons to graze across Native American land for a paltry fee. Soon larger tracts of land would be required and colonisation speeded up at the expense of the hunter-gatherer economy of the Natives. In Palestine the Wall plays a similar function in grabbing strategic land for the Israeli state and simultaneously ensuring the economic unproductivity of the remaining Palestinian reservations.[17]

On a similar trajectory, Rodinson reminds us that, "Kibbutz collectivism was far more important for settling territory and guarding borders against dispossessed Arabs than for opening up a road to Jewish socialism" (Rodinson, 1988: 21).[18] Occasionally, Kibbutz faced with labour shortage, would hire Palestinian wage-slaves but they were consistently excluded from membership. Many working class Israeli settlers are manipulated by the state to move into

zones of conflict in order to act as a buffer in the same way that in the 18th century the colonial officialdom had monopolised the good land on the eastern seaboard of America and was now forcing "landless whites to move westward to the frontier, there to encounter the Indian and to be a buffer for the seaboard rich against Indian troubles, while becoming more dependent on the government for protection" (Zinn, 1999: 54). And in our view it makes sense to see every attack on the Native American and the Arab as at the same time an assault on the 'native' proletariat. The US and Israeli proletariat is also being punished, cajoled and intimated in the process of colonisation. Isaac Deutscher, for instance, demonstrates "when high [Israeli] officials argue that a tough policy has to be adopted towards

the Arabs because Oriental people are likely to take any other policy as a sign of weakness, they have in mind not only the Arabs but the Oriental Israelis as well"[19] (Deutscher, 1981: 109). In both cases, the army was crucial in policing this anti-working class stratagem. And in both cases, the abused settlers gradually transformed itself into the abuser as a matter of survival.

'If you owned Hell and [Jerusalem], live in Hell and rent out [Jerusalem]'
(Paraphrased from Hughes, 2001: 72).

The lure of gold and arable land was not a sufficient motivating factor for proletarian migration into contested territories. This is true of both North America and Israel. In addition, it was necessary to imbue the flock with a missionary zeal. For example, in 1910, the 'socialist' Zionist Yavni'eli was sent to Yemen in order to recruit Yemenite Jews as a cheap labour force to undercut the (already) cheap labour of the Palestinian Arabs. To persuade Yemenite Jews to leave their homeland and embark on an uncertain journey, Yavni'eli "presented himself to them as a herald of the Messiah and declared that the day of salvation had arrived" (Ein-Gil, 1981: 111).

In the absence of any other form of legitimacy, the Christian and Jewish Fundamentalists who colonised Native America and Palestine respectively based their claim on 'sacred texts'. This is the junction when it became useful to mix a sense of racist superiority with a desire for racialist separatism. The mission had to get nasty. Jewish settlers of the West Bank, for example, cite self-serving passages from the Talmud regarding God's regret for creating the Ishmaelites and refer to the Gentiles as "a people like a donkey". Maimonides is quoted approvingly when he claims conquered people must "serve" their Jewish masters and be "degraded

Identity check at border crossing

and low" and "must not raise their heads in Israel but must be conquered beneath their land ... with complete submission" (cf. Rose, 1986: 65).

Only a few critics, including 'spiritual Zionist' theoreticians and 'Kropotkinist Zionists' politicians, were prepared to admit that Palestine was not empty and that this may prove a problem in the future (Rodinson, 1988: 39; cf. Avineri, 1989). In fact, before 1948 there were Jewish theologians such as Martin Buber who advocated a binational state of Jews and Arabs and fought for the repatriation of expelled Arab refugees. Buber argued that Zion referred to a unique place, a memory, a humanist project and not a chosen people. The Jews were as far as he was concerned mere caretakers of the 'holy' lands (Magid, 2006: 24). He even criticised Ben-Gurion for "hijacking the spiritual concept of Zion" and turning it into a "vulgar [form] of nationalism"[20] (Rose, 2004: 12-13).

From a very different perspective Arlosoroff (1899-1933) was also questioning right wing interpretations of Zionism as put forward by the likes of Jabotinsky (an admirer of the Italian fascist leader Mussolini). Arlosoroff was a Zionist leader who rose rapidly to become one of the leaders of the Labour Zionist Party and the de facto 'foreign Minister' of the Jewish state-in-the-making. Influenced by Martin Buber, his vision gradually incorporated diverse currents such as Kropotkin, Marx, Russian Populism, German

Jenine refugee camp

Romanticism and Social Democracy (Avineri, 1989: 4). He borrowed from the anarchist Gustav Landauer a vision of libertarian agrarian socialism which shaped the early phase of the kibbutz movement. He falsely argued that Jews in the Diaspora did not have a ruling class and

Commemorating medal- This is not to suggest Zionism and Nazism are the same (they are NOT!) but that there is *some* ideological overlap and *some* of their leaders found common cause in the past! But then this is also true of *some* Arab nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists!! (cf. Achcar, 2010).

that "we are all property-less, we are all naked; all of us, as a nation, are a proletarian people." Jewish nationalism was in this reading the nationalism of the oppressed. His 'socialism' amounted to state-capitalist nation-building cemented by a strong co-op movement. This also meant the marginalisation of the class struggle. This new Jewish state, he believed, should be based on Jewish labour. On the other hand, he criticised a law and order approach to the problem of Palestinian rioting against Jewish settlers and called for mutual understanding

between Jews and Arabs (Avineri, 1989: 61). His assassination in 1933 (probably by right wing Zionist although the murders were never caught) weakened left wing Zionism immeasurably.

The defeat of both mystic and social anarchist/Marxist currents within Zionism (as exemplified by Buber and Arlosoroff), solidified the position of the exclusionist-settler centre of Zionism. These were Zionists who saw in both Italian fascism and Nazis anti-Semitism an

opportunity to increase the rate of emigration to Palestine and outmanoeuvre the *assimilationist* Jews. Mussolini promised his support to Chaim Weizmann in 1934 and considered Jabotinsky a fellow fascist. In fact, Bernardo claims that "Relations [between some Zionists and Nazis] were so friendly that in April 1933 Baron von Mildenstein, SS specialist for the Jewish question, visited Palestine on the invitation of the World Zionist Organisation with the express authorisation of the Nazi Party ... A medal was coined in commemoration of the event, with the swastika cross engraved on one side and the star of David on the other. Von Mildenstein's visit was echoed four years later when his former subordinate Adolf Eichmann, now promoted to SS specialist for the Jewish question and charged with organising Jewish emigration – and later their extermination – was invited by Zionist leaders to visit Palestine and its colonists".

The rhetoric of the victorious exclusionist-settler current of Zionism began to match their newly found military and economic confidence. The notions of a 'promised land' and 'Manifest Destiny' appear frequently in the religious and secular discourse of both Jewish and Christian exclusionists. The 'promised land' needed to be de-populated in imagination before it could be de-populated in actuality. Only when the conquered were killed, driven off, incarcerated, turned into harmless caricatures or placed out of site could 'Manifest Destiny' be fulfilled.

Cunts aplenty! The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al Husayni, with Adolf Hitler (1941)

There may be a great deal of infantile CIA/Mossad propaganda about this connection which is then unjustly projected onto other Arab and Muslim politician but the sad fact is there were, amongst others, Arab nationalists, Islamists, Jewish Zionists, British social democrats, Russian Bolsheviks and German liberals who forged either tactical or strategic links with both Fascists and Nazis. So right wing Zionists and Muslims were not the only scum chumming up to the Nazis!!

A similar manoeuvre had to be enacted in the USA. The Pilgrims to New England, for instance, were aided by a declaration from the Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the effect that their intended land was a 'vacuum'. It was ingeniously argued that since Native Americans had failed to 'subdue' the land, they only had a 'natural' right and not a 'civil (legal) right'. The Puritans conveniently appealed to the Bible, Psalm 2:8, to back up such legal judgments: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (cf. Zinn, 1999: 14). Many years later the 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, did not mince his words when he declared, "The European settlers moved into an uninhabited waste ... the land is really owned by no one ... The settler ousts no one from the land. The truth is, the Indians never had any real title to the soil" (quoted in Baroud, 2003). The same formula was followed by another racist conqueror, Golda Meir, former Israeli

Prime Minster, "There was no such thing as Palestinians. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country from them. They did not exist" (ibid.).

Racist superiority was intermixed with racialist separatism in order to cement bourgeois rule. Once again it is essential to remind ourselves that prejudice was directed simultaneously against both the *other* in the shape of the 'dirty Arab' and the 'savage Injun' and also the *other* in the shape of the lower class Jew and American. Both sets of *others* were expendable pawns in the hands of the bourgeoisie to be used and when necessary sacrificed to capitalist profitability. Both sets of *others* have to be incarcerated within borders characterised by camps, ghettoes, reservations or nationalisms.

> *'Today is a good day to fight; today is a good day to die'*
> (Crazy Horse quoted in Hughes, 2001: 55).

One way of concluding this text would be to indulge in escapist nostalgia. For example, we could provide a litany of past instances of joint activity by Arab and Israeli proletarians or solidarity amongst Native American tribes and 'white' workers. Joel Beinin (2001: 123) reminds us of a period not so long ago when even Palestinian Stalinists felt obliged to speak "in the name of both the Arab and Jewish working classes" as an alternative to contending nationalisms. Scholarly work from a different perspective has foregrounded numerous proletarian coalitions that existed in the past (cf. the journal *Khamsin* played a key role in this discovery). Likewise the extremely uneven collection of essays edited by Ward Churchill (1992) is testimony not only to the atavistic

"Fuck Hamas. Fuck Israel. Fuck Fatah. Fuck UN. Fuck UNWRA. FUCK USA!" - Gazan youth

The Ghost Dance of Gazan Youth? Well, it's a start!

nature of US Marxism but also occasionally to the potential for cross-cultural alliances between Native Americans and various immigrant groups in the USA (cf. Sakolsky & Koehnline, 1993).

However, important as these examples are, it might be more instructive to end by pointing out a number of crucial differences between *past* Native American struggles and *contemporary* Palestinian resistance. This will, hopefully, prevent our analogy being taken over and misrepresented by romantic *leftists*.[21]

In general (and we do emphasise *in general* since there are numerous counter-examples), the impetus of past Native American struggles (and this is also true of *some* current trends) was toward the preservation of a (by and large) class-less tribal community based on a gift exchange 'economy' and a minimal social division of labor. This way of life was based on a recognition of mutual dependence and non-hierarchical interaction. In places it promoted the existence of 'tri-racial isolate communities' and almost everywhere it celebrated sensual living and joy. The Native Americans' desire for *liberty* and *equality* had a direct impact on European immigrants to the USA as well as the Founding Fathers. The notion of self-regulation without state intervention and consensus decision-making without compulsion influenced the likes of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson (Johansen, 1991: 59). Thomas Paine admired the native societies' lack of poverty.

One feels that even disempowering tendencies such as gender divisions were contested affairs. The latest research indicates that in most areas native men and women freely married at the onset of adulthood (Nassaney, 2004). More significantly, "a woman could initiate a divorce by placing her husband's belongings outside of her house ..." (Nassaney, 2004: 343). Both men and women are known to have held positions of leadership in the seventeenth century. During their struggle against colonialism, women's struggle against male domination was not put on the back-burner as the debates about women taking up tobacco smoking (with all that it entailed in terms of shamanistic power and status) readily attests to. Native societies were not

perfect and the romantic histories of tribal culture have been rightly discredited. However, there was a fierce and healthy contestation of commodification, exchange values, gender division and hierarchy. By contrast, and this is a contrast that no amount of wishful-thinking can deny, the current Palestinian struggle has been taken over by capitalist, patriarchal and suicidal impulses. Reactionary currents have become sedimented, leaving little room for self-criticism and strategic re-adjustment. Even the recent rapprochement between ugly and dick-face (respectively Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Meshaal) does not classify as genuine self-criticism although if it holds it will have strategic significance. But how seriously can the working classes take a 'unity deal' between two capitalist gangs, mediated by the Egyptian and Syrian secret services and blessed by the Turkish bourgeoisie? (Fisk, 2011).

Of course, revolutionaries amongst the Palestinian resistance were from the outset outnumbered by reactionaries but never quite as marginalised as they are today. It was the *left* wing of capital (various Leninist and nationalist groupings) that made the running in the first few decades whilst since the late 1980s it is the *right* wing of capital (Hamas and nationalist groupings) that have taken over the leadership. The Palestinian proletariat has only managed to exert its autonomy in spits and spurts, the initial weeks of the first Intifada (1987) and the first few days of the Al Aqsa Intifada (2000) being prime examples. It was the defeat of this first Intifada (by the Israeli and Palestinian elites) that paved the way for right-wing Islamic discourse.

Whilst for us there is no substantial difference between the left and right wings of capital, the shift is, nonetheless, indicative of a more general loss of political consciousness. Political *discourse*, as a set of statements and practices that make and re-make the subject of study, has been severed from the dynamics of struggle and reified into yet another border with its own law-like protocols. The militarisation of the Intifada and the ascendancy of religious discourse have played a significant role in this deterioration.[22] Occasionally we come across Palestinian proletarians who *partially* understand the counter-productive military tactics of the Islamists (cf. McCarthy, 2006). The *Gaza Youth's Manifesto for Change* is the latest example of this (Carbajosa, *The Guardian*, 2 January 2011). Sadly, for the time being, they appear powerless to stop the Islamists or go beyond their own nationalistic limitations. Never before have capitalist, racist, sexist, homophobic and superstitious perspectives been so much at the forefront of the Palestinian struggle. It is, of course, possible that The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt has released seismic forces whose impact will eventually dislodge reactionary forces and empower the proletariat. We will have to wait and see.

Meanwhile, those who choose not to see the qualitative differences between the Paiute *Ghost Dance*, on the one hand, and the Shi'a ceremony of *Ashura* or Salafi organised 'purity' rituals, on the other, are doing all of us a great disservice. For this is a chasm as great, if not greater, than the gap between the pioneering kibbutz and the inflexible Mae Shaarim. The Ghost Dance was a *convergent* ritual which affirmed life and re-animated the collective historical memory of Native Americans. Shi'a Ashura and Salafi purity rituals, in contrast, are *divergent* performances (setting Shi'a against Sunni, fundamentalist Shi'a against Sufi, men against women, and believers against non-believers), which celebrate death whilst distorting history. The Ghost Dance was more akin to a serious *carnival*. Ashura, purity rituals and Hajj gravitate toward the *spectacle*.

Palestinian proletarians today are being bamboozled by both Sunni and Shi'a examples of the spectacle. A spectacularised-religious-sensibility has now invaded and cemented the secular-martyrdom-sensibility which was already observable amongst some Palestinians. A similar trajectory within Israel has witnessed the transformation of Zionism into neo-Zionism.[23] The hero-worshipping, martyrdom-seeking, suicidal tendencies promoted by this desperate millenarianism may be in the interests of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, PLO, the Israeli, Iranian,

Saudi, British and US ruling classes but our interests lie elsewhere. Today, monotheistic religions are wholly counter-revolutionary. Those sections of the proletariat with daily experience of this reality are in an enviable position to renew atheism as part of their struggle against the totality of capitalist relations. Ironically we feel the prospects of this *proletarian atheism* are greater amongst Iranian and US proletarians than Palestinian and Israeli ones.

Our comparison of Palestinians with Native Americans was posited neither to elicit pity for 'Palestine' nor to promote a moralising discourse. We did not dwell on the 1936-39 revolt (a Palestinian movement of resistance which began in towns, spread to rural areas against English rulers and Zionists as well as Palestinian landowners), the *Nakba* ('grievous catastrophe', the expulsion of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war), the two *Intifadas* and many more familiar signposts of the standard narrative in order to get away from the dead weight of a certain kind of history. We haven't even re-enacted all those precious moments of solidarity between Israeli-Jewish proletarians and their Arab-Palestinian comrades. Important as these examples are, they have become fewer in recent years and we need to discover why. Our historical analogy aimed to demonstrate the failure of the present course of action for the region's proletariat and suggest an alternative. It is the social and not the military or religious dimensions of the struggle that has the potential to transcend capital. Sadly so long as Native Americans, US immigrants, Palestinians and Israelis are reduced to choosing between the camp, ghetto, reservation or nation-state, the consciousness of the universality of our struggle will remain marginalised. To paraphrase Crazy Horse, "Today is a difficult day to fight; tomorrow might be a better day to die."

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published in Prague on 22.04.2007
Expanded and groovyfied in Oslo on 20.09.2011

'In my childhood I have suffered fear, hunger and humiliation when I passed from the Warsaw Ghetto … to Buchenwald … I hear too many familiar sounds today … I hear 'dirty Arab' and I remember 'dirty Jew'. I hear about 'closed areas' and I remember ghettos and camps. I hear 'two-legged beasts' and I remember 'Untermenschen', 'subhumans', … Too many things in Israel remind me of my childhood.'

- Shlomo Shmelzman

**Would be child suicide bomber: a victim of both
Israeli and Palestinian power-mongers**

Endnotes

[1] The Palestinians who are still tolerated as labourers go almost unnoticed such as the Basket Children of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Freedman (2007) describes how these children make a pittance carting heavy loads for customers shopping at the local souk on the orders of stern shopkeepers. Since they are also illegal workers, they are ripped off by unscrupulous employers.

[2] By 2000 the agricultural sector accounted for only 7% of the GDP of the combined economy of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (OTR Palestine, 2001). Apart from the usual factors such as migration from the countryside, there are also additional circumstances specific to Palestine such as expropriation of arable lands by Israeli colonies, the wilful blocking of exports and water-theft which explain this decline. Occasionally the Israeli state has used herbicides to destroy crops. For example, in 2003 helicopters sprayed Bedouin crops at Abda apparently undeterred by the presence of children playing in the fields (Cook, 2003).

[3] Once this new inter-clan conflict constructed its own discourse, then every event became embedded in its interpretive repertoire. The moralistic anti-drug crusades of Hamas in the Gaza strip is a case in point. Like some latter day untouchable Elliot Ness, Hamas organised a drug burning ritual recently, during which not only tonnes of marijuana but also painkillers like Tramadol and sexual enhancement drugs like Cialis and Levitra were incinerated. The significance of the crusade went beyond preaching a policy of abstinence and endurance to proletarians when it accused Fatah officials of being in charge of drug smuggling. These actions will continue since they are a convenient mechanism of cementing authority whilst brushing the real social antagonisms of Palestinian society under carpet. The 'unity deal' may resolve some intra-classist political conflicts but such cultural assaults on the proletariat will continue unabated.

[4] This is precisely the argument put forward by some of today's 'far-right' organisations such as the British National Party (BNP) in relation to the need to separate 'Muslims' and 'Europeans' within dense, urban centres of tension such as London, Leeds and Birmingham. The 'far-right' tag so overused by vacuous journalists, attempts to mystify the capitalist core of the BNP's ideology which consists of an uneasy mixture of six anti-working class currents: populism; neo-populism; fascism; neo-fascism; Nazism; and neo-Nazism. Different masks are adopted by members for different occasions. The British media has made a concerted effort in recent years to court the populist and neo-populist fronts of the BNP whilst pretending that the other four fronts do not exist. The recent spate of violence associated with some BNP factions as well as The English Defence League (EDL), targeting immigrants, blacks, Muslims and trade union meetings is testimony to the breakup of the BNP under the double whammy of electoral meltdown and internal strife.

[5] In South Africa the 'reserves' created for Black people between 1913 and 1936 became known as 'Bantustans' at the end of the 1940s. A Bantustan was a territory designated to a tribal homeland with its own local elite.

[6] Frank James Tester (2010) discusses the brutal killing of Inuit sled dogs by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These dogs were deliberately slaughtered as a way of confining the Inuit within reservations and to coerce them into giving up their extended-family hunting camps. These "developments take place in the 1950s and 1960s as Canada is supporting the decolonization of British territory internationally, and moving toward completing its own constitutional sovereignty with a greater degree of separation from the British crown" (Tester, 2010: 8). Here we detect the same pattern discussed throughout this essay. The gaining of nationhood status by one group and the relegation of the *Other* to a reservation status as intrinsically interrelated phenomena.

[7] The comment was made by Israeli deputy defence minister, Matan Vilnai, after an air raid on Gaza: "the more Qassam [rocket] fire intensifies and the rockets reach a longer range, [the Palestinians] will bring upon themselves a bigger *shoah* because we will use all our might to defend ourselves." According to the *Electronic Intifada*, An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman, Arye Mekel, claimed that Vilnai used the word *shoah* "in the sense of a disaster or a catastrophe, and not in the sense of a holocaust" (Abunimah, 2008). However, this is a term rarely used outside discussions of the Nazi genocide during W/W II. The comment, of course, reminds one of similar racist demagoguery uttered frequently by President Ahmadi-Nezhad. So long as the level of class struggle remains low, little men like Vilani and Ahmadi-Nezhad can threaten proletarians with impunity.

[8] Howard Zinn explains in relation to Native Americans how, "Food shortages, whiskey, and military attacks began a process of tribal disintegration. Violence by Indians upon other Indians increased" (Zinn, 1999: 134). Replace 'Indians' for 'Palestinians' and 'Whiskey' for 'religion' and the above quote would serve as an accurate description of the current state of affairs in Palestine. At least since the first Intifada, Israel has been using curfews to starve whole villages and towns. Sometimes the only Palestinians with food are the collaborators who use it as a bargaining chip to regain lost prestige amongst Palestinian proletarians (Shahak, 1988: 11). The old corruption of Fatah and the new corruption of Hamas have made both unpopular with large swathes of people. Yet another reason why the recent 'unity deal' was timely.

[9] We suspect there are many reasons behind the Israeli Wall, chief among them the desire to grab land by stealth, limit proletarian mobility, enhance Israeli patriotism, ethnically cleanse areas from Palestinians, secure water sources and limit 'insurgent' attacks across the border. In the late 1960s the US military also tried to set up 'an electronic battlefield' across the border with North Vietnam in order to prevent attacks and the establishment of supply routes. It was an abject failure (cf. Barbrook, 2005). We are not in a position to ascertain whether the Israeli Wall will be a more effective barrier. However, this wall must be seen as a long term, strategic policy which first came to fruition with the 1992 Labour coalition of Yitzhak Rabin and later

cemented in 2001 by Ariel Sharon. In an insightful article, Graham Usher (2006: 18) suggests the wall "marked a posthumous victory for the *iron wall* revisionism of Zeev Jabotinsky".

[10] In our youth, many members of *Melancholic Troglodytes* were hopelessly inaccurate with the molotov-cocktail, barely competent with the rifle and woefully inept with the bazooka. We are, therefore, not laying claim to expert status in military affairs. However, we feel this historical analogy between US and Israeli armies (and Native American-Palestinian resistance to it) is one worth pursuing. Needless to say, we would be grateful to specialists in this area willing to correct our shortcomings.

[11] Eyal Weizman (2006) describes the bizarre example of the Israeli Defence Forces studying post-structuralist theoreticians such as Deleuze and Guattari on 'space' as well as the Situationist writings of Debord on 'urbanism'. The aim, it seems, is to work out new post-modernist tactics for defeating the enemy whilst creating a sanitised and seductive discourse of warfare. In practical terms, this translates into 'going through walls' in dense urban areas instead of going round them with the media's seal of approval! Without wishing to indulge in impotent armchair speculation it seems the Israeli army was not served at all well by Deleuze, Guattari and Debord during their recent Lebanese foray. Lederman (2006: 2) argues that the Israeli army's post-modern turn was a direct response to Yassir Arafat's introduction of the twin notions of tribal governance and tribal warfare (circa. 1994). Again, *Melancholic Troglodytes* do not feel sufficiently well informed to comment on this.

[12] It also explains the affinity between the Israeli and US armies. An Arab member of the Israeli Knesset points out the complex web of interests between both the civilian and military wings of the Israeli state and the US establishment in terms of key personalities: "The difference between Barak and Netanyahu is that as a member of the military establishment, Barak may be more pragmatic than Likud's Netanyahu. The military establishment shows greater strategic awareness and understanding for America's needs in the region and is more open to American considerations than Likud's settlers and religious coalitions. But on those issues requiring an Israeli national consensus, including an independent state, Jerusalem as its capital, settlements, refugees and borders, we believe there is no difference" (Bishara, 1999).

[13] Massacre of camp inhabitants is not confined to the Israeli ruling class. In 1970, semi-autonomous (and armed) Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan were attacked and crushed by the Jordanian ruling class. The PLO "withdrew from Amman, thus allowing the massacre of the proletarians who remained in the city" (Aufheben, 2002: 30).

[14] David Ben-Gurion, onetime prime minister of Israel, wrote in 1948: "... Blowing up a house is not enough. What is necessary is cruel and strong reactions. We need precision in time, place and casualties. If we know the family, strike mercilessly, women and children included ... At the place of action there is no need to distinguish between guilty and innocent" (quoted in Rose, 1986: 26).

[15] As *Melancholic Troglodytes* have said in our text on 'Hydro-Jihad' (see next article in this volume): "Israel suppresses Palestinian development of water collection as a matter of strategic policy. Since 1967 Israel has allowed Palestinians to drill only 13 wells in the West Bank. Even then Israel insists that Palestinians use only the Israeli drilling company, Mekorot, which can charge whatever it wants and schedule the work at its whim. Control of water is an indirect method of limiting Palestinian population growth and development. Whereas Israel has the technological capacity to treat and reuse waste water, Palestinian farmers cannot afford the procedure. The same is true of desalination plants that are beyond the means of Palestinians. Moreover, when Ariel Sharon was minister of infrastructure, he insisted that all waste water, treated or not, had to go to Israel". The Oslo agreement left ultimate control of water-flow in the hands of Israel.

[16] In an insightful article Eyal Weizman (2004: 110-111) demonstrates how 'sanitary-margins' on each side of the Israeli roads consume much of the Palestinian territory on the West Bank. Weizman also shows how planting has become a geo-political tool. For example, "pine trees leave the ground acidic ... and thus grazing, farming, and other Palestinian branches of the economy cannot take place ..." (Weizman, 2004: 108).

[17] The issue of productivity-unproductivity is even more complicated since it is inexorably tied in with Israel's creation-myth. Integral to the stories of pioneers making the desert bloom is the myth that Arabs had neglected the land and it was left to the true owners of the 'holy lands' to recover marshlands and swamps. Recent anthropological findings that undermine this narrative are neglected by Israeli museums (Petrovato, 2006). It is, of course, not just Palestinians who are written out of Palestine's narrative by some museums but non-European Jews are also marginalised since their stories may contain too many problematic loose ends for official Israeli culture. The few 'Arabs' who are displayed in these Israeli museums are 'traditional Arabs' who are depicted as timeless archetypes, in aesthetics disconcertingly similar to the representation of Africans by Leni Riefenstahl!

[18] We are happy to (partially) defer to Isaac Deutscher's superior knowledge on the kibbutz. But only partially! He argues that the new kibbutzim in Israel were modelled on the experimental Russian communes that flourished during the New Economic Policy with Lenin's blessings. The division of labour in the early kibbutz was voluntary and rewards were distributed equally. And it may very well be true, as he argues, that one does not understand the kibbutz without taking into account its nemesis- the zeal of the Mea Shaarim (one of the oldest Jewish neighbourhoods in Jerusalem with strict adherence to both Jewish fundamentalism and the anti-Zionist Neturei Karta). Deutscher writes, "The kibbutz and the Mea Shaarim are the two opposite poles of Israel's spiritual life" (Deutscher, 1981: 110). All this may be true. What is unacceptable is to suggest, as Deutscher does, that the kibbutzim represent the "communist principle" (Deutscher, 1981: 101). On this point, Rodinson's analysis strikes us as more realistic. It is also worth remembering that the kibbutzim granted numerous concessions to religiosity from the outset in the name of national unity. For instance, even atheists in kibbutzim were married by a rabbi (Shahak, 1988: 3). Finally, the

gradual rise of agribusiness in rural Israel has made Deutscher's rosy account of kibbutzim even more obsolete.

[19] More recently, Ein-Gil and Machover (2008: 62) have argued that Mizrahim Jews from 'Muslim' countries despite "being regarded as culturally inferior and treated as colonisation fodder by the Zionist leadership, were nevertheless successfully co-opted to the Zionist project. The Mizrahim continue to face socio-economic disadvantages in Israel but these are predominantly a reflection of class barriers and are fundamentally distinct from the national oppression of Arabs". We find these arguments sound but (slightly) over-stated. They tend to minimise ongoing Zionist leaders distrust of proletarian Mizrahim Jews as potential fifth-columnists and racist tendencies present in many Ashkenazi Jews directed toward non-European Jewry. For example, in June 2010, more than 100,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews from European origin protested the fact that their daughters are educated in the same classroom as schoolgirls from Mizrahi background. Despite obfuscating media discourse, this was ugly racism directed by Ashkenazi Jews against Mizrahi Jews. However, we accept the argument that bourgeois Mizrahi have found a secure niche for themselves among the predominantly Ashkenazi ruling classes.

[20] Martin Buber and Ben-Gurion had another significant tussle in 1960 after Israeli agents captured Adolf Eichmann in Argentina. Buber 'had wanted Eichmann tried at an international tribunal because his crimes were crimes against the human race as a whole. Ben-Gurion insisted that the trial should be held in Israel as a way ... of bolstering the legitimacy of the Jewish state' (Rose, 2004: 13). Ben-Gurion also wished to use the trial to more securely bind the new generation of Israelis to state ideology and to more effectively demonise Arab nationalists such as Nasser as 'Nazi collaborators' (Achcar, 2010: 193 and 202).

[21] *Leftism* is a derogatory term used to designate all those individuals, groups and ideologies occupying the left wing of capital. This includes (all of) Leninism and (most of) Anarchism, but also (many currents within contemporary) Autonomism, Left-Communism, Libertarian Socialism and Situationism. It is sad that people calling themselves 'revolutionaries' still need these pathetic group identities from the past as a way of bolstering their self-importance.

[22] The role of the secular Arab bourgeoisie in dividing, abusing and discriminating against Palestinian refugees must not be camouflaged. An academic (nonetheless useful) recent document worth consulting is Chatty & Hundt (2005). Another article (Lederman, 2006) convincingly demonstrates how Arafat created a centralised fiefdom where all lines of wealth generation and communication ended at his headquarters in order to marginalise his political rivals. Also it is noteworthy how Palestine is increasingly discussed by the media in therapeutic terms. In this discourse, Palestinians are treated as children who are 'vulnerable' and 'traumatised'. There is even a British charity supporting a 'mobile therapy centre' in the West Bank "offering psychological tests and support, play and speech therapy, physiotherapy and drug therapy" to traumatised children (O'Neill, 2006). Finally, a cursory look at the economics of the Gaza Strip shows how 'development' was deliberately suppressed first by the

Jordanian/Egyptian states and later by the Israeli state (Avnery, 2006). All these factors forged the preconditions for the rise of Islamic reaction.

[23] It is more complicated, of course, as most things are in the 'Middle East'. Besides official Zionism (and its many subsets) and neo-Zionism, there is also Post-Zionism. Uri Ram defines the difference as follows: "Post-Zionism is citizen-oriented (supporting equal rights, and in that sense favouring a state of all citizens within the [pre-1967] boundaries of the Green Line), universal and global. Neo-Zionism is particularist, tribal, Jewish, ethnic nationalist, fundamentalist, and even fascist on the fringe" (Ram quoted in Achcar, 2010: 178).

West Bank town of Nablus Sunday, January 14, 2007

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"HYDRO-JIHAD: Water Conflict and the Class Struggle" was originally written in 2003 as an extended leaflet which is why it doesn't cite full references. The Iraq War underlined the significance of three key commodities in the Middle East: labour power, energy and water. This text investigates the role of water in relation to the class struggle.

It briefly demonstrates how water became first commodified and then a tool for repression and control. We do not need the forewarning of hydrologists to know that water will increasingly emerge as a contributing factor in armed conflict between nation-states under capitalism and perhaps even between rural and urban regions of the same country.

This latest version of the leaflet has been updated and substantially expanded in order to reflect a growing body of research on the topic of water conflicts. In keeping with the original style of the text we decided not to include references, although our debt to experts in this field is freely acknowledged. We focus on five areas of dispute on the Middle East but *some* of the conclusions could be generalised more widely.

Like Wind I Go

With them the Seed of Wisdom did I sow,
 And with my own hand labour'd it to grow:
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go."

Into this Universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing:
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.

Then to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn
My Lip the secret Well of Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmur'd— "While you live,
Drink! —for once dead you never shall return."

For in the Market-place, one Dusk of Day,
I watch'd the Potter thumping his wet Clay:
And with its all obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd— "Gently, Brother, gently, pray!"

- Omar Khayyam

HYDRO-JIHAD: Water Conflict and the Class Struggle

The Early Domestication of Water

The earliest examples of water worship date from the period 6000 - 4000 BC. The druids offered the water goddess libations in the vain hope of arresting the Roman advance. In Wales, water was drunk from human skulls in order to acquire the desirable qualities of the skull's original owner. Persians personified the water as Apas and prayed to them in order to rejuvenate the life-force the goddesses had invested in nature. The invention of *qanats* (sloped water canals), sometime between the tenth and eighth centuries BC in Persia, witnessed the birth of a hereditary class of professionals responsible for excavating and maintaining them. The Achaemenid Shahs "actively encouraged the construction of qanats by granting the profits for five generations to the people who dug them" (Dale R. Lightfoot). Some of the pre-Islamic rain-making ceremonies developed in Iran, Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula over the centuries are remarkably reminiscent of the village ritual enacted in *The Wicker Man* (Dir. Robin Hardy, 1973; also see Ilhan Basgöz). At least five of the Mithraic (Persian 'mystico-pagan' religion imported into the 'West' during Roman times) temples discovered in Britain were built close to streams or over springs. The very earliest Hindu, Egyptian and Roman legal codes were based on the assumption that a leader would protect water supplies in return for people's obedience (Alexander Bell). Around 500 BC, the Chinese became the first to understand the 'water cycle' (sea evaporation → cloud formation → surface water). It was also the Chinese who set up the first flood-warning system in 1574 on the Yellow River, using "horseback riders who travelled faster than the water" (Alain Gioda). Today Europe and USA have a satellite each in orbit tasked with mapping salinity of oceans and understating the movement of freshwater around the planet- data that will no doubt be used to further commodify water.

Some societies were so dependent on water, that the determinist historian Wittfogel coined the term 'water civilizations' to describe them. Egypt, Assyria and the Kingdom of Saba' are clear examples. The latter's fall was symbolized by the destruction of the only dam around Ma'rib (approx. 300 AD). Some Old Testament scholars are of the firm opinion that "King David was able to take Jerusalem by using the city's underground conduits, which supplied water from the spring of Gihon" (Alain Gioda). After the fall of Rome (410 AD) and then

Constantinople (1453 AD), the Arabs and the Persians refined the tradition of fountains, water sports and hot baths. Persian qanats were brought to Spain by Muslim conquerors during the 8th century. In turn, Spanish conquerors took their qanat engineering skills to the Canary Islands, Peru, Chile and Mexico. This enabled them to incorporate most of the land under their influence into wheat farms and cattle ranches. At the beginning of the 7th century AD Pope Gregory acknowledged the obduracy of paganism by recommending their temples be converted to Christian use, instead of the previous policy of ruination. The well water was adopted for the Christian rites of baptism and hand-washing. The transition became allegorized in the stories of saints battling with giants, monsters and demons.

Da Vinci and Machiavelli were very clear about the importance of water. In a failed plot they tried to divert the course of the Arno River away from Florence's enemy, the city-state of Pisa, and to the sea through a series of navigable canals that would immensely benefit Florentine commerce and security (Adam Garfinkle).

By the time of the Reformation (16th century), the Church was strong enough to try strong-arm tactics once more. Some well chapels were demolished, pilgrimages prohibited and offenders chastised. The 'lower' classes attracted to 'holy' wells turned the ritual into Bacchus orgies, not unlike original football festivals. The spa culture was in many ways a bourgeois response to plebeian carnivalesque. But "it was not until the eighteenth and, even more so, the

nineteenth century, with the rediscovery of the body and the health cult, that the popularity of spas reached its height" (Gioda). Gradually the magical holy wells transmuted into devotionless 'wishing wells', and by the late 19th century, 'cursing wells' played an important role in identifying *criminals.* The 'wet Northern' countries of Britain, Germany, France and the Netherlands spend a great deal of energy and resources on improving rivers and draining land during the early phase of their industrial and agricultural development in the 18th and 19th centuries (Alexander Bell). Their water-richness allowed them the luxury of planning ahead, whilst water-thirsty countries were too busy surviving to forge a strategy for development.

What is vital to appreciate here is this: for centuries the domestication of water went hand in hand with its statification and also with its veneration. Sometimes this was due to a push from below when, for instance, peasant and plebeian groupings would demand better water supplies and sanitation. In these cases, the improvements were not usually associated with alienation. However, at other times the domestication of water was a prelude for the

disciplining of the lower classes. These attacks were perceived by people as 'unnatural' and catalysed the process of alienation from Nature. With the advent of generalised commodity exchange under capitalism, the process of transforming inanimate objects into 'things' with magical qualities separate from humans, was intensified. Commodity fetishism took centre stage.

Commodification of water

Water enjoys an unrivalled position in nature's domain, precisely because "it symbolizes the whole of potentiality; it is *fons et origo*, the source of all possible existence" (Mircea Eliade). So much so that even "under Roman law flowing water was considered to be public property, which meant that rivers and their branches could not be commercialized. The political and military power of the feudal system was limited by rural communities for which water, by virtue of being continually renewed, was a public property and could not be appropriated by feudal rights" (Gioda).

Under capital, life becomes survival, and water, a vital regulator of political economy. "Enclosures", as some autonomist Marxists have correctly observed, "are not a onetime process exhausted at the dawn of capitalism. They are a regular return on the path of accumulation and a structural component of the class struggle" (Midnight Notes). Water deposits determine the boundaries of enclosures, separating thirsty proletarians from podgy masters. The resultant *phony* water shortage becomes harnessed to a siege mentality- an essential strategy for smothering dissent.

Water economists have employed Sraffa's distinction between 'basic' versus 'non-basic' commodities lately. Basic commodities enter into the production of all commodities, while non-basics do not. Energy commodities (water included) are basic commodities. In certain transitional periods, it is claimed, only with price changes of the energy commodities can the average real wage be reduced. The new fangled concept of 'virtual water' (John Anthony Allan) is one such attempt to increase the profitability of water. It refers to the water embedded in water-intensive commodities such as cereals. It is argued that the economies that import cereals are getting a subsidized bargain and should be grateful for this 'western' generosity.

BLUE GOLD
THE WAR OVER YOUR WATER IS ABOUT TO BEGIN
IN THEATRES DECEMBER 12

Higher industries *suck up* the surplus value produced at the bottom of the system through this price structure, and in the process dictate the rhythm and extent of lower forms of surplus value extraction. The Israeli hi-tech industry not only guarantees Israel's military pre-eminence over her neighbours, but just as

crucially it catalyses agriculture's passage from *absolute* to *relative* surplus value extraction for Jewish farmers, through constant technological upgrading. Arab farmers, by contrast, are forced to rely on the less productive methods of extending the working day, and working harder in order to compensate for their lack of technology. The military and economic superiority of the state of Israel can also be harnessed to constrain rival states at the level of the *formal* domination of capital. As we try to demonstrate later, the control of water supplies becomes a vital method of upholding this superiority.

Marx correctly observed that, "it is not the absolute fertility of the soil, but its degree of differentiation, the variety of its natural products, which forms the natural basis for the social division of labour." He also noted that in ancient societies such as Egypt, Lombardy, Holland, India, and Persia, "artificial canals do not only supply the soil with the water indispensable to it, but also carry down mineral fertilizers from the hills, in the shape of sediments. The secret of the flourishing state of industry in Spain and Sicily under the rule of the Arabs lay in their irrigation works." Significantly, in the Middle East, the problem is not only the total volume of water but the high evaporation rate, which 'devalues' water as commodity.

Commodification as policing

Capital commodifies water by making use-value into exchange-value. Obviously, "something cannot be a commodity unless someone lacks it." Commodification is practiced whether shortage is caused 'naturally' or artificially. The U.N. sponsored Rio earth summit of 1992, where hydro-economists agreed to treat water as a commodity, capable of being traded, was a formal recognition of this phenomenon. Today a particularly pernicious alliance between some

World Bank bureaucrats and some sections of the environmentalist 'movement' is calling for the stricter commodification of water as the only way of preventing 'wastage.'


The commodification of water, the alienation of peasants from land (through territorial acquisition of, say, *fellaheen* Arabs by Israel or the general capitalist invasion of the countryside by the metropole), and the sedentarization of nomadic population (as seen in Jordan and Iran) must, therefore, be viewed as strategic elements of the same violation. The current attempt by Israel to ethnically cleanse the Negev desert from Bedouin Arabs in preparation for the next wave of Jewish settlers is part of this 'civilizing' strategy. In 1963 Moshe Dayan was quite explicit on this, "We should transform the bedouin into an urban proletariat. This will be a radical move, which means that the bedouin would not live on this land with his herds, but would become an urban person who comes home in the afternoon and puts his slippers on. The children would go to school with their hair properly combed" (Chris Mc Greal). To pressure the bedouin off the land, water (as well as electricity, roads and welfare programmes) are withheld from them.

Righty-ho! We've mapped the Evian camel. As soon as we find the butt-scratching monkey we can go home!
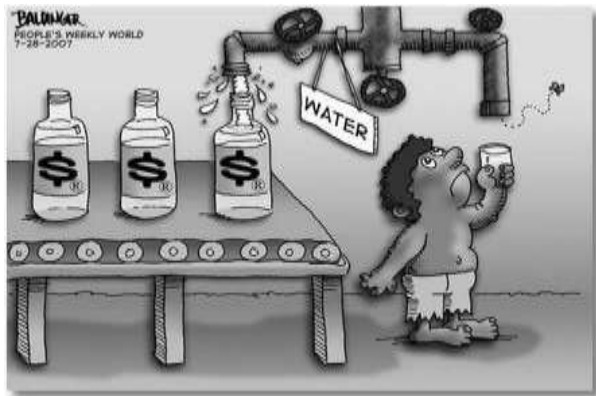
The data collected about aquifers and water distribution is treated as state secrets, giving more 'advanced' countries such as Israel and Turkey a scientific advantage over their neighbours. Satellite technology will only exacerbate this divide. The inapplicability of international water laws to arid countries also works to the advantage of the militarily superior powers as it allows them to use water as a bargaining chip. In fact, some believe the 'international community' does not want international water law at the present time (Tony Allan).
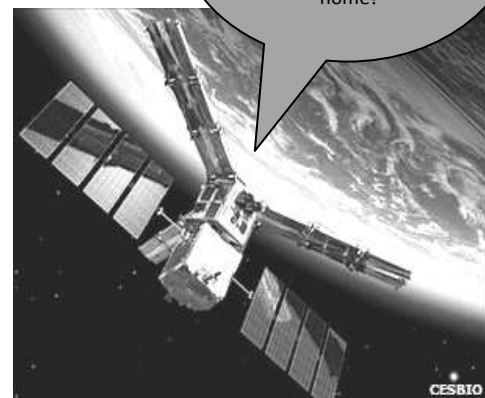
European 'salt mapper' *Smos* spying on thirsty camels
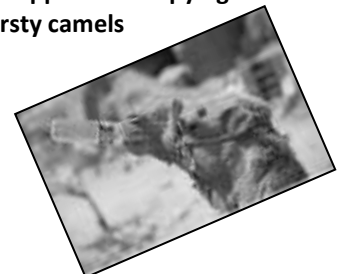
Commodified water becomes an agent of policing hierarchies: national as well as social. "One of the material foundations of the power of the state over the small and unconnected producing organisms of India", writes Marx, "was the regulation of the water supply. Its Mohammedan rulers understood this better than their English successors. It is sufficient to recall the famine of 1866, which cost the lives of more than a million Hindus in the district of Orissa, in the Bengal Presidency".

Water conflicts within Middle East/N. Africa region

There are five major disputes over water in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: control of the Karun or Shatt-al-Arab River (Iran and Iraq); Euphrates and Tigris Rivers (Turkey, Syria, and Iraq); the Jordan River (Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine); the coastal and mountain aquifers (Israel and Palestine); and the Nile River (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan). Let us look more closely at some of these points of tension.
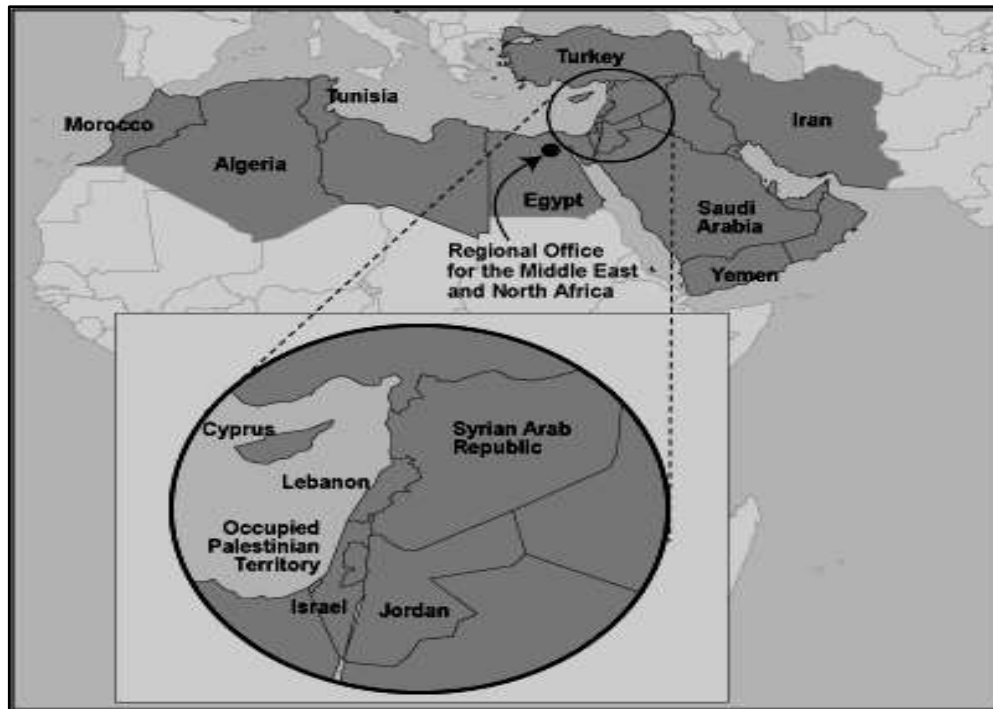
Lebanon

Technologically *superior* countries and those perched *upstream* hold a decided advantage over technologically *backward* and water-hungry *downstream* neighbours. For example, Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights extended her water reserves to the Banias tributary, and since the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Israel has maintained effective control over the Hasbani tributary. In so doing Israel has fulfilled Chaim Weizmann's dream of extending her northern border to the Litani river. During the siege of Beirut (1982) a small Israeli engineering unit "turned the wheel that closed the valve controlling the supply to west Beirut; then they removed the wheel and took it with them." The PLO resistance faltered soon after. Some analysts believe "water itself has been a relatively minor factor in most Israeli land acquisition,

but the result of the acquisition of land has been to exacerbate the gap between [Arab] and Israeli water use" (James Hudson).

Lebanon is also subjected to Syrian 'Water Imperialism.' The 1991 treaty of friendship between the two countries includes a "secret clause ensuring that Syrian forces would guard and if necessary defend the source of river Yarmouk, which rises in Lebanon before flowing into Syria" (Jad Isaac). To underscore the point, it should be remembered how the Israel-Syria talks became stalled, at least in part, over the question of Syrian access to the eastern shore of Lake Tiberius. Ever since Israel's decision to back out of its water obligations under various agreements to Jordan and Palestine has led to one crisis after another.

Egypt

Herodotus, who visited Egypt about 450-440 BCE wrote, "The Nile is the Gift of Osiris, but Egypt is the gift of the Nile." Almost 97 percent of all the water drawn in Egypt (whether for agriculture or municipal and domestic consumption) is from the Nile (Ismail Serageldin), a river whose flow and tributaries are controlled by 8 other countries. At Camp David in 1978, Sadat offered to divert 1 per cent of "Osiris's gift" to irrigate the Negev Dessert of Israel, in return for Arab land. Some sections of the Egyptian ruling class were content with this arrangement but *Mukhaberat* (the Egyptian Intelligence Services) leaked the details, in an attempt to bring down Sadat. Although the coup failed, the ensuing anti-Sadat media campaign created a hostile climate, culminating in his assassination in 1981 by the Jihad group. Israel's construction of new dams in Ethiopia, which would inevitably diminish the Nile's volume, is economic blackmail in all but name. What Israel and Syria do to Lebanon and Jordan through their military superiority, Turkey (an upstream riparian) does to Syria and Iraq, by virtue of geographic ascendancy. As Sudan and Ethiopia begin demanding more water from the Nile to meet growing developmental needs, Egypt's water-scarcity becomes increasingly precarious.

The nationalist/supra-nationalist tension intrinsic to capitalism, finds an echo in the two strategies proposed for water management: the *integrationist* faction (as represented for instance by the World Bank), who following Churchill's original concept, seek to create hydro-political units in the Middle East; and the *separatist* wing who are happy exploiting the dynamics of present boundaries. Both wings of the ruling class are, however, united on the use of water as a weapon in the class struggle against the proletariat. One innovative bourgeois attempt for addressing shortage in arid regions has been to purchase land for agriculture in water-rich

countries and then export the product to themselves (Ismail Serageldin). Saudi Arabia, for instance, now owns upwards of one million hectares of land in countries ranging from Tanzania to Indonesia as part of such a scheme.

Iraq

In 2009 the Iraqi bourgeoisie threatened to block all agreement with Turkey unless "their country is given a more equitable share of the available water supply," a shrewder reaction compared to Saddam era 'diplomacy' when Iraq threatened to bomb the Atatürk Dam (Joost Jongerden). Farmers in Iraq's south face particular difficulties in growing their products, driving many to immigrate to urban areas.

In a parallel internal manoeuvre, the Saddam River (a 565 Km waterway between Baghdad and Basra) is ostensibly designed to reclaim polluted land, but more significantly the project aimed to dislodge the Marsh Arabs, dissidents and deserters who fled there after the abortive uprising of 1991. This is a dual political and 'civilizing' project which aims to annihilate a way of life and turn self-sufficient marginals into wage-slaves. The Israeli state has been employing a similar strategy for uprooting Arabs from their lands, since at least 1951. A related ploy is to

increase the salinity of downstream water to such an extent that irrigation becomes impossible. Surplus peasants are forced to leave the land and migrate. Whilst Israel has deployed such tactics with subtlety against Palestinians, the Iraqi orgy of destruction during their retreat from Kuwait included a 'scourge water' policy, when desalination plants were damaged beyond repair. Bordiga once pointed out with regard to the floods at Po valley, "Capital has become incapable of the social function of transmitting the labour of past generations to the future ones ... It does not want maintenance contracts, but huge building deals; to enable this, huge natural cataclysms are insufficient - capital creates human ones with ineluctable necessity, and makes post-war reconstruction 'the business deal of the century.'" Although Bordiga's comment should not be over-generalized, it does seem to be an accurate description of so much of the 'reconstruction' projects being pursued in the Middle East today.

Turkey

Turkey is the only country in this brief survey enjoying a major water surplus which it refuses to share. The Turkish bourgeoisie is using its dam and irrigation schemes to *terraform* its vast eastern territory from low-yield small land-holdings to an army of wage slaves for agri-business. A parallel aim is to turn 'mountain Turks' (an offensive official description of Kurds) into loyal Turks. This is not unique to Turkey as dam building is also used in India to clear valleys where peasant struggle is high. The Turkish scheme is a long standing multi-level enterprise which began in 1975 and is known by the acronym GAP (*Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi*, Southern Anatolia Project*)*. So far it has led to large landowners solidifying their holdings vis-à-vis poor farmers and an assault on Kurdish culture resulting in evermore alienation from central government.

Turkey's $32 billion programme includes the building of 19 hydroelectric power plants and 22 dams along the Euphrates, the Tigris and other rivers in the impoverished southeast Anatolia region. GAP is expected to reduce the flow of the Euphrates by 30-50 percent within the next fifty years as well as increasing the amount of salt, pesticides, fertilizers and other pollutants entering the river. The Atatürk Dam alone meant 155 villages were submerged, the power base of Kurdish rebels wiped out overnight. 'Mountain Turks' can then be cordoned off in reservations, in a policy reminiscent of the US treatment of native Indian tribes in previous centuries. Those who decide to collaborate with the central government will be 'integrated', the rest will remain 'differentiated.' It is noteworthy that some dams are built neither for hydroelectric power nor for irrigation purposes but as a physical barrier against insurgent activity. The eleven proposed dams in the Hakkari and Sirnak provinces along the border with Iraq and Iran come under this category (Josst Jongerden).

In another ambitious move, the Turkish ruling class has decided to take on and subdue the Syrian and Iraqi states' water policies one at a time. First, the Euphrates will be blocked bringing the Syrians to their knees (as well as forcing them to curtail PKK activities), and, once they have agreed to the price increases, the Tigris will be targeted in order to win similar concessions from the Iraqis. Turkey's infrastructural work in the river basin of the Euphrates and Tigris has resulted in Iraq's spring water reserves to fall from 40 billion cubic meters to 11 billion (Joost Jongerden). In a blatant attempt to bully their southern neighbours the former Turkish president Turgut Özal once said, "We don't tell Arabs what to do with their oil, so we don't accept any suggestion from them about what to do with our water" (Joost Jongerden).

The water crisis has helped accelerate a rapprochement between Iraq and Syria, which have been bitter rivals for decades (Ed Blanche). A NATO conflict scenario envisages Syria and Iraq execute a joint invasion of Turkey over water (Joost Jongerden). Interestingly, Turkey already ships water to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and now it is negotiating to sell water to Israel. Rainfall in the entire Cyprus island has fallen by 15% since the 1970s and "a land once marked with rivers and lakes now has only artificial reservoirs, and many of these are half

full" (Alexander Bell). In the absence of a proletarian solution, the interconnectedness of these problems tends to reinforce artificial national boundaries instead of putting them under erasure.


Palestine

A quote from Chaim Weizman, the first President of Israel, will serve to contextualise the roots of the problem, "The whole economic future of Palestine is dependent upon its water supply ... [which] must mainly be derived from the slopes of Mount Heron, from the headwaters of the Jordan and from the Litani River in Lebanon." The British or French Mandates conveniently neglected the presence of Arabs in the land and granted the Jewish people control over the natural resources in the area (Jad Isaac and Leonardo Hosh). Today Israel's economic and technological superiority shapes water shortage in Palestine and Jordan. Israel has achieved a position where 97 per cent of its GDP is generated from activities, which only use five per cent of its water (Tony Allan).

At the same time as becoming water sufficient, Israel suppresses Palestinian development of water collection as a matter of strategic policy. During the 1948 war this translated into the physical destruction of the Rutenberg electricity generating plant in "an attempt to avoid exclusive Arab control over the use of the River Jordan and Yarmouk rivers" (Jad Isaac and Leonardo Hosh). Gradually the techniques of domination became more refined. Since 1967 Israel has allowed Palestinians to drill only 13 wells in the West Bank. Even then Israel insists that Palestinians use only the Israeli drilling company, Mekorot, which can charge whatever it wants and schedule the work at its whim (Jane Adas). Over the years, therefore, there has been a shift from direct or 'imperial' domination of Palestinian water resources to a more subtle or 'hegemonic' form of control after the 1995 Oslo Accords (Mark Zeitoun). The latest round of 'peace' negotiations mediated by Obama are meant to cement this shift but tellingly Israel still relies on a mixture of 'imperial' and 'hegemonic' methods for maintaining its superiority. In 2002, for instance, one of the first targets of the Israeli advance into Jenin was the city's water system. This technique of *water-deprivation-as-collective-punishment* will continue to pay handsome dividend at the negotiating table for Israel. Control of water is also an indirect method of limiting Palestinian population growth and development. Israel restricts the expansion of Palestinian water use in order to recharge upland aquifers, which feed wells on Israel's coastal plain (James Hudson). It has been estimated that "Palestinians have access only to about 18 percent of the ground water which is generated on their territories" (James Hudson).

Whereas Israel has the technological capacity to treat and reuse waste water, Palestinian farmers cannot afford the procedure. The same is true of desalination plants that are beyond the means of Palestinians. Moreover, when Ariel Sharon was minister of infrastructure, he insisted that all waste water, treated or not, had to go to Israel (Jane Adas). Another favourite

tactic of the Israeli state is to negotiate separately with its Arab neighbours over water distribution when the issues are clearly interdependent.

Attempts by racist historians (e.g., Patrick Clawson) in recent years notwithstanding, we could concur with orthodox historians that water was one of the underlying causes of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war as well as a rallying cry for the Intifada. As Alexander Bell has explained, "the underground aquifers in the West Bank and the headwaters of the River Jordan in the Golan ensured that life in Jerusalem could be sufficiently resourced." After all, some 40 percent of Israel's water is now obtained from aquifers beneath the West Bank and Gaza (Christian Drake). Jewish settlements consume 90-120 cubic meters per capita, whereas for Arab settlements the consumption is only 25-35 cubic meters per capita.
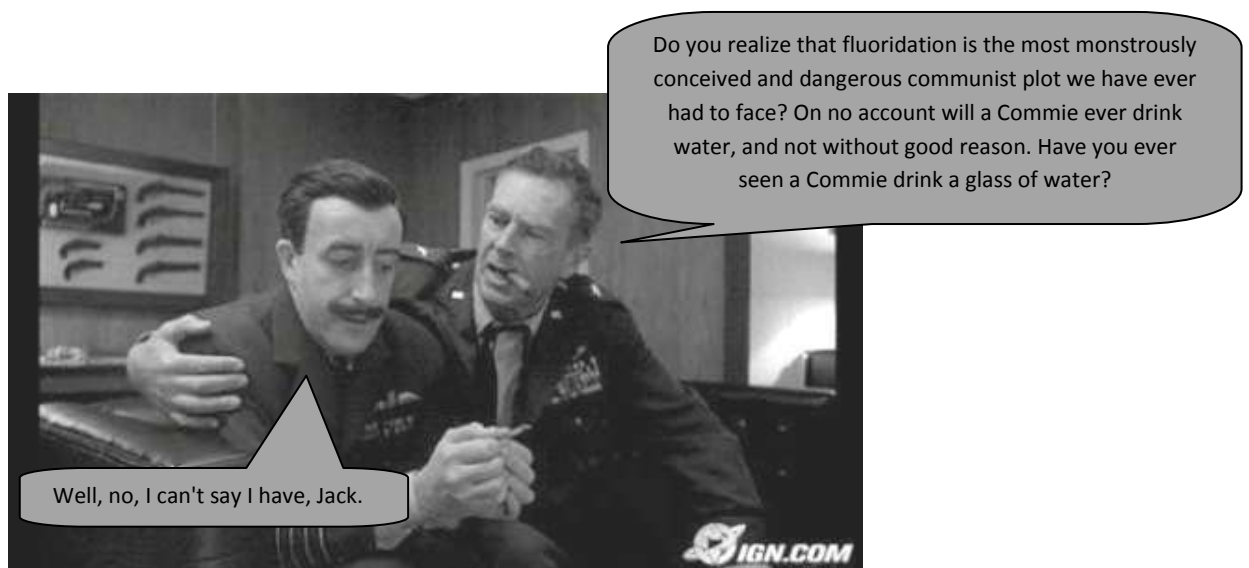
Group Captain Lionel Mandrake and General Jack D. Ripper discussing the finer consequences of fluoridation in a scene from *Dr Strangelove*

Since Israel is now economically capable of cutting water allocations to agriculture, it will probably initiate 'water for peace' negotiations in the future. In fact, some experts claim Israel can easily use 400 million cubic meters per year less than the two billion per year it now demands (Tony Allan). The reasons seem to be political and tied into giving Israel a stronger hand in the 'Peace Process'. During the Oslo and Camp David negotiations, Israel insisted on keeping control of the underground resources of Mountain Aquifer (the region's largest reservoir) in any permanent resolution. The patterns of settlements on the West bank are primarily shaped by access to water.

Conclusions

As post-boom governments of the region (with the exception of Israel and Turkey) fail to turn their population increase into capitalist advantage (as earlier capitalist powers such as USA and Britain managed so admirably in the 19th century), the commodification of water will exacerbate regional socio-economic variations. Tourism, instead of aiding in 'development', may be used as an excuse to cement existing class and national superiorities. After all, with tourism comes a concern with the quality of water, toxic chemicals and air pollutants. Already industries related to environmental technology (especially US-based ones) are invading the region. In Saudi Arabia, for example, US companies hold a 60 per cent market share and in Egypt (the largest single Middle East market for environmental technologies) they hold a 45 percent share (Josh Martin). Whilst individual companies may only be after profit, 'western' (and Japanese) governments will use this lever to exert socio-political pressure. We are already witnessing in some regions of the Middle East the construction and maintenance of water-wasteful tourist attractions such as golf courses, as proletarians are increasingly denied basic needs.

'Western' capitalists are using water to reverse decades of 'dependency' they claim to have endured at the hands of oil-producing Middle Eastern countries. For instance 'western' experts are encouraging "the reallocation of water from comparatively low-value use, such, as agriculture, to essential domestic use and higher-value, industrial uses" (Christian Drake). However, such a policy creates increased reliance upon food importation. Another ploy is to engineer a technical division of labour by discouraging the irrigation of 'water-consumptive' crops such as cotton, rice and sugarcane. Reactionaries such as Patrick Clawson are pursuing the concept of 'virtual water' (i.e. water that is embedded in water-intensive commodities such as wheat). Once the policy has been accepted by MENA (Middle Eastern & North African) countries, the 'subsidized' virtual water will be commodified.

Furthermore, the US policy seems to be aimed at maintaining the regional hegemony of friendly states at each river basin. Thus Turkey is given the green light to control the Tigris-Euphrates valley, Egypt takes care of the Nile basin and Israel rules supreme over the Jordan-Yarmuk waters. Related to this manoeuvre is the discursive construction of one the most imbecilic theoretical concept used by geographers and hydrologists, known as, 'peak water.' Plagiarised from analysis of oil consumption, 'peak water' refers to the point when demand for water meets and then outstrips supply. The argument is that as aquifers are over-pumped, groundwater becomes depleted and seawater seeps into empty caverns, ruining the aquifer (Alexander Bell). Only under a regime as moronic as capitalism, can experts construct interpretive repertoires for mystifying how a planet which is 70% water can suffer from 'peak water.' The distinction between 'fresh water' (2.5% of total water available) and 'salt water' (the remaining 97.5%) is really a question of political economy, technical innovation and environmental concerns. More than 1,500 desalination plants now

line the Gulf and the Mediterranean and the cost is falling. However, desalination is a very "energy intensive and greenhouse gas-emitting way of getting fresh water" (John Vidal, *The Observer*). Moreover, it produces impurities (concentrated salt streams) that end up back in the sea and kill marine life.

It is capitalism's 'modernisation' that is responsible for draining much of the area's water. For instance, "the qanats in the oases of central Arabia appear to have died, probably after the 1930s when pumps installed by US agricultural missions and Aramco began withdrawing large quantities of water in these areas" (Dale R. Lightfoot). Capitalist corporations are expanding their water operations into new fields. Some far sighted capitalists and their faithful scientific servants are encouraging farming the sea as opposed to fishing it (Ismail Serageldin). Less imaginative capitalists feel safer with traditional methods of acquiring profits. "In India",

The Swimmer: more of a flâneur than a psychogeographer (but still, a good movie)

for example, "whole river systems, such as the River Bhavani in Tamil Nadu state, have been sold to Coca-Cola even as the state is suffering the worst drought in living memory" (Maude Barlow). The bottled water industry is growing at an annual rate of 20% and super-tankers and giant sealed water bags are being constructed to transport vast amounts of water to paying customers (Maude Barlow).

In some parts of Africa there is the cruel irony of simultaneous droughts and flash-floods.

Burt Lancaster in his 'body-building' days!

Some parts of Kenya have been suffering from droughts, leading to the death of humans and livestock since 2004. In other regions of the same country flash-floods have displaced thousands, washed away roads, brought about water-borne diseases and slowed down agricultural activities (Simon Roughneen).

And yet capital's apparent supremacy conceals fissures of vulnerability. As surplus value from sectors with a low organic composition of capital becomes congealed in sectors with a high organic composition, the smallest monkey wrench can wreak havoc. Machines and information industry are deployed to counter the falling rate of profit, but bourgeois success proves partial and short-term. This lack of control represents itself in ideological attempts to bring order to chaos. An innocuous instance of this bourgeois violence has been documented in the contested nature of swimming pools in the United Sates. These social spaces were segregated in America, first by gender and then by 'race' and the segregation was policed through violent means. The bourgeoisie used municipal pools to Americanize young immigrant proletarians. They in turn subverted these goals

through 'rowdy' behaviour. When following protests blacks were finally allowed to use swimming pools alongside other 'races', the municipal authorities lost interest in maintaining public pools (Jeff Wiltse).

Water disputes are becoming evermore entangled. Yemen is usually referred to as the region's "most food-and-water-insecure" country in the region. According to one Yemeni official, "19 of the country's 21 main aquifers are no longer being replenished and the government has considered moving Sana'a, the capital city, with around two million people, which is expected to run dry within six years" (John Vidal, *The Observer*).

Riots over water shortage have been reported in Iran- this whilst 300 were drowned from flooding in another part of the country. In South African townships, "entire communities react to the arrival of new water meters by revolting, smashing the meters and chasing away the installers" (Naomi Klein). In the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh protest against contamination of water after the infamous 1984 Union Carbide plant in Bhopal are still rumbling on. Meanwhile, as the upmarket Delhi of Luytens receives 250 litres of water per person per day, the slum of Najafgarh on the city outskirts receives less than 30 litres per person per day. A recent European report concludes starkly: "Abu Dhabi, the world's most profligate water user, says it will run out of its ancient fossil water reserves in 40 years; Libya has spent $20bn pumping unreplenishable water from deep wells in the desert but has

Chipmunks united against desertification!

no idea how long the resource will last; Saudi Arabian water demand has increased by 500% in 25 years and is expected to double again in 20 years" (The Blue Peace report cited by John Vidal, *The Observer*).

Desertification is becoming increasingly severe in parts of Western Europe and the USA. Portugal and Spain fight over water, as do Argentina and Brazil. Chinese capitalism may very well have its growth curtailed due to water scarcity (Todd Hofstedt). We live in a capitalist world where "every eight seconds a child dies of water-borne diseases. By 2025 ... two-third of the world's people will not have enough water for the basics of life" (Maude Barlow). Various World Bank/IMF integrationist and nation-state isolationist strategies of regulating water as a commodity are doomed attempts to control the uncontrollable. The water crisis is neither 'natural' nor 'man-made'! It is capitalist-made! A capitalist system just as creaky and rusty as the qanats left to crumble aeons ago.

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published as a leaflet on 8.03.2003
Expanded and groovyfied on 12.08.2011

"Uncle Louis, his Fruits and Vegetables" was published in the winter of 2002. It was one of the few texts by *Melancholic Troglodytes* that was not a total failure, which is nice. Some people even put it on their websites which is also nice, and we even came across a strange forum debate based on the issues raised in the text, which is even nicer.

It is not a complicated text. The narrative takes the reader from the early days of Islam in the USA to the rise of the *Nation of Islam* (NOI). We consider the NOI to be a significant counter-revolutionary force. We have tried to demonstrate in our critique that despite its rhetoric (and sometimes because of it!), the NOI is an anti-working class, sexist, homophobic and racist organisation. A great deal of this critique can be generalised to those Islamic groupings that occupy the populist-fascist part of the political spectrum, although we have tried to keep the specificity of the case study uppermost in mind.

We have updated the 2002 version with fresh texts and illustrations. The reader must assume throughout that terms such as 'race', 'white', 'black', etc are always in inverted commas, as these are notions constructed over many years by the ruling class in order to divide and rule the dispossessed.

Rubaiyyat

Unfit to mosque or synagogue to go,

God only of what clay I'm mixed can know;

   Like sceptic darvish or like ugly bawd,

No hope have I above, no faith below.

Omar Khayyam
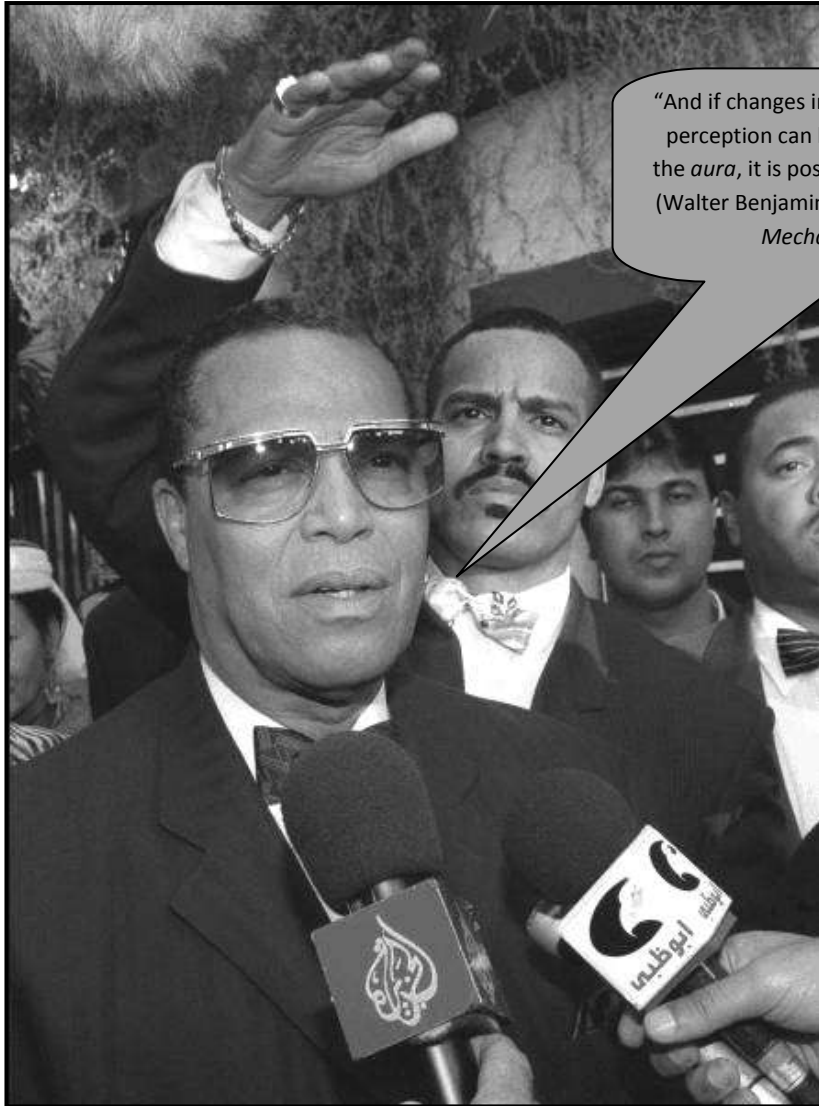
"And if changes in the medium of contemporary perception can be comprehended as decay of the *aura*, it is possible to show its social causes." (Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*)

Uncle Louis, his Fruits and Vegetables:
A Proletarian Critique of the Nation of Islam[1]

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The impact of slavery

With anything between 20,000 to 100,000 members, considerable financial assets and increasing political clout the *Nation of Islam* (NOI) represents a significant counter-revolutionary force in North American society. Lincoln's (cf. Lincoln, 1961) position, that the Islamic tenor of the movement was entirely epiphenomenal, may be overstated but it is true that *initially* the Nation had only a tangential relationship to the Koran and Hadith (sayings of the prophet Mohammad), which played such a central role in the development of Islam in Arabia and conquered neighbouring countries. That a social movement, which transformed the world over a millennium ago, should be so reflected in North American life is not without its ironies. The incursions of Muslim slave traders into Africa provided the preconditions that would be subsequently exploited in the Christian trans-Atlantic slave trade. The British colonisation of North America was set out on the basis of a religious mission which allowed for the enslavement of non-Christians – originally Native Americans and then also Africans.

Marcus Rediker (2007: 77) reminds us that slave trading had gone on for centuries before the 'Western' trans-Atlantic trade began, "from the seventh century to the nineteenth, more than nine million souls were carried northward in the trans-Saharan trade organized by Arab merchants in North Africa and their Islamic allies." The Atlantic trade (circa. 16th-19th centuries) catalysed the process and created new class divisions, especially in areas of greatest contact- West and West-Central Africa. It also led to both African and European merchants becoming "powerful as a class, controlling customs, taxes, prices, and the flow of captives" (Rediker, 2007: 77).

Some scholars have argued, "10-30% of slaves brought from Western Africa to the Americas were Muslim, and many of them practiced their religion upon arrival" (Steller 1996). Michael Gomez looking at figures for the entire continent writes: "Given that between 400,000 and 523,000 Africans came to North America during the slave trade, at least 200,000 came from areas influenced by Islam in varying degrees. Muslims have come to America by the thousands, if not the tens of thousands" (quoted in Segal 2001: 225). There were numerous African

Muslims amongst the early Spanish explorers, "either enslaved or hired, [working] as navigators, guides, and sailors for the Christian conquistadors" (Gardell 1996: 32). According to Gardell (1996: 4) there were some eight million Muslims in the United States by the early 1990s. Today there are more than 1,200 mosques of all sizes located throughout the Unites States (ibid.).

"Hence man was not freed from religion- he received the freedom of religion. He was not freed from property- he received the freedom of property. He was not freed from the egoism of trade- he received the freedom to engage in trade." (Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, 1843).
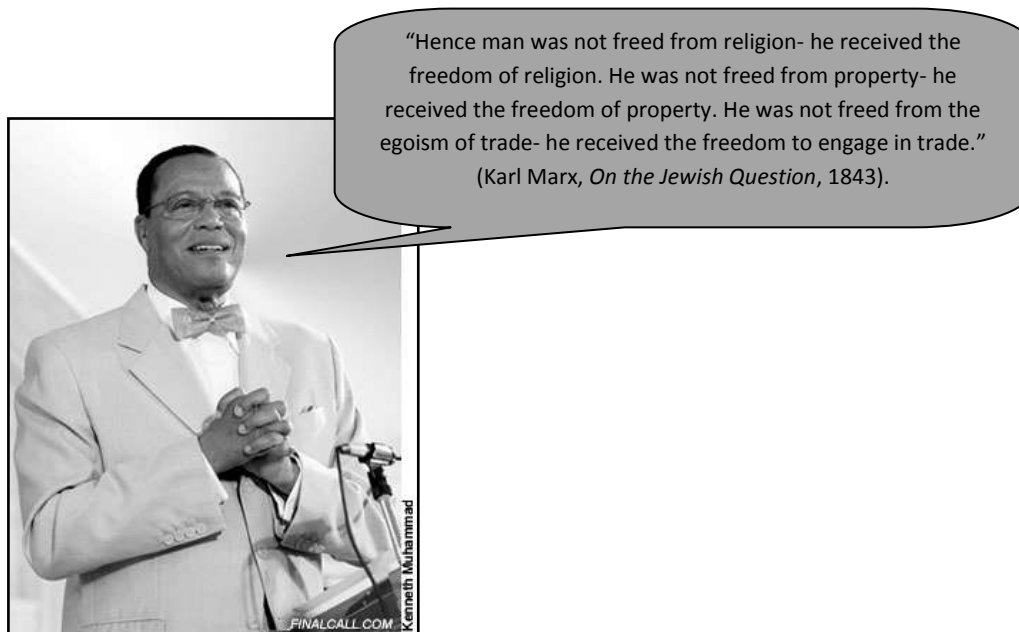
The vast bulk of slaves, however, retained an indigenous African belief system. Due to Christian influence slaves were discouraged from practicing Islam or any of the various indigenous religions once they were captured. There were exceptions. Marcus Rediker discusses a certain Hyuba, the son of an imam residing near the Senegal River, in the kingdom of Futa Jallon (circa. 18th century). He was captured and taken to Maryland where his learning and ability to recite the Koran brought him to the attention of a sympathetic attorney. Sent to England, his freedom bought, he became a cause célèbre and on his return to Africa, he paved the way for a number of lucrative deals for the Royal African Company (Rediker, 2007: 78-79).

Most Muslim slaves, however, were not so fortunate. Lacking institutions by which to maintain Islam, by 1830 the majority had lost their belief (White Jr. 2001). At the same time many Christian Churches chose to retain a white identity barring 'black' and 'red' people from their congregations. Consequently, by the 1780's a specifically black (in fact incorporating people of both African and Native American descent) church had developed, particularly in South Carolina. Some of the ministers had been part of the Black Loyalists, who responded to British promises for freedom if they fought against the North American revolutionaries. As a consequence George Liele fled Savannah following the British withdrawal and founded a black Baptist church in Jamaica. Others like David George and John Marrant went to Nova Scotia where there was a large settlement of Black Loyalists (Minges, 2000). Yet others, such as the

Muslim Balali, "who managed a plantation with some five hundred slaves on the Georgia island of Sapelo", actually "led eighty armed slaves in successfully defending the island against a British attack in the War of 1812" (Segal, 2001: 225).

The abolition of slavery (usually put between late 18th to early 19th centuries) was not so much accompanied by a relaxation of racism as by its intensification. The institution of slavery created a role for the African or their African-American offspring. With the abolition of slavery (initially in New England) came a reluctance by the 'white community' and their institutions to allow a free 'black community' to flourish. Both overtly racist and more hidden racist measures were introduced to curb the free movement of black people (Melish, 1998). As the legal/economic institutional safeguards of slavery were dismantled, new restrictions based upon a hardening conception of 'race' came to confine the activities of free blacks. Indeed free blacks were generally excluded from the growing industrialisation developments of the time.

In Nova Scotia, Canada, there were in the summer of 1784 what can be described as the first race riots in Shelburne. The entire black population of Shelburne, numbering several hundred, were driven out by unemployed white Loyalist ex-soldiers. The incident, which sparked this off, was religious: the black Baptist minister, David George had baptised a white woman. However, the underlying economic reasons soon asserted themselves as the rioters attempted to lynch Benjamin Marston, the chief surveyor whom they held responsible for delays in granting them land. Here the pogrom of Black Loyalists, many of whom competed for work with the White Loyalists, accompanied an assault on the authorities whose delays in handing out land affected ex-soldiers both black and white. From the account of white people being baptised in a black church, the pogrom underlines how the rioters' goal of ensuring land settlement was accompanied by a desire to reassert a distinction between themselves as whites and the impoverished black Loyalists.[2]

In the same period there was in 1786 what appears to be the first anti-racist demonstration when London's black population protested proposals to introduce laws to expel black people from England, copying what had already been done in France. The resistance to these attacks on free black 'communities' was accompanied by the growth of Christian sentiment in these communities. As in England the acquisition of Christianity was accompanied by the acquisition of literacy. Trevelyan has illustrated how the geographic spread of the Peasant's Revolt paralleled the spread of Lollardy in the fourteenth century (Trevelyan, 1908). Although the Lollards had no central beliefs other than the need to reform a corrupt Church, they fervently believed in translating the Bible into the vernacular. Blacks could now base their resistance to slavery on a reaccentuation of official culture.

The question of slavery came to dominate US political life in the first half of the nineteenth century. The first bone of contention was whether slavery would be permitted in the new territories, which were being turned into new states to be admitted to the USA. But in many ways this was fuelled by a conflict within the white population with the concern that slave labour would drive out free labour as had happened across the Caribbean and to a certain

extent in the southern states of the USA. The American Civil War (1861-65) was partially precipitated by abolitionists like John Brown whose raid on Harper's Ferry was an attempt to start a slaves' revolt by seizing an arsenal in Virginia. The plan was to hold the arsenal and encourage an uprising amongst slaves. John Brown was not the first and certainly not the last middle class do-gooder to discover that the proletariat does not rebel at his beck and call. The planned uprising did not occur. Brown was captured and hanged. However, this first military attempt by a white abolitionist led the Southern state militias to begin training in anticipation of more serious Northern assaults. Interestingly, when the US state apparatus did finally engage in warfare, many of the leading generals showed a marked disinterest in fighting, whereas radical republicans who had volunteered to fill the lower ranks of the army, and occasionally took field command, served to provide the real dynamism of the invasion of the South.

The successful conclusion of the war swiftly led to the abolition of slavery in North America and was followed by an intense struggle in the conquered South as former slaves asserted themselves socially, politically and economically and plantation owners tried to ensure that the land they owned retained its quality as capital by subordinating black labour to work it for them. The US Army by asserting their rights of ownership prevented the former slaves from taking over the land. This was a period when former slaves, many of whom had been manual workers, occupied political positions in a way only elsewhere realised in the Paris Commune. Nevertheless, the old Slave-owning elite organised the Ku Klux Klan, established in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866. Most of its leaders were former members of the Confederate Army. Any attempt to form "black protection groups such as trade unions was quickly dealt with" (Teaching History Online). Offering less wealthy whites, 'racial supremacy', with all its real and imagined benefits served to restrict the social opportunities to the newly freed slaves who were forced back to the plantations under disadvantageous conditions.
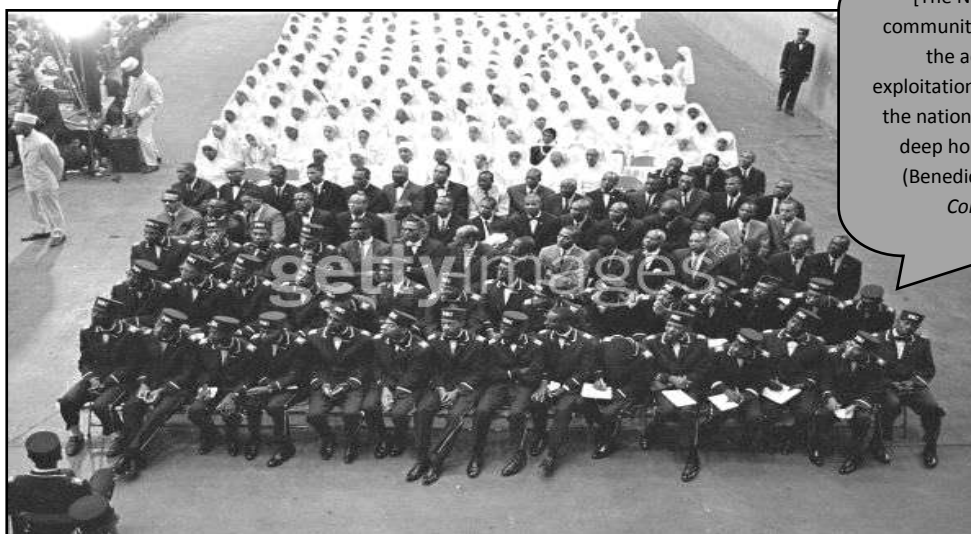
"[The Nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship." (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1990)

'The FOI is an elite force among Black Men. You have what it takes. Contact us today! Fall in Soldier!!' (Chicago, 1966. Note the sexual apartheid with women at the back)

Racism modernised

Once the North had achieved its overall goal of submitting the South to its economic dictates, defence of the liberated black people and their radical allies was perceived as superfluous sentimentality. Institutionalised violence and Jim Crow laws became the order of the day without the need for such a specific form of organised violence as provided by the Ku Klux Klan. Nevertheless, alongside the terror of everyday life, occasionally mass violence broke out, e.g. as in Wilmington in 1898. Faced with a Republican-Populist fusion gaining elected control of municipal and state-wide institutions in North Carolina, the Democratic Party organised the Red Shirts as a terror gang to intimidate black voters. This culminated in a Democratic coup carried out by about 2,000 white Supremacists. After various gun battles which left about twenty African Americans dead, the Republican Mayor and aldermen were forced to resign. Wilmington had been a town that had a black majority, including a substantial black middle class. By 1900 it had a white majority. The Republican US government did nothing about this Democratic Party coup d'etat.

Brothers! Oh, brothers! We have all gathered here, to preserve our hallowed culture and heritage! We aim to pull evil up by the root, before it chokes out the flower of our culture and heritage! And our women, let's not forget those ladies, y'all. Looking to us for protection! From darkies, from Jews, from papists, and from all those smart-ass folks say we come descended from monkeys!

Homer stokes as Grand Kleagle of the KKK in *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*

It was precisely this erasure of a black middle class which fuelled Booker T. Washington's (1856-1915) approach to racial uplift. Rather than just create a middle class to be repeatedly stomped into the ground, Washington *lowered* his sights in the hope of achieving some tangible goals. Faced with terror, he became quiescent focussing on developing technical skills that would allow some slight opportunities for former slaves and their children to become skilled workers. Washington worked his way out of salt furnaces and coal mines and it has been suggested that he was, in fact, purveyor of more radical politics, which he hid from his rich white benefactors for fear of losing their support. This may explain his writing style and media representational techniques. Carla Willard (2001: 629) suggests:

... narrative brevity helped him skirt the inflammatory phrase ... his stories also fascinated like advertisements. Admiring audiences flocked to his stories from so many disparate ideological positions that it is hard to believe that they read from the same script ... [Washington's] anecdotal style increased the attractiveness and saleability of his stories, and through his stories, the exposure and funding of his entire project of black uplift.

In other words "Washington spoke less not only to leap over troubled social terrain but also to engage further the disparate social and political positions of his readers" (Willard, 2001: 632). For instance, in his autobiographical *Up From Slavery* (1901), Washington only briefly mentions tortures and the slave celebration of emancipation is glossed over (Willig, 2001: 630). The urging of black political passivity was aimed at assuaging the unwarranted sense of entitlement amongst the southern white oligarchy. Washington would claim "Negroes without strikes and labor wars ... [are the] ... most patient, faithful, law-abiding and unresentful people that the world has seen," in an effort to ease the fears of employers at a time of hangings and burnings (Washington quoted in Zinn, 2003: 208). It was precisely this aspect of Washington's work that was taken up by leaders of the Nation, "members of the NOI adopted many turn-of-the-century black middle class 'uplift' themes like thrift, sexual propriety, industriousness, and temperance by recasting them in an Islamic mold" (Curtis IV, 2002: 169).

However, the strategy of appeasement failed and in 1915 the Ku Klux Klan was reformed by William J. Simmons, a preacher influenced by Thomas Dixon's book, *The Ku Klux Klan* (1905) and the film of the book, *Birth of a Nation* directed by D.W. Griffith. Oppression became so fierce that even someone as pliant as Washington felt obliged to intervene more urgently. He began in late life to speak out "in surprisingly direct terms against Jim Crow, lynching, and D.W. Griffith's sordidly successful film of 1915, The Birth of a Nation" (Willard, 2001: 632). By 1925 Ku Klux Klan membership reached a staggering 4,000,000. According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "between 1900 to 1930 ... blacks were lynched on an average of every other day" (White Jr., 2001: 15). In addition to racist violence, the KKK acted as strike breakers. Jim Crow laws were widespread and the "black servicemen who returned to America after World War I found that they frequently had been treated better in European countries than they were in their own home" (Gudel and Duckworth, 1986).

Big Dan (Cyclopes) Teague (John Goodman playing a KKK bible-salesman in *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?*)

Although the Great Migration of Southern blacks to northern cities like Chicago, New York and Detroit led to slight economic improvement, this trend reversed itself "after [World War I], and frustration, anxiety and discontent arose" (Religious Movements website, 2000). In this period we see the experience of Wilmington 1898 repeated in 1921 Tulsa. James R. Allen (2001) describes how "about 1200 buildings, including 23 churches, [were] burned, bombed, or looted, and as many as 300 people [were] shot, burned alive, or dragged behind cars." The Tulsa police actually deputized members of the Ku Klux Klan to carry out the punishments. Allen suggests, "[The Ku Klux Klan] became strong after the collapse of the Oklahoma Socialist Party. Previously the strongest group in the area."

Whereas the 1917 Race Riots in East St Louis had been a pogrom leading to the death of over 300 following the use of black strike breakers, the Chicago race riot arose due to a dispute over black-white neighbourhood boundaries. However, the climax of the Tulsa Pogrom was the sacking of what was regarded as the 'black Wall Street.' As I. Marc Carlson has indicated this riot went beyond an armed brawl to become a veritable 'organized urban warfare.' Around 1913 and within this context of institutionalised racism, the deradicalization of the black church, proletarian mobility and intense capitalist development we find the first recorded "assertive Muslim presence" (Segal, 2001: 225).

RECENT ORIGINS OF THE NATION OF ISLAM

Economic and cultural influences

If Washington D.C. can be called its diplomatic capital and New York its financial nerve centre, then the Nation of Islam's power-base is located in Chicago. The 'Windy City' was, after all, founded by Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, a black man who came to the Mississippi Valley with French explorers and constructed the first building on the site that developed into Chicago. In late 19th century, Chicago witnessed a number of significant social struggles. Zinn describes how "twenty thousand unemployed marched through the streets to City Hall" demanding bread, clothes and housing (Zinn, 2003: 243). The 1894 strike of workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company drew impressive support from a wide range of groups within Chicago. But gradually the city changed and the Chicago of the 1920s became in many ways a perfect breeding ground for reactionary movements. Gareth Canaan (2001: 148) notes how 'racial' and gender factors helped to divide the proletariat:

> for Chicago's black workers, the economic and living conditions were already in decline during the 1920s ... as severe as the Great Depression was, it only further exacerbated

pre-existing conditions within the black community ... African American women in Chicago enjoyed increased job opportunities between 1910 and 1920 but, unlike black women in other northern cities, were largely shut out of industry ... [However] as wartime production in industry contracted, African-American workers were fired and replaced by whites who had returned from the war and needed employment.

The depiction of the 1920s Chicago as a booming and prosperous city is, therefore, highly exaggerated. Again according to Canaan (2001: 164) "an estimated 34.5 to 50.1 per cent of urban families lived under the poverty line ... the unemployment rate of industrial workers [averaged] 12.95 per cent between 1921 and 1926." Davies (1988: 20) has convincingly argued that the rapid industrialization of cities such as Chicago in the nineteenth century tended to fragment rather than unify the proletariat (unlike industrialization in Western Europe). He cites three centrifugal forces acting to pull the American working class apart. First, in these areas industrialization arose,

> without those deep roots in the artisanal resistance to industrialism which many historians have stressed as a determining factor in the formation of militant unionism and working class consciousness ... it was this expanding urban-industrial frontier ... with its constantly replenished opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurial accumulation, that provided material sustenance for the petty-bourgeois ideologies of individual mobility that gripped the minds of so many American workers (Davies, 1988: 20).

The second centrifugal influence was the 'Yankee vs. Immigrant' conflict that emerged after the "arrival of several million impoverished Irish and German laborers who came in a flood [sic] after the European crop failures of the 1840s" (ibid., p. 21). To this was added cultural difference and religious tensions that American society exacerbated, making proletarian unity even more precarious. Finally, there was the problem of racism and slavery. As Tocqueville observed, writes Davies about the 1850s,

> the antebellum North was, if anything, more poisonously anti-Black than the South ... Although segments of the native white working class, especially in New England, eventually embraced Abolitionism, they remained a minority whose opposition to slavery was most often framed within a pietistic religious ideology, rather than within a clear political analysis of the relationship between capitalism and slavery (ibid).

After the Draft Riot of 1863, which began as a struggle against the 'silk-stocking rich' and ended up as an anti-black pogrom, even the Irish proletariat severed their links with the despised black proletariat. It is true that World War II provided some black proletarians entrance to hitherto inaccessible areas of the manufacturing sector. In fact, "the shortage of labor led to the uneven integration of Afro-Americans into more skilled positions; but, at war's end, most still held unskilled positions" (Robinson, 2001: 36). Nevertheless, many more languished in jails or remained unemployed.

"Jazz was to us a system of latitudes subject to a freely accepted discipline of integral bonds between an individual and a group. As such it became perhaps the best metaphor for liberty that any culture has ever come up with."

(Mike Zwerin, *Jazz as a Metaphor for Freedom*, 2000)

"When you spend Saturday night in an illegal dancehall, there is no energy left for Sunday-morning mass."

(Mike Zwerin, *Jazz as a Metaphor for Freedom*, 2000)

"Black Man don't play jazz no more ... not that stuff that comes out of our slave days" Louis Farrakhan

Ideological influences

The Nation's more recent ideological origins should be traced to a number of early twentieth century influences. Shortly before World War I, two black movements were founded: the 'Moorish Science Temple of America' established in 1913 by Timothy Drew and the 'Universal Negro Improvement Association' founded in 1914 by Marcus Garvey. Freemasonry, Gnosticism, and the Islamic creeds of Ismailiyya, Ahmadiyya and Sufism influenced the Moors. Members were "advised to respect the inequalities of social stratification" (Gardell, 1966: 44). Garvey was a printer by trade, who had led an unsuccessful strike in his youth at Kingston. The experience of defeat "imbued him with a lifelong scepticism regarding unionism and class struggle" (Gardell, 1996: 23). He also believed, "potentially, every whiteman is a Klansman, as far as the Negro in competition with whites socially, economically and politically is concerned, and there is no use lying about it" (Gardell, 1996: 272). As E. Franklin Frazier has explained:

Garvey not only promised the despised Negro a paradise on earth, but he made the Negro an important person in his immediate environment. He invented honors and social distinctions and converted every social invention to his use in his effort to make his followers important. While everyone was not a 'knight or sir', all his followers were fellow-men of the Negro race … The women were organized into black Cross Nurses and the men became uniformed members of the vanguard of the great African army (Quoted in Marable, 1998: 167).

Garvey who was at some stage a class fighter, having helped lead a printers' strike in 1908-09, also campaigned against lynching and Jim Crow laws but eventually settled for a 'Back to Africa' movement. He was willing to negotiate with anyone who would aid his campaign, including the Ku Klux Klan. Eventually he was deported and lived for a while in Britain where he supported the Conservative Party. Garvey's metaphysical belief 'in a pure black race' will be picked up by the NOI in due course (Gardell, 1996: 272).

I read *Up From Slavery* and then my dream- if I may so call it- of being a race leader dawned … You may call me a Klansman if you will, but, potentially, every white man is a Klansman, as far as the Negro in competition with whites socially, economically and politically is concerned, and there is no use lying … I have no desire to take all black people back to Africa; there are blacks who are no good here and will likewise be no good there … There is no force like success, and that is why the individual makes all effort to surround himself throughout life with the evidence of it; as of the individual, so should it be of the nation … The whole world is run on bluff!
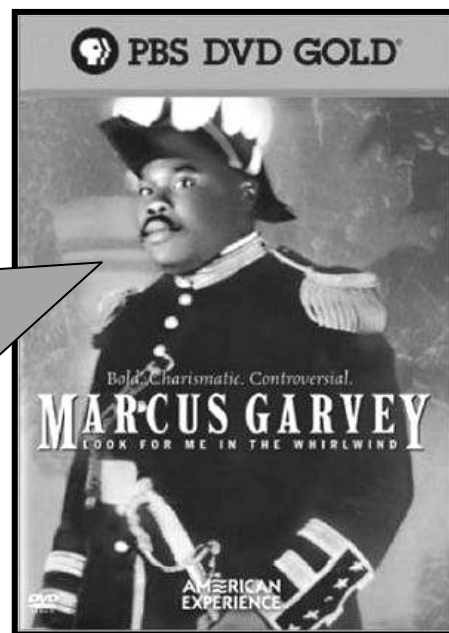
A few decontextualised quotes by Garvey which are key for understanding Farrakhan

The man who blended Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey with a smattering of Islam was a door-to-door rug salesman and convicted drug dealer called Wallace Dodd Ford. By this stage in the 1930s, the memory of Islam may have been alive amongst children of early slaves but 'we encounter [mostly] a memory, not a living faith' (Gardell, 1996: 35). Palmer takes up the story:

Upon Ford's 1929 release from California's San Quintin Prison, he moved to Detroit to start a new life. Ford used a number of names, including Wali Farad and Master Fard and claimed to be from Mecca, Arabia. Being that Ford's parentage was a mixture of white and South pacific Maori, he used his skin color and his prison con skills to pass

himself off to blacks as a 'mystic' and a 'prophet' from the Middle East … Among his first students was an unemployed Georgia migrant worker, Elijah Poole, who Ford renamed 'Elijah Muhammad'. In later years, Ford disappeared and Elijah assumed leadership of the NOI which he held until his death in 1975.

Ford disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Some allege he was murdered by the family of a young girl whom he had raped, whilst others maintain he was the victim of foul play by the federal state. Elijah Muhammad's 'explanation' for his master's disappearance was simpler: "We believe that Allah (God) appeared in the person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, July, 1930 – the long awaited 'Messiah' of the Christians and the 'Mahdi' of the Muslims" (Elijah Muhammad, 1965). So Ford had ascended back unto heaven but, lest the faithful grow anxious, it was alleged that he would return at Armageddon to proclaim the total victory of the black man over the white man.

Elijah Muhammad was not very popular with certain sections of the Nation. His life was threatened by rivals from Temple No. 2 in Chicago, causing him to fled to Milwaukee in 1935 (Bush, 1999: 142). He returned in 1942 to assume leadership of the national office in Chicago. His imprisonment for refusing to be drafted, "imparted to Elijah Muhammad a sense of martyrdom, which reinforced his claim of leadership. He returned to Chicago in 1946, after his release from prison as undisputed leader of the nation of Islam" (Bush, 1999: 143).

Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be current among men. This lays cities low, this drives men from their homes, this drains and warps honest souls till they set themselves to work for shame; this still teaches folks to practise villainies, and to know every godless deed.

(Sophocles, *Antigone*)
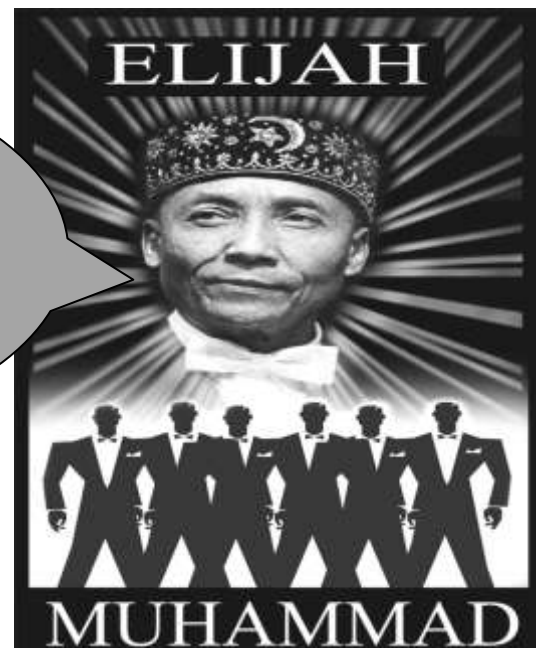
The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and his male strippers

One of the essential elements in a critique of the *Nation of Islam* is to grasp its adherents as Pendulum-junkies. Its founding fathers discovered and at times invented ideological polarities around which the strategy of the movement could be shaped. As with Gestalt psychologists, configuration and presentation is privileged over substance. This then creates the illusion of

motion with which the rank-and-file are mesmerized. The repetitive toing-and-froing of the pendulum serves to imbue the flock with a crass activism, suppressing doubt by promoting dynamic disorientation. At first it proves to be an indispensable party-building device, but the pendulum has a nasty side effect. Once it reaches critical mass, it acquires a mind of its own, disowning the Prime Mover and transforming whoever strays in its path into dependent junkies. The fact that Farrakhan has managed to exert his power over violent faction fights and contending interest groups within the Nation is testimony to his personnel management skills. For example, whenever he was scheduled to speak "all Muslims from a five-hundred-mile radius were instructed to be there for security", but in reality "[they were encouraged to attend] as an audience against a poor showing" (White Jr., 2001) and whenever a minister became too popular with members, an excuse was found to demote him.

Gestalt psychology or Nation of Islam magic? What do *you* see?

Some clown of a founding father must have been over-dosing on Plato's *Republic* when the Nation's bedrock was being laid. For the division of the Muslim commonwealth into the three classes, gold, silver and iron (Ministers, Fruits of Islam, and rank-and-filers), the notion of a 'necessary lie' as mythic-glue binding individuals to their philosopher-king, the proto-eugenic policy of filtering the defective and the prohibition on innovation in doctrinal matters, fit a pattern all too common in totalitarian dystopias. For a section of the proletariat that experiences the alienation of American society more than most, the Nation's assertion that black people are angelic gods is a comforting sop. As bell hooks has correctly observed:

> When people focus on the white media's obsession with Louis Farrakhan, they think the media hates Farrakhan so much. But they don't hate him. They love him. One of the reasons why they love him is that he's totally pro-capitalist. There is a tremendous overlap in the values of a Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam and the values of the white, Christian right (bell hooks interviewed in Z Magazine).

In March 1990 Farrakhan appeared on *The Phil Donahue Show* and after the Million Man March, he was invited on *Larry King Live* (see Robinson, 2001: 123). The March itself was covered by CNN in its entirety. Gardell (1996: 140) reports, "as of September 1995, Minister Farrakhan could be heard on forty-eight different radio stations and seen on at least ninety-nine different television channels across the United States." The Nation is now an official part of the establishment. That is the reason George W. Bush in 2000, while he was still the Texas governor decided "under his charitable choice plan, the Nation of Islam would be able to provide various social services using tax dollars" (PR Newswire, Feb 1, 2000). This was part of Bush's overall plan to cut welfare payment and turn faith-based organizations into primary providers of social services. Music to the ears of Farrakhan who has been lecturing about 'self-improvement' and 'economic independence' for years, in much the same way various Muslim

organizations establish a welfare network around the mosque in order to strengthen their political hold on the proletariat.

In 1991 NOI launched the Three Year Economic Savings Plan, in order to catalyse the process of capital accumulation. Members were asked to donate $10 a month. "Farrakhan suggests," writes Gardell (1996: 32), "that the government should support the Three Year plan by allowing blacks to direct 15 percent of their taxes to the NOI savings program."

People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth.

(Raoul Vaneigem, *Revolution of Everyday Life*, 1983).

THIS ASABIYYA AIN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR THE BOTH OF US!

From *asabiyya* to *umma*

Asabiyya, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) contended cryptically, "is a function of lineage affiliation or something that fulfils the role of such affiliation" - a kind of group solidarity maintained by a dominant element with a mandate to coerce. It could also be viewed as a socio-economic structure based on vassal relations marking the transition from an egalitarian tribal system to class society.

The Nation of Islam's early phase of development (circa 1930-1960) was characterized by the search for asabiyya through a nation-building program in what was often a hostile climate. The crash of 1929 had hit black capital just as severely as the larger white capital it depended on. In this context religious values were only of secondary importance to the extent that they fostered and strengthened asabiyya. Black Muslim leaders consistently called for a separate state, either

on US soil or elsewhere, despite realizing that there was no realistic chance of being granted one. There was, for instance, the project advocated by the National Movement for the Establishment of the Forty-Ninth State. This group of black nationalists "argued that because they did not receive the promised forty acres and a mule in the nineteenth century, they should now receive a separate state from the government" (White Jr., 2001). This was an opening salvo in a protracted negotiation over compensation for slavery that is still raging today. Apart from its obvious monetary benefits, the quest acts as Holy Grail and an emblematic desire for independence from the 'white Devil'. It is claimed that Fard successfully recruited 8,000 followers into his Lost-Found Nation of Islam between 1930 to 1934 alone.

Theology (the language of the gods) and philosophy (the language of men) are both moments in a single progression. They are both nothing more than ways of abstracting life. Thus spiritual and temporal power vie with one another in order to carry out one goal: to perpetuate slavery.

(Raoul Vaneigem, *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, 1994)

In *The Theology of Time*, a work which by contrast makes Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Khomeini's *Secrets Revealed* appear monumentally coherent, the Honourable (space-cadet) Elijah Muhammad uses a combination of messianic, chiliastic and numerological myths to forge a new historical identity for black Americans. Amongst other gems, the prophet Muhammad (the real one!) is dismissively referred to as 'white' (!); the black Stone of Kaa'ba as proof that people will one day bow to the real black Man, Elijah; a 30 million black army deemed sufficient to help the chosen one 'rule the whole world'; Africans are blessed as special and chastised as uncivilized in the same paragraph; the 'mad scientist', Yakub (contradictorily referred to as 'a devil' and 'another god') is alleged to have grafted devils (the white race) from the black Man 6,600 years ago (!); in a direct reversal of white racism, Elijah Muhammad refers to an even younger group called "the monkey family, who were created from white people as they tried to graft themselves back to the black nation. A few got as far as what you call a gorilla" (Elijah Muhammad, 1965); the black people have a more ancient origin, in fact they are "66 trillion years from the moon"! In a relatively recent interview, Farrakhan asserts that for him the account of Yakub is not metaphorical but very real: "It is not, in our judgment,

metaphorical. The reason it seems like an invention is because it was not heard before" (Farrakhan and Gates, Jr., 1996: 163).

The honourable one assures us that women are not all fools and their function viewed as comforters of men, although "[men] have more powerful brains than she because we were made to rule" (ibid.); Islam is perceived as black Man's equivalent of white masonry ("masons who have reached siren degrees as 32nd or 33rd are called Moslem Shriners"); the Hindu [sic], Vietnamese and Christian Americans fighting each other condemned as equally godless and condemned to physical annihilation ("I wish that My God would allow me to get one of these nuclear bombs and one of these planes ... I would show you how long they would be here ..."); following Nobel Drew Ali and preceding Khomeini by decades, America is referred to as the "Great Satan"; and onwards and upwards into a crescendo of bird-brained absurdity.

This absurd, mish-mash of an ideology was meant to augment the spatial exclusivity of Muslim temples by providing the membership with, appropriate psychological armour in their daily struggle against American alienation. The creation of asabiyya was facilitated by the alienation experienced by black Americans. The Nation's party builders had a great deal of material to work with, after all 'public' places such as schools, restaurants, and churches were segregated institutions. One common recruitment technique during the heyday of the civil rights movement was "to use clippings from newspapers showing blacks being turned away from white churches or of white Christian ministers openly advocating segregation" (Gudel & Duckworth, ibid.).

This alienation was actively encouraged by the white judiciary at least since 1898 when in a landmark ruling the railroad companies were given the go ahead to segregate their workforce along racial lines. This institutionalised racism allowed up and coming bourgeois blacks to set

up enclosures within which primitive accumulation of (black) capital could shield itself from unwelcome competition. Once the Nation's religious credentials were constitutionally verified, their temples and schools could become tax-exempt. In addition, each member is obliged to give a tenth of his earnings to the temple, although White Jr. (2001: 59) claims as much as a third of members' salaries go to the Nation.

Where previous Islamic groupings such as The Moorish Science Temple were content to play home-spun economics, indulging in the simple commodity production of heating oil, bath compounds, minerals, and tonics, the Nation laid the foundation of more ambitious schemes, setting up restaurants, bazaars, farms, bakeries, clothes stores, theatres, rallies and a regular newspaper network. According to Robinson (2001: 40) the Nation "even purchased a bank." And while the former appropriated a Moorish identity as a legal method of resisting slavery, the latter (temporarily) spurned full US citizenship. Remember that at this time, from a legal standpoint, black people were considered three-fifth of whites. This law had real consequences in terms of being able to carry arms. In this context, the formation of a group such as Black Panthers should be viewed as a constitutionalist tendency aiming toward full citizenship- a reformist group which aimed to decentralise the police force and could be credited with the earliest Rainbow Coalition (hardly revolutionary!).

The early 60s heralded a Rubicon. By this time enough asabiyya had been stored in the organization's battery cells to last it a lifetime. This primitive accumulation of capital was achieved through the 'super-exploitation' of black workers. Robinson (2001: 42) reports how many members who worked "long hours in the restaurants and bakeries didn't get paid for all the time they worked." Moreover, "with the religious ban on wastefulness and extravagant pleasures, investment of accumulated capital was regularized and modern *rational* capitalism became a reality" (Gardell, 1996: 115). However, gradually it became obvious that the Nation's isolationism was proving counter-productive and capital accumulation slowing down. Individuals like Malcolm X were beginning to find the constraints of fake humility and political non-intervention unbearable, and the American left's influence in Harlem was waning. At his behest, and despite Elijah Muhammad's initial objections, the Nation co-operated with a sympathetic producer who made an hour long documentary called *The Hate That Hate Produced* (Directors: Wallace and Lomax, 1959) about the organization.[3] Membership doubled from an estimated base of 40,000 (according to C. Eric Lincoln) as a result of the broadcast. The influx of university-educated blacks soon began demanding change and modernization. The switch from *asabiyya* to *umma* (the fictive universal Islamic community) was inaugurated through a number of highly publicized politico-spiritual pilgrimages.
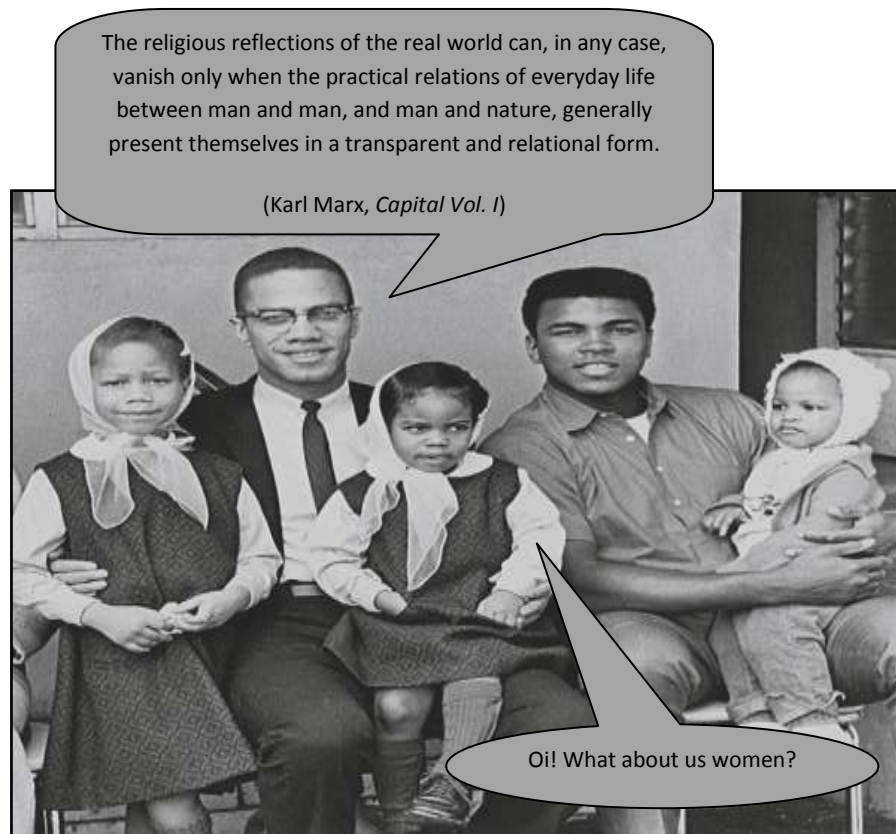
MECCA CARLO OR BUST!

Entrenchment and expansion

In the same way that the asabiyya/umma dichotomy can only be fully understood within the wider context of the periodical American oscillation between isolationism and expansionism, the romanticized spiritual journey of Muslim leaders requires a larger historical canvass.

"Islam is permeated with nostalgia for departure," writes an American scholar (Wilson, 2001). This is true enough, so long as one does not lose touch with the material source of this nostalgia: the Bedouin who fought enclosures and resisted Islamic urbanization; the annual de-paganization of Mecca/Medina (Hajj) as a platform for kick-starting the mercantile economy; the long voyages abroad in search of booty and imperial conquest; the Sufi wandering away from the epicentres of Islamic corruption; and, finally pilgrimage to exotic lands as a tactic of legitimising one's authority within a sect and against political rivals. All these earthly methods of accumulating wealth and power represent the real basis of the idealistic notion of 'nostalgia' in Islamic literature.

When Ibn Battuta, the famous 14th century Muslim traveller, embarked on his voyage of discovery, he used the *caravanserai* route to cut across invisible borders and the magical *Khanegah* (Sufi hospice) route to transcend real obstacles. In imitation, the NOI spreads its matrix of mosques across America like so many plastic squats on a monopoly board. Yet the simulated network reminds one more of interlocking chains of McDonald's and YMCAS, catering to the alienated and confused with a menu of spiritual fast food and squeaky beds. At some stage, "the Nation owned farms in three estates, a newspaper that earned annual profits of $3 million, a Chicago supermarket that cleared $325,000 on sales of $1.7 million, a string of small bakeries and cleaners, over 40 Chicago-area rental properties and the controlling interest in the Guaranty Bank and Trust Co. on the South Side" (Steller, 1996). During Elijah Muhammad's last Savior's Day convention in 1974, the Nation claimed to have amassed $75 million and that its corporate empire included "a trucking firm, farms, restaurants, newspapers, grocery stores, apartment buildings, a fish enterprise, and a fleet of airplanes" (White Jr., 2001: 97).

Since 1982 Farrakhan has coerced members to part with millions of dollars for building a National Centre Complex, school and adult education facility- projects that were never fulfilled. Robinson (2001: 41) underscores the importance to the Nation of separate education: "By 1974 forty-six cities in the United States had NOI elementary schools. These schools taught fundamentals and doctrine. Boys and girls attended separate classes, if space permitted." Ironically, the Nation has always been in dire financial difficulties through a mixture of mismanagement and corruption. For instance, it is often very hard to locate temples because they must constantly change address due to evictions for unpaid bills.

Taking another leaf out of Sufi techniques of pedagogy, the Fruits of Islam are put through an arduous and painful initiation ceremony. They are instructed to do things that often seem bizarre and illogical. For instance, one ex-member had to post bulletins in wind-chill temperatures of minus 45 degrees (White Jr., 2001: 73). Giving financial support to the coffers of the Nation could easily translate into personal bankruptcy. The goal is to break the spirit of members and remould them in the Nation's image, as Sufi initiates have been remoulded for eons by their *pirs*.

> The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves in a transparent and relational form.
>
> (Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*)

> Oi! What about us women?

Tourist warriors of Allah

Every successful pilgrimage to 'the holy lands' (to be understood in the broadest geo-cultural sense) shifts the balance of power within the organization. Farrakhan's 1985 trip to Libya was rewarded with a $5 million donation from Colonel Gaddafi, which was wasted on a failed venture called POWER (People Organized Working for Economic Rebirth). The promised employment opportunities never materialized and the Clean-n-Fresh beauty products on sale were twice as expensive as rival commodities. Today *The Final Call* (the Nation's official paper) tells us the West wants to kill Gaddafi because he is a threat to western hegemony and because

he has a "vision of a United Africa with a single currency backed by gold" (*The Final Call*, 2011). Furthermore, Gaddafi wishes to price oil in another currency other than the dollar thus undermining US power. Gaddafi is still referred to as a "friend" and a "brother" as late as 31 March 2011 (*The Final Call*, 2011b). The article ends with hyperbole and self-serving opportunism reminiscent of Stalinist propaganda: "For now, after several months of military intervention, betrayal by former comrades of the revolution and continued assassination attempts by NATO, Muammar Gadhafi is still standing. For the imperialists however, his elimination means the future of their power in Africa" (*The Final Call*, 2011a). Not a single word about the Gaddafi clan's assault on the Libyan working classes!

Farrakhan's next tour of the Middle East and Africa undermined his American rivals and promoted the financial conditions for the next phase of capital accumulation. Although he denies being a prophet, he certainly knows how to act like one. The World Friendship Tour of Minister Louis Farrakhan (1996) saw him visit a number of key countries in the Middle East and Africa. Everywhere he had accolades heaped upon him by corrupt politicians whilst his simple-minded rhetoric was completely ignored by a proletariat too savvy to fall for what passes as political discourse in the States. In Syria, he was praised by president Hafez al-Asad for his piety and virtue [sic]. The Grand Mufti of Syria offered a cultural treaty, including hundreds of scholarships for young men and women from the U.S. at the Islamic Call Society Academy in Damascus (Askia Muhammad, 1997). Today we are informed that "the major crackdown" being carried out in Syria "is an internal matter" (*The Final Call*, 2011b).

In Iran, Farrakhan went through the ritual of laying a wreath at the tomb of the fascist Khomeini with the following panegyrics: "Allah sent us Imam Khomeini to guide and lead the Iranian people on the straight path. Iran is now the vanguard of the Islamic revolution sweeping the earth" (ibid.). After a chat with Saddam Hussein and Necmettin Erbakan (the Turkish leader of what used to be called the 'Welfare Party'), Farrakhan's declarations became even more outlandish. In Malaysia, he seemed to have completely lost the plot: "America says she's the only superpower left ... but she better look again. Islam is the next world superpower, and you will be the leaders of that world."

The Nation's temples can be viewed as employment guilds combining the functions of civil and political societies. They also act to discipline Muslim proletarians employed by the organisation through starvation wages. This disciplining sometimes takes the form of a spectacle, which has been described as a "mixture of Baptist revival tent service and a criminal hearing" (White Jr., 2001: 86). The end result is to have a trouble free workforce who 'works for no one but Allah'. One member of the Nation has had the decency to call this set up by its proper name: "we became the black Mafia!" (Quoted in White Jr., 2001: 146).

Capital can also be accumulated unhindered through Japanese fish trawlers importing South American fish or thousands of sheep and cattle shifted across the country using a regiment of trucks and planes. The relationship with Japan is very odd in deed. During the 1930s a Japanese agent, Major Takashashi Satakata, "established a connection with the black

Muslim movement led by Elijah Muhammad. Takashashi succeeded in persuading a splinter group of black Muslims known as the *Development of Our Own* to rally behind the cause of the emperor" (The Communist, 2001). In fact, some unsubstantiated reports suggest the NOI itself supported Japan during W/W II. When the Nation established its Blue Seas Whiting Fish Company, "members were expected to buy thousands of pounds yearly" in order to keep it profitable. However, "eventually members refused to buy the fish. Because of this policy, Blue Seas failed as a money enterprise. In 1991 the company filed for bankruptcy" (White Jr., 2001: 92).

Travelling is always done with a sense of purpose and within a prescribed set of protocols in the world of religion. Throughout Ibn Battuta's journey, doors would open and obstacles cleared from his path almost as if an angel had taken permanent residence on his shoulder. The trick, of course, was to be a Sufi initiate and know all the passwords. American black leaders have always been wise to this. Noble Drew Ali, founder of the Moorish Science Temple, was a mason, as was Elijah Muhammad. In 1775 "fifteen Negroes were initiated into a British lodge of freemasons, at Boston. After the Revolution, the white American masons refused their Negro brothers to set up a lodge, but the Negroes applied directly to the Grand lodge of England and were immediately granted a charter". Such attitudes fuelled separatist tendencies and strengthened the Nation's perception of the whole of America as *jahaliyeh* (here, land of ignorance). Consequently, unlike Martin Luther King and the NAACP, the Nation organized in the North and won many converts. The uneven spread of bigotry facing blacks required a flexible stratagem, hence a new double-headed monster was concocted: *racism* and *racialism*. The pendulum began swinging once more.

THE FABLE OF THE TWO LIONS

Racism/racialism

Louis E. Lomax (1963) has an amusing tale to tell:

> I once debated with Malcolm X on TV in Los Angeles ... As we were leaving the studio, we were greeted by several white (sic) students, Moslems from Persia, who complained to Malcolm that they had attempted to visit Elijah Muhammad's temples and were refused entry because they were white-eyed devils. Malcolm glossed the matter over: "Let's look at it this way," he told the Persians, "if a lion is in a cage, his roar will be different from the

roar of the lion who is in the forest. That's why you couldn't get in our temples. But both the lion in the forest and the lion in the cage are lions. That is what matters. Lions love lions: they hate leopards."

Drew Ali was a lax *racialist*, believing in the separate development and destiny of black people whilst permitting *Asians* (Amerindians, Chinese, Japanese, and even white Celts and Persians) to join the Moorish Science Temple. Elijah Muhammad, as already indicated, a strict *racist*, espoused the superiority of blacks over all others. Malcolm X who in his conformist phase swung both ways, slowly evolved towards a more tolerant position, splitting with his mentor. Uncle Louis, perhaps the most opportunistic of the Nation's leaders, remains an unreconstituted racist who actively encourages political alliance with other minorities so long as his position as supreme boss is not threatened. Segal believes that while all previous leaders of the NOI were prejudiced, to some extent, "it was under the leadership of Farrakhan … that the Nation of Islam took to demonising the Jews with invective fervor. Jews were accused of having injected black babies with the AIDS virus …" (Segal, 2001: 235). Gardell (1996: 246-252) has demonstrated some of the complexities in US Black-Jewish relations over the years:

> The first Jews to arrive in the New World in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries adhered to a conservative line of thinking and kept a low or apolitical profile … Starting in the 1880s, this pattern began to change with the influx of working class socialist Jews from Russia and eastern Europe.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century "Jews were there to form a coalition with blacks in a fight for common causes" (Gardell, 1996: 247). Since the NOI does not encourage a class analysis it is easy to ignore the plight of Jewish proletarians and to highlight those Jewish-Americans who stand in an exploitative relationship vis-à-vis black proletarians as representative of all Jews. We are talking about slumlords, ghetto store-owners, etc., who are at times the only exploiters that ghettoised blacks come into direct contact with. Reactionary Black and Jewish racists have been successful in driving a wedge between these two potentially radical sections of the US proletariat. For instance, when a black reporter, Milton Coleman, reported Jesse Jackson's anti-Semite jibe about "hymie-town" (*New York*, 2000),[4] he was branded as an Uncle Tom and race traitor by Farrakhan who urged the black community to ostracize him:

> What do we do with Coleman? At this point, no physical harm. But for now, I'm going to get every church in Washington, D.C., to put him out … One day soon, we will punish you with death. You say when is that? In sufficient time, we will come to power right inside this country … This is a fitting punishment for dogs (quoted in White Jr., ibid, p 103).

This was not the first time Farrakhan had threatened someone with assassination. The remark harks back to some of his inflammatory remarks against Malcolm X: "Only those who wish to be led to hell or to their doom will follow Malcolm. The die is set, and Malcolm shall not escape … such a man as Malcolm is worthy of death …" (*Muhammad Speaks*, 10 November

1964).[5] As if this was not bad enough, Farrakhan then went on to call Hitler "a great leader," call Judaism a "dirty" religion, publish the racist forgery *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and ultimately to challenge the authenticity of the Holocaust. Years later, the *Final Call* newspaper carried similar denial claims regarding Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurds.

Another notorious book *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews* was written by the Nation's own 'scholars'. Using selective texts it blames,

> conversos as the driving force behind New World Exploitation, and, by extrapolation, slavery. In its simplistic overview, anybody who had anything to do with Atlantic maritime commerce or New World colonization was either a Jew or a conversos (Leinweber, 2001).

The book fails to point out the racism that drove so many Jews to engage in usury or commerce or the inconvenient fact that during the Medieval Era, Jews themselves were often captured and sold into slavery. By sleight of hand, terms such as 'Dutch' and 'Jewish' become veritable synonyms, so that the establishment of the Great Bank of Amsterdam in 1609 can be perceived as part of a Jewish bid for world domination. Some prestigious Afro-American scholars such as Tony Martin and Professor Leonard Jeffries jumped on Farrakhan's racist bandwagon. According to Segal (2001: 238) the "Jewish involvement in the Islamic black slave trade was relatively minor as well as intermittent." And Henry Louis Gates Jr., head of the African-American Studies department at Harvard University, has concluded: "American Jewish merchants accounted for less than two per cent of all the African slaves traders imported into the New World … all the Jewish slave traders combined bought and sold fewer slaves than the single gentile firm of Franklin and Armfield" (quoted in Segal, 2001: 238). And a recent brilliant study of the Atlantic Slave Trade by Rediker, *Slave Ship* (2007), does not even consider the topic worthy of a footnote. In 1993, Khallid Muhammad, Farrakhan's alleged flame-thrower went even further during a speech at Kean College, New Jersey:

> Everybody always talks about Hitler exterminating six million Jews … But doesn't anybody ever ask what they did to Hitler? They went there, in Germany, the way they do everywhere they go, and they supplanted, they usurped, they turned around Germany and a German, in his own country, would have to go to a Jew to get money.

Then with reference to South Africa, borrowing language from a western movie, he continued:

> … we give him [whites] 24 hours to get out of town by sundown … if he won't … we kill everything white that ain't right in South Africa. We kill the women, we kill the children. We kill the babies. We kill the blind, we kill the crippled, we kill'em all. We kill the faggot, we kill the lesbian, we'll kill them all … Why kill the babies? … Because they gonna grow up one day to oppress our babies … Why kill the women? … Because they are the military or the army's manufacturing center. They lay on their back and reinforcement roll out between their legs (quoted in White Jr., ibid., p 120).

Such unrestrained bigotry throughout the history of the Nation has manipulated politically naïve blacks to wage holy wars against all whites irrespective of their class affiliations. One such case was the infamous 'Zebra Killings' in San Francisco during late 1973 and early 1974. According to White Jr. (2001: 28) the four murderers claimed to be following the teachings of the Lost Found Nation of Islam. Calling themselves the Death Angeles they managed to decapitate fifteen victims and permanently injure many more before capture. The court proceedings exposed that the local minister of Islam had hired attorneys for the convicted men. When a serial killer called Wayne Williams murdered twenty-six black babies in Atlanta, Georgia, Farrakhan's responded with predictable bravado: "You better start finding the killer of our babies or some of your white babies will begin to die." Today, Farrakhan does not display the honest naiveté of his youth quite so cavalierly. But there was a time when he was less coy. At a rally for Angela Davis, he asserted:

> Black supremacy was supposed to be something evil. Supremacy means to be top, to be the Supreme Ruler. Somebody has to be supreme, white folks. You've been supreme for 6000 years. What's wrong with black supremacy? It's our day now! And some foolish brother will say, "Black supremacy is just as bad as white supremacy." How would you know? You never lived under black Rule.

In April 1994 in another typical remark he warns: "I am going to be like a pit bull. That is the way I'm going to be against the Jews. I am going to bite the tail of the honkies." Jason Glenn (1996) has correctly pointed out that Farrakhan, despite his rhetoric and dalliance with Middle Eastern/African identity politics is a decidedly 'Western' phenomenon:

> Why is America unable and unwilling to deal with Farrakhan? Because he thinks exactly as America does. America is unable to deal with Farrakhan because he is an orthodox Western thinker. To deal with Farrakhan, America would have to deal with itself.

If our thesis that the Nation of Islam combines four related tendencies, namely black Nationalism, religious doctrine, cult-worship and gang activity is correct, then the success of NOI should be seen in the context of similar North American movements.[6]

The proletariat is the negation of this society. It is not the collection of the poor, but of those who are desperate, those who have no reserves ... who have nothing to lose but their chains; those who are nothing, have nothing, and cannot liberate themselves without destroying the whole social order.

(Jean Barrot, *What is Communism?*, 1983)

Personally, I don't see the resemblance. I'm a lot sexier than that hymie bastard, Cleveland!

Cleveland Brown   TotallyLooksLike.com   Jesse Jackson

Biological determinism

What unites the Nation's conception of 'race' with white racists is pseudo-scientific biological determinism that only occasionally requires the support of its lesser twin, cultural determinism. This was a crucial element in a host of half-baked ideas thrown haphazardly into the Nation's ideological melting pot. Robinson (2001: 35) has shown how, "in terms of ideas and practice, Muhammad mixed Horatio Alger themes of uplift, racial determinism, and gender subordination, with an apolitical millenarianism." Farrakhan's bigotry against homosexuals seems a confused mixture of both forms of determinism:

> ... I think that when you warehouse black men in prisons and they have a sexual drive that is being titillated by the lyrics and by the cultural degeneracy that pervades America today, this sexual need is sometimes filled with activity that God disapproved of (Meet the press interview, 10/12/1970).

In relationship to AIDS, and in line with a whole range of religious reactionaries from idiot Ayatollahs to ugly Popes, Farrakhan welcomes the suffering caused to people as a message from God:

I consider [homosexuality] a problem. Maybe they don't consider it a problem, but AIDS is manifesting that there is a problem somewhere in this kind of social behaviour ... And AIDS is making some people who are promiscuous adopt another extreme posture; they are becoming celibate. So fear is causing people to reassess all kinds of relationships that they are having. I think in the end it will turn out to be something good (*Independent Black Leadership in America*, p. 46).

In fact, Farrakhan is also of the opinion that AIDS is the result of an intentional biological assault on the Central African population: "[They're] not drug users nor are they homosexuals. How did they get AIDS?" (Quoted in Patrick Inniss, 2000). All this may seem a tad unsophisticated but it would be foolish to underestimate its influence on a section of the black male population that feels itself not only inferior to 'white society' but also increasingly to black women. Norm R. Allen, Jr. (1995) has written:

Any woman who advocates equality between the sexes is accused of being a feminist, or worse. A woman is expected to 'get with the program' or risk being branded as a rabble rouser and traitor to the cause. Women are expected to submit to men, who supposedly need such submission to restore their long-lost manhood. It should therefore not be surprising that not a single RBN [Reactionary Black Nationalist] has come out in opposition to female genital mutilation (FGM), euphemistically referred to as 'female circumcision.'

Thus attacks on gays and women are part of the same patriarchal strategy of dominance. Muhammad would write: "The woman is man's field to reproduce his nation" (Muhammad, 1965: 64). In line with all reactionaries he considered control over the reproduction of labour power to be a crucial mechanism of discipline and moralistic control, which explains his views on abortion: "using birth control for a social purpose is a sin." Malcolm X, that icon of 'progressive' and 'radical' politics for most of the 'white' Leninist left, shared similar views: "a woman's true nature is to be weak ... [man] must control her if he expects to get her respect" (Malcolm X, 1965: 226). These were not mere off-the-cuff statements. They constituted practice. As Robinson (2001: 42) demonstrates, "Men and women were separated in places of worship. Men dominated the leadership of the organization." Girls were taught "not to use profanity and not to raise their voice" and the "proper bodily posture" to go with their status as the dominated sex (ibid.).

Today Farrakhan plays on the divisions within various American churches over gay and lesbian issues by encouraging pastors to criticise homosexual relationships: "[At the American Clergy Leadership Conference in Chicago on 17 May 2011] Minister Farrakhan said many pastors are afraid to speak out against homosexuality and lesbianism. Many pastors accept this, but it is not accepted by God. 'This is a world that has made evil fair-seeming and this is because Satan is the master of this world and he is the arch deceiver of humanity' ..." (The Final call, 2011c).

He is shaking that hand and not letting go! Farrakhan and Mandela, Johannesburg, 1996

THE (ODIOUS) CHARMS OF NATIONALISM

Not all fascists wear shiny boots, you know!

At this stage a brief trawl through the murky waters of nationalistic pacts may prove instructive in predicting future trends. Garvey, whose "ideas on the future government were inspired by Aristotle and Plato" (Gardell, 1996: 26), began denouncing *racial mongrelisation* and actively allied himself with the racial philosophy of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. "Garvey even invited a KKK spokesman to speak at one of his rallies (the speaker received cheers and applause from the black audience, but the U.N.I.A. lost many members as a result of this and other actions)" (Allen, Jr., 1995). By the 1930s he had become sufficiently envious of the success of Fascism to proclaim, following Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, "We were the first fascists ... Mussolini copied Fascism from me."

The NOI was merely following this trend when they held a meeting in 1962 with the American Nazi Party ostensibly to discuss partitioning the United States between blacks and

whites. Malcolm X later admitted that he was ashamed of having been a part of this alliance. A week before his assassination he told the press: "I know for a fact that there is a conspiracy between ... the Muslims and the Lincoln Rockwell Nazis and also the Ku Klux Klan" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 273). In fact, Malcolm X comes to denounce Elijah Muhammad as a "faker" whose "distorted religious concoction" and "racist philosophy" has been used to fool the gullible (see Segal, 2001: 231). At the NOI's annual Savior's Day in Chicago, George Lincoln Rockwell, the American Nazi was a guest speaker. He stated, "I believe Elijah Muhammad is the Adolph Hitler of the black man," and ended his speech by pumping his arm and shouting 'Heil Hitler' (*Chicago Free Weekly Reader*, April 11, 1986). Moreover, a Ku Klux Klan lawyer by the name of James Venable defended members of the Nation who became entangled with the law in Louisiana. In this context Robinson (2001: 41) has observed: "... Muhammad's orthodoxy looked a great deal like fascism, minus the power." Gardell's (1996: 283) position is slightly different: "To a certain extent, it is possible to propose that the NOI represents a Black-American Third Positionist ideology."

Elijah Muhammad invited Rockwell to speak at the Savior's Day Convention, 25 February 1962, before 12,175 people in Chicago's International Amphitheater.

Fruits of Islam routinely harass mixed couples in exactly the same fashion as Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan or the British National Party. By the early 1980s, the Nation of Islam had come to the attention of British Nazis: "The publication of the National Front, a paramilitary organization with a record of racist assaults and attacks against black people in Great Britain, praised Farrakhan as *God-sent*. The National Front subsequently distributed leaflets defending the Nation of Islam's positions" (Marable, 1998: 176).[7] In another revealing episode in 1985, Farrakhan invited,

Tom Metzger, the former Grand Dragon of the California KKK and the head of the white Aryan Resistance, and six other white supremacists to attend an NOI rally. Metzger praised the NOI ... saying "They speak out against the Jews and the oppressors in Washington." Metzger donated $100 to the NOI and said, "They are the black counterpart to us" (ibid.).

From inside prison, the outstanding black revolutionary, James Carr (1987) understood this cosy alliance of scoundrels with absolute clarity:

The Nazis and the Muslims usually got along. Their philosophies complimented each other; each group was certain of its own racial supremacy and neither was overly aggressive. They left each other alone; each group had its own turf to look out for. This one time, though, some Nazis happened to be standing nearby when a Muslim gave his rap about the white man being the incarnation of evil. The Nazis were forced to move or risk lose face. The cops watched the whole thing from the catwalk ...

This Muslim-White Aryan dynamics inside US prisons is re-enacted between black Muslims and Jews outside prison walls. Black Nationalists' attitude towards the Jews has traditionally been a mixture of veneration and contempt. Ironically, this also parallels the US Left's attitude towards the black proletariat, the contempt shown by Stalinists and the veneration displayed by the usually sober-minded Black Mask group who viewed the black 'lumpenproletariat' as the vanguard of the working class. Their concept of 'Nigger as class' is as erroneous as Abram Leon's depiction of Jews as a 'people-class'. We foreground all these bizarre dynamics to show how clarity of thought and critical consciousness can be subdued once a discourse of class struggle is marginalised by 'race' and 'nationalism'.

When class struggle is foregrounded, then even a reactionary mode of communication cannot derail us indefinitely. For example, the imagination of the black slaves feasted on the subversive imagery contained in the Old Testament. Black Judaism acted as a bridgehead between the two. Although the two sets of proletarians ('Jews' and 'Blacks') have traditionally identified with each other's plight, nationalistic leaders have preferred to stoke the fires of hatred. Let us end this section with one of Farrakhan's less restrained comments regarding Jews in order to underscore the type of rubbish the US proletariat is up against:

And you do with me as is written, but remember that I have warned you that Allah will punish you. You are wicked deceivers of the American people. You are the synagogue of Satan, and you have wrapped your tentacles around the U.S. government, and you are deceiving and sending this nation to hell. But I warn you in the name of Allah, you would be wise to leave me alone. But if you choose to crucify me, know that Allah will crucify you (Saviors' Day Speech, Chicago, 25/2/96).

"Semi-historical religion establishes a qualitative point of departure in time (the birth of Christ, the flight of Muhammad), but its irreversible time – introducing real accumulation which in Islam can take the form of a conquest, or in Reformation Christianity, the form of increased capital- is actually inverted in religious thought and becomes a *count-down*: the hope of access to the genuine other world before time runs out, the expectation of the last judgment."

(Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1987)

What a chump!

Martin Luther King, Jr. meets Malcolm X
March 26, 1964
Courtesy U.S. News & World Report

Melvin Hale
artist*LA*.com
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Ideological accommodations

Garvey, taking a leaf out of Zionism, intended to attract only those Negroes with technical and professional skills to join his New Jerusalem (Non-surplus value producing 'part-white Negroes' need not apply!).[8] The NOI "points to Israel as an example to emulate" both in terms of nation-building and also in terms of seeking compensation for the Holocaust (Gardell, 1996: 256), even though they support Palestinians in the Palestine-Israel conflict. The Nation actively encourages blacks to become skilled electricians, engineers and farmers. Blacks who prefer art subjects are publicly humiliated and derogatory referred to as "college niggers" (this preference for science subjects over the arts is also evident in right-wing Middle Eastern Muslim groups). Most significant of all, Booker T. Washington in his infamous Atlanta Exposition Address "played upon the Anglo-American xenophobic fears of Catholics and Jews, of Southern Europeans and Slavs, those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits." This is perhaps the

first public expression of a new hybrid of bigotry, what Wilson Jeremiah Moses refers to as 'Anglo-African Chauvinism'.

As discussed earlier, Booker T. Washington, as the principle of Tuskegee Institute (Alabama) was instrumental in turning the rural peasantry into skilled wage-salves or 'independent farmers' by setting up training and banking facilities. It is worth remembering that he also thought it his duty to win over other races to the 'American way of life'. Chapter nine of his *Up From Slavery* is an account of his "first teaching position at Hampton and his experience in acculturating one hundred Plains Indians to *civilization*" (Willard, ibid, p 635). He also consciously set out to create a black middle class, setting up in 1900 the National Negro Business League as a black version of the Chamber of Commerce. Marable (1998: 31) explains Washington's accommodationist 'compromise' in these terms:

> ... blacks would disavow open agitation for desegregation and the political franchise; in return, they would be permitted to develop their own parallel economic, educational, and social institutions within the framework of expanding Southern capitalism.

This alliance with white capitalists was cemented through attacks on organized labor. Washington referred to proletarian opposition to capital as foolish and even criminal, meanwhile encouraging black workers to scab on striking white workers. A seminal instance of Washington's anti-working class attitude manifested itself during the Alabama Coal Miners' strike. Marable again:

> The Alabama United Mineworkers (UMW) had twelve thousand members, six thousand of them black miners. When U.S. Steel refused to renew the workers' contracts and ordered substantial wage cuts, the miners announced a strike. The state government of Alabama assisted the company by sending convicts to work in the mines. The conflict soon escalated: miners dynamited the homes of non-union strike-breakers; police and company security guards shot and physically assaulted UMW leaders; the governor of Alabama ordered the state militia to destroy the tent camps of black and white strikers; and hundreds of labor leaders were imprisoned (Marable, 1998: 32).

During this magnificent, united, proletarian fight-back, Washington sided with capitalism and discouraged black workers from striking, encouraging them instead to take this ideal opportunity to replace white workers. In order to ingratiate himself with the ruling class and secure his position as the *de facto* authoritarian leader of the *black community* he not only attacked other leaders such as Du Bois[9] but went as far as planting spies in their organizations! In a description befitting Farrakhan, Oliver C. Cox has argued that Washington was "an intercessor between his group and the dominant class ... he was given wide publicity as a phenomenal leader [precisely because] he demanded less for the Negro people than that which the ruling class had already conceded" (Quoted in Marable, 1998: 35).

In a more recent incident, Al Sharpton used the Crown Height incident to stoke up anti-Jewish sentiment, organizing a march on a Jewish Sabbath originally destined to end provocatively at the headquarters of the Lubavitcher Jews. Crown Heights is an area in New York. In August 1991 a "Hasidic Jew ran over two black children. Gavin Cato died after the Hasidic ambulance that arrived was instructed by police to take only the driver to Hospital. Three nights of rioting ensued in which a rabbinical student was stabbed." Uncle Louis deliberately adds gasoline to fire by routinely accusing 'Jews' of infiltrating black organizations such as NAACP and Martin Luther King's SCLC.[10] It is, of course, stating the obvious that all nationalistic leaders (whether Black nationalists, Zionists, Palestinian bureaucrats, etc) have to constantly divide-and rule the proletariat, since the class struggle itself is relentless.

> The true communion amongst men, is to have all things in common, and to call nothing one hath, ones own ... els your religion is in vain.
>
> (Abiezer Coppe, *Selected Writings*)

> Give us a kiss, Al ... Al, give us a kiss! Lovely, Al ... lovely kissy! Kissy, kissy!
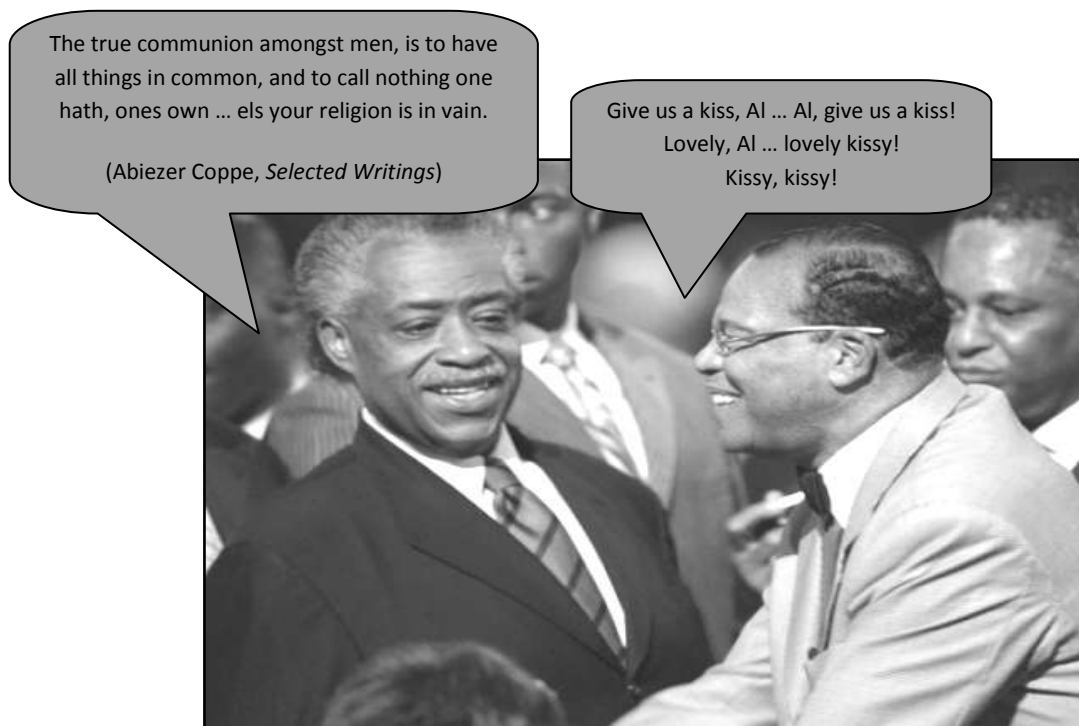
Reverend Al Sharpton and the Supreme Minister and National Representative of the Nation of Islam Louis Farrakhan arrive to the memorial service for Michael Jackson at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, 7 July 2009 [Don't they look heart-broken?!]

THE PROMISE OF PAIN AND THE PAIN OF PROMISE

Populism and the counter-revolution

The prime function of the NOI is to prevent proletarian rebellion and to keep the US proletariat perennially divided along racial lines. It does this through the institutionalisation of grievance and the spectacular projection of a tightly-scripted Armageddon scenario into an

indefinitely postponed future. This role has gained added significance since the demise of the U.S. left and various Democratic Party sanctioned Rainbow Coalitions.

The NOI's populist strategy demands a cross-sectional membership. The early phase of development saw the emphasis on recruiting the 'lumpen-proletariat' (addicts, gamblers, beggars, etc.) and unemployed proletarians. In fact, "Elijah Muhammad and other Muslim leaders had opportunities to recruit incarcerated converts during periods when these leaders were imprisoned for refusing to serve in the armed forces during World War II" (Smith, 1993: 136). Some are convicts, for at least three temples are behind prison walls. With the help of the Nation's lawyers these Muslim prisoners have played a role in constitutional changes over the years. However, Smith (1993: 133) is correct in pointing out that: "By initiating litigation, Muslim prisoners consciously participated in governmental processes that their professed philosophical doctrines regarded as illegitimate." The FOI ensures that all members hold down their allocated jobs, giving a full day's work for the meagre wages received. Farrakhan explicitly states the aim: "Why not let us handle the inmate and lessen the taxpayer's burden? ...We can reform our people and make them productive members of society" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 309). The rank-and-file are forced to sell the Nation's papers "often having to buy the papers from their own wages if they failed to meet a certain sales quota" (White Jr., 2001).

It is essential to point out how conveniently this strategy of organizing prisoners chimes with US capitalism's latest turn towards productive mass incarceration. Wacquant (2002) has argued that four 'peculiar institutions' have successfully been employed to control and discipline Afro-Americans. The first is chattel slavery (1619-1865), which lasted up to the Civil War and was based on plantation economy and accumulated capital through 'unfree fixed labour'. The second 'peculiar institution' was the notorious Jim Crow (South, 1865-1965) ensemble of social and legal codes. Wacquant explains: "Imported from the North where it had been experimented within cities, this regime stipulated that blacks travel in separate trains, streetcars and waiting rooms ... that they be incarcerated in separate cells and buried in separate cemeteries" (ibid., p 46). This phase was characterized by the 'free fixed labour' of sharecroppers in Agrarian business and workers in extractive industries.

After Jim Crow, US capitalism employed the ghetto (North, 1915-1965) system with menial workers in the manufacturing industries whose 'free mobile labour' was instrumental in the 'success' of the Fordist economy. By a ghetto Wacquant does not mean merely a segregated district or an ethnic neighbourhood. Borrowing from the history of the reserved Jewish quarters in the cities of Renaissance Europe Wacquant defines a ghetto as "essentially a sociospatial device that enables a dominant status group in an urban setting simultaneously to ostracize and exploit a subordinate group endowed with negative symbolic capital ..." (ibid., p. 50). The ghetto is therefore an 'ethnoracial prison', characterized by stigma, coercion and isolation.

Wacquant designates the next institutional form of oppression as the 'hyperghetto & prison' (1968 to the present) and employs 'fixed surplus labour' as its main source of profit.

Significantly these institutions do not merely reflect racial divisions but indulges in active 'race-making'. The upshot of this mode of incarceration is to exclude convicts from citizenship with all its real and imaginary 'benefits', such as cultural capital, public aid, legal representation and political participation in decision-making. Into this cauldron of despair wades in the Nation of Islam with its army of professional recruiting agents as the last hope for many alienated individuals caught in the judicial labyrinth. Being a member of NOI may mean survival in prison, early release and a job offer at the end of one's term of imprisonment. The appeal of this arrangement for convicts trapped in a vicious circle cannot be overstated.

To continue with the recruitment story of NOI, after the 'lumpen-proletariat' the Nation targeted businessmen, professionals, students and celebrities. The rap group Public Enemy, for instance, embarked on 'educating' black people through the words of Malcolm, Mao Tse-Tung, Ayatollah Khomeini, Nelson Mandela, and Minister Farrakhan. Michael Jackson was also cultivated but more recently Farrakhan has been another brain-dead, reactionary rapper, Snoop Dogg who according to NOI's propaganda has already joined the 'movement'. In case the reader needs further evidence that Farrakhan is indeed a man possessed his views on Blues and Jazz should prove convincing: "No more blues - black Man don't sing BLUES NO MORE!! ... black Man don't play jazz no more ... not that stuff that comes out of our slave days." Both Blues and Jazz are mostly secular, as well as being associated on occasion with

Lovely, Snoopy ... Snoopy, lovely! Kissy, kissy! Money, money!!

'Rapper Snoop Dogg at the Nation of Islam's annual Saviours Day convention, praising Minister Louis Farrakhan and suggesting that he is a member of the movement. Snoop, whose real name is Calvin Broadus, gave a $1,000 donation to the Nation and said he will always seek the minister out' (NOI propaganda)

rival Muslim sects. The Ahmaddiya Movement, for instance, had many jazz musicians (e.g. Art Blakey) who developed their own unique blend of bebop and Arabic. And many rhythm-and-blues, and pop musicians began their careers with the Ansarullah Nubian Islamic Hebrews. Nelson (1991) explains:

> the early blues [represent] the true foundation of all secular black music in America ... [and] express conditions associated with what James Cone refers to as the 'burden of freedom'. Ex-slaves had to cope with the intersection of racism and its side effects of poor housing, inadequate education and limited job opportunities. Many of the early communities of former slaves revolved around the sharecropping system, an arrangement that kept black men and women in debt to their white employers virtually all year round. Such conditions were ripe for the 'ghettoization' of freed persons in the South and the creation of the blues (ibid.).

Moreover, blues singers have historically functioned as 'priest-philosophers' for the 'black community' and Farrakhan rightly sees them as political rivals. This explains his animosity towards them.

Gangs and landlords

Realizing the youthful appeal of gang members and rap groups, as well as the financial benefits involved, the Nation under the guidance of Minister Khallid Muhammad, began a concerted effort to recruit them. As Gardell (1996: 295) has observed: "What reggae was to the expansion of the Rastafarian movement in the 1970s, so hip-hop is to the spread of black Islam in the 1980s and 1990s." Gangs such as the Crips and Bloods from Los Angeles, the Gangsta Disciples of Chicago, and the Zulu Nation of Miami and the Bronx were approached. Rap artists such as Public Enemy, Niggas With Attitude, Ice Cube and Tupac Shakur took time out of their hectic money-generating schedules to play at being *revolutionaries*. In 'the society of the

spectacle' a photo opportunity with 'hard core' rap artists can go a long way in establishing one's street credentials.

The US government's housing policy had made affordable housing inaccessible to millions of proletarians many of them blacks. The most recent capitalist crisis has obviously worsened the situation. Moreover, there was always systematic discrimination against black proletarians in terms of denying them 'government mortgage money'. The situation created a new role for the NOI. As landlords, the Nation began social engineering the landscape as a symbolic act of urban renewal, "... Elijah Muhammad bought a large modern apartment building in Chicago, evicted the white tenants, moved in house-hungry Negroes from the South Side ghetto and lowered rents" (White Jr., 2001).

Some of the Fruits were turned into a security firm that patrols crime-ridden estates; only they also try to preach to the residents and recruit the vulnerable and politically naïve. All this was carried out with the tacit consent of Chicago's political white elite with whom the Nation had established cordial relationships as far back as the 50s when Elijah Muhammad courted the city's boss, Richard J. Daley. This also explains why although the Chicago police department routinely harassed and victimized black residents, the Nation "rarely experienced the sort of police raids and harassment that occurred frequently in other cities" (Marable, 1998: 172). A decade later, J Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO ('counter intelligence program') "seemed to come to an accommodation with the Nation of Islam" whilst twenty-nine Black Panthers were assassinated and hundreds jailed (Robinson, 1997:152).

Such social engineering acted as useful propaganda ploy whilst making the membership evermore financially dependent on the goodwill of the leadership. Last but not least, they were sound real-estate investments. Despite the Nation's rhetoric regarding self-sufficiency and economic independence from the establishment, "Nation members were subsidized housing, welfare checks, and food stamps and participated in Women Infant Children programs" (White Jr., ibid. p. 92). Of course there is nothing wrong with one part of the proletariat receiving aid from the dead and living labor of another section of the proletariat but the trend towards welfare dependency shows the chasm between the group's propaganda and the dire living conditions of the rank-and-file. The leadership, however, never seem short of a dime or two. Farrakhan and his cronies always stay at the best hotels, travel, eat and dress in style. Like good businessmen they are forever on the lookout for opportunities to make a fast buck. The rank-and-file are indirectly used in these risky ventures as collateral. According to insiders, credit card scams, illegal NOI drug busts and fraud are widespread within the organization. One infamous example came to light when Minister Khallid Muhammad, a leading member of the Nation, was caught falsifying documents in order to obtain a bank loan to purchase property in Atlanta.

Contrary to current wisdom, the NOI shift of policy away from meaningful political engagement and abstentionism began well before Farrakhan's rise to power. But it is true that Uncle Louis has given this strategy a more coherent direction, especially since the subtle shift

in the class composition of the NOI virtually guarantees proletarian compliance with every decision of the leadership. For instance, he endorsed Harold Washington, Chicago's black mayoral candidate. Washington narrowly won the 1983 election and "rewarded Farrakhan with praise and admiration" (White Jr., ibid, p. 100). Farrakhan's big break came when the far more prominent Reverend Jesse Jackson invited him "to be a member of a coalition of black leaders travelling to Damascus, Syria, to negotiate the release of black Air Force pilot Robert Goodman, who had been shot down after illegally entering Syria's airspace" (ibid, p. 102).

> Order reigns in Berlin! You stupid lackeys! Your *order* is built on sand. The revolution will raise itself again with clashes, and to your horror it will proclaim with the sound of trumpets: *I was, I am, I shall be*.
>
> (Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, 1971)

A female Nation of Islam member carries a donation (or tithe) bucket among the attendees at the Saviour's Day celebrations at the International Amphitheatre, Chicago, Illinois, 27 February 1966. The text on the bucket reads 'Sacrifice: Help Do Something for Self.'

THE MILLION MEN PARADE

Reactionary mobilization

We will pass swiftly over Farrakhan's claims that his inspiration for the Million-Man March is based on his "vision of being swept into a UFO that took him to a larger mothership. While in the UFO, he claims to have spoken to the late Elijah Muhammad before being beamed back to earth" (*Washington Post*, 18 Sept, 1995). As Palmer explains this UFO fantasy is an inseparable doctrinal link to the ideas of Elijah Muhammad himself who believed that blacks were

originally 'moon people' and that the UFO 'mother wheel' was piloted by 13 youths who perpetually orbited the earth, waiting to unleash global destruction on whites, while rescuing all blacks (Palmer, ibid.). The fact that such a space cadet is considered a mainstream bourgeois politician able to organise a million men to march up and down Washington is testimony to the ducked up times we live in.

In slightly more sober times, the Nation of Islam was not deemed important enough to be invited to the original 1963 march on Washington. Some of Malcolm X's fiery language may also have been responsible. A disgruntled Malcolm X hit back by branding the march as a farce as it was "run, financed, and controlled by whites, Jews, labor unions, corporate America and the Kennedy administration" (White Jr., 2001: 101). Asked his views on the campaign and its leadership, he replied, "Martin Luther King is a chump, not a champ" (Segal, 2001: 239).
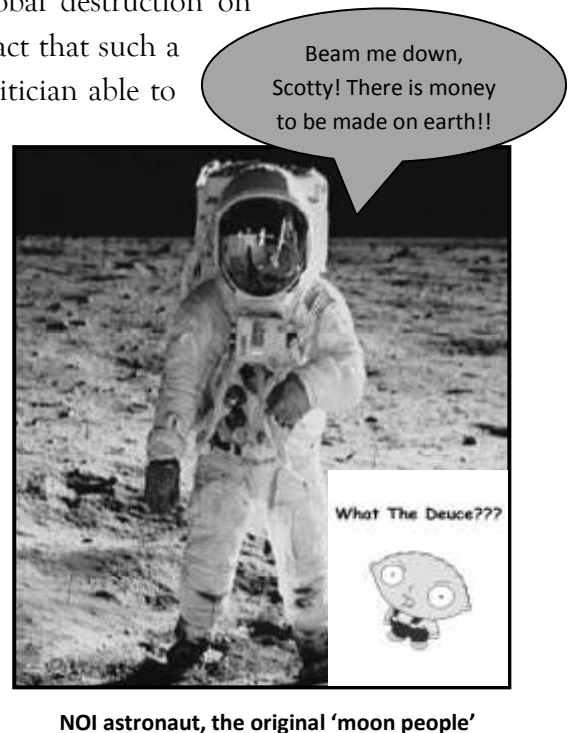
NOI astronaut, the original 'moon people'

The 1995 Million-Man March could only be given the go-head (from both the NOI and the US media) when it was safe to assume that the proletariat had been marginalized. White Jr. (2001: 152) suggests it was also Farrakhan's way of undermining a rival's (Minister Silis Muhammad) bid for a march to demand repayment for black slavery. Four years later a 'battle over a newspaper route between followers of Lost-Found leader Silis Muhammad and members of the rival and more powerful Nation Of Islam led by Minister Louis Farrakhan had erupted in all-out war' (Noel, 1999).

As it turned out only the better off could pay the travel fair to Washington. There was an $11 registration fee, a $3.99 per minute 900 number for call-in registration, a $700 vendor's fee and constant appeals for donations from the faithful (Palmer, ibid.). Exactly how much of this went towards paying the policing bill is anyone's guess. At a personal level, the March intended to outshine the memory of Dr Luther King's 1963 March on Washington. This, by contrast, was meant to be a 'serious' march. The 1963 march was condemned for being filled with 'entertainment, frolicking, and groping' of female marchers. It was, therefore, perfectly natural for black women not to be invited to the march. The Nation's appeal, after all, stems partly from its male-centeredness, itself a reaction against "female-dominated black Baptist churches" (Kulungowski, 1996). Farrakhan, after all, believes, "when you see a real man you are looking at God," and continues in his usual patronizing tone, "there's no woman on earth who would not be happy with a man who is a reflection of God" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 330). Moreover, the event was designed as redemption from both contemporary and original sin and Farrakhan is on record as claiming that the black man fell from grace and was destroyed "through our

women." The March aimed at recreating the power relationship that existed between black men and women when the latter was content with acting the role of the good housewife: "God gave woman to man, according to the Bible, as help mate, to meet your wants, your aspirations ... [But] pleasure comes after work!" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 331).

The Nation advocates the death penalty for adultery, incest, rape and interracial sex but realizes it needs real power before it can implement its program (Gardell, 1996: 337). Despite all this "several women's organizations endorsed the event, including the National Council of Negro Women and the National black Women's Political Congress" (Marable, 1996: 139). This is perhaps a reflection of the times. In years gone by when the 'secular' Stokely Carmichael said "the only position for women in the movement is prone," both black and white women united to oppose his arrogant, sexist jibe. When Farrakhan instructed women to stay at home and mind the kitchen he was displaying an unusual amount of tolerance towards a despised gender, for in years gone by he was less reserved:

> The black woman should not belong to any women's liberation movement. That's for the white woman ... A woman is the prize possession of a man ... A man should protect his women even if he has to spank her ... A man shouldn't generally beat a woman ... but some of our women who want to go out and disgrace the Nation need a whippin (Farrakhan, Message at the East, Jan 1971).

The same survey discovered that "fully 94 percent of all people responding to the survey supported the aims of the march ... [and] some 84 percent of all respondents believed that the march would have an overall favourable effect on race relations in the [USA]" (ibid., p 62)! Thankfully the article also captures a few moments of insights besides its reified quantitative survey. For instance, a black woman is quoted as offering the following pearl of wisdom: "Farrakhan is a jerk but a lot more happened there in D.C. than him." A non-black woman from New Jersey saw things with equal clarity: "I had to pinch myself constantly. Didn't know whether I was watching a white religious right's rally or an all male religious or an all-male religious Islamic gathering in Iran." A final quote from a black man from New Jersey is worth pondering: "If he were not white, Newt Gingrich would have joined the march and celebrated it as a victory for the conservative cause" (ibid, p. 63). It is noteworthy that many people, who were happy going on the march as an act of solidarity with fellow blacks, were not interested in the content of Farrakhan's speech. Segal (2001: 236) writes:

> He lost so many of his listeners in a labyrinth of historical references and numerological predictions that barely a third remained till the end to join in the pledge of black men to abstain from violence, drugs, sexual and verbal abuse, in helping to restore their community.

The numerological references seem to have been intended to fraternal lodge organizations present on the march: "There, in the middle of this mall is the Washington Monument, 555

feet high. But if we put a 1 in front of that 555 feet, we get 1555, the year that our first fathers landed on the shores of Jamestown, Virginia as slaves …" (quoted in Robinson, 2001: 125).

The March also cemented the wealth of the Nation's inner circle through capitalist protectionism. All rival yuppies, who had intended to use the March as a business opportunity, were branded as enemies of Elijah Muhammad and the plum pickings were reserved for NOI's top brass. From the podium Farrakhan encouraged black men to 'atone for their sins' and take personal responsibility for conditions in the ghettos. He also took the opportunity to once again blame Jews, Koreans and Vietnamese for exploiting the *black community*. The march was endorsed by the big public service unions despite the fact that non-black male workers and black female workers were purposefully excluded from the spectacle (Black History and the Class Struggle, 1996). In so doing, trade union bureaucracies once again displayed their anti-proletarian credentials for all to see. According to Marable (ibid., p 141):

> Neither Farrakhan nor Chavis [the co-organizer of the event] has significant influence within black labor unions or the Coalition of black Trade Unionists. Their core program was designed to appeal in the broadest possible terms to racial solidarity, while saying next to nothing about the growing class stratification within the black communities.

The economic analysis was, as indicated above, "taken almost verbatim from Booker T. Washington's program of black petty entrepreneurship and political cooperation with white conservatives" (Marable, 1998: 164). Likewise in this case, some 'white' sections of the ruling class supported the march as it both chimed with Newt Gingrich's reactionary 'Contract with America' and doubled up as a giant voter enrolment device in a country where voter apathy is considered a genuine problem for capitalism. Marable (1998: 163) claims "approximately 1.5 million more African American men participated in the 1996 presidential election than in the election of four years earlier." According to Young (2002a: 6), "today only 9% of African-Americans vote Republican."

However, there are various moves being conducted to steer a 'fundamental realignment' in American politics. Wallace D. Muhammad had already indicated such a move when he refused to support Jesse Jackson's 1984 candidacy, adding that in his view, "on the whole, the Reagan administration had been good for the country" (Gardell, 1996: 113). The 'maverick' and unpredictable, although highly respected ex-advisor to Ronald Reagan, Jude Wanniski, believes that, "Muslims need someone to unify the Islamic world – that's Farrakhan" (Young, ibid). Consequently, he has been vigorously courting the Nation of Islam. Young (2002a: 6) continues, "[Wanniski's] support for Farrakhan stems from a desire to see a fundamental realignment in American politics to win African-Americans over to the Republican Party. Farrakhan, he believes, is the key."

Aftermath of the March

The aftermath of the Million-Man March proved very disappointing for Farrakhan, although ironically many black organizations, even some that had opposed the march such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, gained fresh recruits. Farrakhan had intended to use it as a springboard for loftier aims but his appeal failed to find a resonance within the black proletariat. This was partly because most had come to show solidarity with each other and not to be sermonized by the Nation. Cutbacks in the welfare system, high levels of unemployment and the mass incarcerations of several million African-American young men were the real grievances that the March refused to address. Contrast the political achievements of this march with the march on Washington organized by A. Philip Randolph, the President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, in 1941. Then the demand was,

> the end of segregation in defense jobs, in government departments and the armed forces ... The vision of 100,000 angry blacks in Washington was enough to get President Roosevelt to issue an executive order establishing a committee on fair employment practice (John Alan, 2001).

One million *men* seeking *atonement* for alleged *sins*, however, merely underlined the reactionary nature of Farrakhan's mobilization. Moreover, the level of financial corruption was such as to alienate the participants and the lawsuits filed against the Nation by disgruntled African-American businesses for non-payment of bills created additional problems. Some businessmen were intimidated by the Fruits when they dared to ask for their money back but even Farrakhan understood this could only stall them temporarily.

It is just as impossible to do without control of the mass by a minority, as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of civilisation. The masses are lazy and unintelligent.

(Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 1927)

He is the brains of our family. We're all very proud of him.
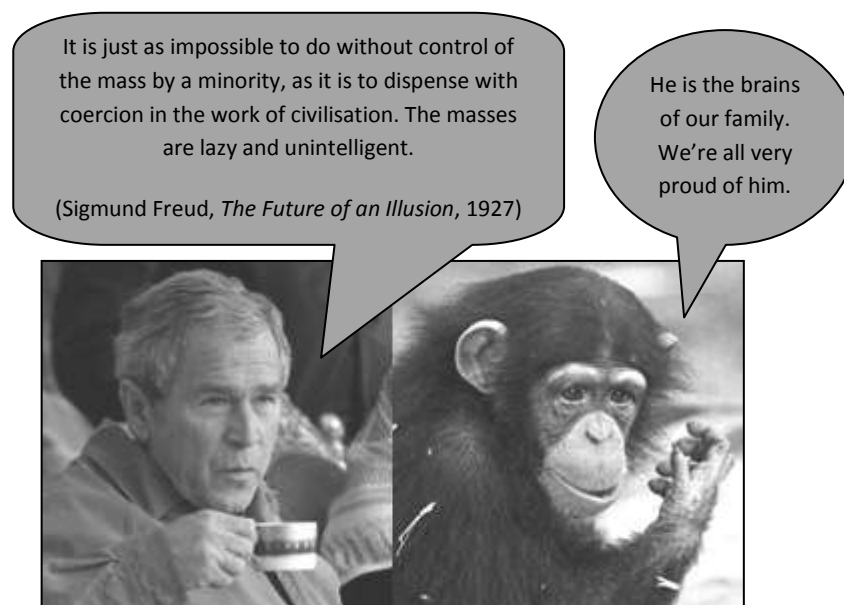
When a national black political rally was organized to follow up the Million-Man March only two thousand faithfuls turned up and the World Day Atonement celebration of the anniversary of the March attracted 150,000 New Yorkers. Chavis by now had become so dependent on Farrakhan that his National African American Leadership Summit organized at St. Louis in 1996 was no more than a front for the Nation of Islam. Black Nationalism reached new depths of depravity during the summit when Lyndon La Rouche, a leading American fascist and defender of Apartheid in South Africa, was proudly introduced to the delegates as a major speaker. Marable describes how,

> instantly the crowd turned against Bevel [Reverend James Bevel, a recent convert to political conservatism] and La Rouche, booing them off the stage and intimidating them into silence. A fistfight erupted between several black nationalists and some supporters of La Rouche, which was broken up by Farrakhan's security force, members of the Fruit of Islam. Throughout the country, perplexed African American activists asked themselves why a notorious white supremacist and fascist would be permitted to address a black political convention (Marable, 1998: 165).

In order to suppress criticism of its 'leadership' of the March and influence future trends, the Nation set up the self-appointed 'Council on black Affairs'. Part of this Council's task was to reshape the collective memory of the March by denouncing emerging rivals to Farrakhan. According to Young (2002b: 2) the Council produced a book entitled *The American Directory of Certified Uncle Toms*. "It ranks over 50 black leaders," writes Young, "past and present, according to a five-star Uncle Tom rating, with five being the worst. Michael Jackson, who has had plastic surgery which left many of his black features destroyed, gets one star; Bayard Rustin, the gay activist who organized the March on Washington at which King made his 'I have a dream' speech, gets five; WEB Dubois, a pioneer of Pan-Africanism ... is also, according to the authors, a five-star Uncle Tom" (ibid.).

As Young (2002b) makes clear in his article, this "is in fact a reactionary form of psychological and behavioural racial policing within black communities." Moreover, as explained in footnote 1 at the beginning of the text, it represents a distortion of the literary character, Uncle Tom. Although far from a revolutionary, Tom refuses to punish a fellow slave despite strict orders from his master or to rat on escaped slaves. He is whipped himself for this act of insubordination with fatal consequences. Harriet Beecher Stowe was a mere liberal with ideas that sound decidedly patronising to us but "what is now commonly regarded as a sentimentalist, racist text was at the time received as a vicious polemic against slavery in general and against the fugitive slave law in particular" (Young, ibid., p 1).

It is worth noting that two years later, in October 1997, Afro-American women jammed the streets of Philadelphia in what became known as the Million Women March. Organized with a great deal less fuss and corruption, the rally was intended to highlight issues that (white dominated) women's organizations tend to ignore, such as the abuse of black human rights, the

problem of drugs and rampant crime. Although religion was heavily represented on this march by the Christian church, the Black Muslims' presence was marginal.

However, despite the above-mentioned setbacks and the Nation's failure to cash-in on the Million Man March (1995), it still displays an impressive ability for the reactionary mobilization of the masses. Yet it is also significant that as soon as Farrakhan raises explicitly 'political' issues or indulges in 'anti-American' rhetoric, he loses large junks of his audience. In 1996 a more permanent solution for the Nation's financial burdens was sought in Farrakhan's World Friendship Tour of a number of 'rogue' states, such as Iran, Libya, Iraq, Sudan, Nigeria and Cuba.

In Iran he rubbed shoulders with ex-President Rafsanjani, personally responsible for the execution of scores of proletarian revolutionaries. There followed a succession of 'tea-ceremonies' with other fascist ayatollahs. In a large rally in Tehran Farrakhan's hyperbole was half-heartedly applauded by a crowd more politically savvy than our intrepid warrior: "God will destroy America by the hands of Muslims ... God will not give Japan or Europe the honour of bringing down the United States; this is an honour God will bestow upon Muslims" (ADL website).[11] Promising to use American Muslims as a pressure group inside the USA for the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran, he warmed to his theme: "We live in the centre of corruption and struggle in the heart of the Great Satan." A few days later during his trip to Iraq, Farrakhan promised his full support for removing the economic sanction imposed by the USA.

In Libya, Gaddafi offered Farrakhan a human-rights prize worth $250,000. The alleged offer of a staggering $1 billion booty in order to fight America 'from the inside' was later denied (this indeed sounds like propaganda). However, less substantial 'loans' of $3 million in 1971 for Chicago church to a mosque and $5 million for 'economic development' have been freely acknowledged by Farrakhan (see http://www.noi.org/statements/statement_09-22-2009.htm). Farrakhan is fully aware of how best to use Gaddafi, even if some of his less politically savvy 'soldiers' occasionally lose the plot. For instance, in the 1983 'First International Symposium on the Thought of Muammar Al Gaddafi', held in Libya, a representative of the NOI, Maleek Rashadeen, proposed armed struggle as a mechanism for bringing down the US government: "Imagine 70% of America's army made up by well-trained, dissatisfied, angry black men and women ... America is definitely going to fight a major world war outside, with a rebelling black and white army and revolution inside her borders" (Gardell, 1996: 208). The brain-dead Gaddafi, fell for this hook, line and sinker, promising: "We support you to create [an] independent state, to create [an] independent black army. We are ready to train you and to give you arms, because your cause is [a] just cause" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 209).

It is the way with rhetorical discourse that at some critical point it could become re-animated, turn around and unexpectedly bite the speaker in the nether regions. Such was the effect of Rashadeen's Boy Scout machismo. Farrakhan interceded at this stage and patronisingly criticised both Rashadeen and Gaddafi for being unrealistic.

> We don't need anybody outside of us to tell us how to win the fight ... Gaddafi can't guide us ... My brother [Gaddafi] is a revolutionary and I told him that I am one too, but my revolution has to be brought about by this book, the Quran, and not by buying weapons. Because I can't out-weapon the weaponman, see, and if I start arming the Brothers the government will come down on us instantaneously (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 209).

So, Gaddafi can only expect the occasional sympathetic article in the *Final Call* for his financial generosity, Rashadeen can return to obscurity and feeble martial parades with his fruity friends (the FOI), and Farrakhan to the safety of 'loyal opposition' and ever-closer ties with the US ruling elite. All's well that ends well!

In Nigeria, he made light of the military junta's execution of the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. In South Africa, Nelson Mandela came under intense pressure not to hold a meeting with Farrakhan but decided to go ahead with a face-to-face. A few days later Farrakhan claimed: "Light skin is weak, dark skin is strong." He also took the opportunity to renew his demand for land in Africa:

> We have asked that territory be set aside in Africa because we did not leave voluntarily. We have a right to Africa. This is our motherland. You have a vast land here that is not used. Over a million blacks are in prison right now, with no future. We are saying give them to us to teach them, reform them, and let them work off their time.

The project, suspiciously similar to a mixture of a black Australia and Liberia was understandably given a frosty reception. Later in Sudan, Farrakhan ignored the thorny issue of the slavery of proletarian Sudanese (mostly Christian) by bourgeois Sudanese (mostly Muslim) for as long as he could. On one occasion when he lost his temper he angrily responded to reporters: "There is no slavery in Sudan. But prove me a liar and go there and see for yourself and come back and tell the world what you have found." Journalists for the Baltimore Sun did just that. Having exposed several camps they even purchased a slave boy as proof. Abdul Akbar Muhammad, the Nation's International Representative, conveniently branded the whole expose as a Jewish conspiracy. Perhaps what is most surprising is that Middle Eastern politicians, usually well informed

The Charmer was the stage name for Louis Eugene Wolcott. Louis joined the Nation of Islam in 1955 and changed his name to Louis X, then to Louis Farrakhan.

about American politics, fell for the *charmer*'s song-and-dance routine and treated him like a head of state. Perhaps Garvey was right, after all: "The whole world is run on bluff"!

Two years later Farrakhan embarked on yet another whistle stop tour of the globe, including Israel. He was allowed in as a private U.S. citizen although there were some demonstrations against his visit. Later Farrakhan claimed that Islamic militants were not to blame for the massacres carried out in Algeria. During his brief visit to Russia, Farrakhan claims that "... they [Russian authorities] tried to guide our plane into the mountains, it's true, they tried to kill us!" (Ibid.).

CONCLUSIONS

Black proletariat

The 'black' proletariat in the U.S.A. has had a tremendous impact on the evolution of class struggle. C.L.R James has argued that if it were not for the masses of Negroes of the South, through the underground railroad and numerous other revolts before the Civil War, the northern bourgeoisie and the Southern 'plantocracy' would have come to a compromise. "What broke that compromise?" asks James,

> It was the Fugitive Slave Act. They could prevent everything else for the time being, but they could not prevent the slaves from coming, and the revolutionaries in the North from assisting them. So that we find that here in the history of the United States of America such is the situation of the masses of the Negro people and their readiness to revolt at the slightest opportunity, that as far back as the Civil war, in relation to the American bourgeoisie, they formed a force which initiated and stimulated and acted as a ferment (James, 1948).

He goes on to state that:

> As the struggle develops, such is the situation of the Negroes in the United States, that the emancipation of the slaves becomes an absolute necessity, politically, organisationally and from a military point of view ... The Negroes are incorporated into the battle against the South. Not only are they incorporated here, but later they are incorporated also into the military government which smashes down the remnants of resistance in the Southern states ... But, when this is done, the Negroes are deserted by the bourgeoisie, and there falls upon them a very terrible repression (ibid.).

It is noticeable that reactionary movements organized by bourgeois blacks only gain support to the extent that the black proletariat has been defeated. This is as true of Farrakhan's neo-liberal

agenda as it is of the social democratic program of Jesse Jackson. Again James makes this abundantly clear regarding another black nationalist:

> Some of us think it is fairly clear that the Garvey movement came and looked to Africa because there was no proletarian movement in the United States to give it a lead, to do for this great eruption of the Negroes what the Civil War and the Populist movement had done for the insurgent Negroes of those days (ibid.).

By the 1940s many black proletarians were engaged in seminal labour disputes in the auto, steel and coal industries. Initially people like Henry Ford saw this as an opportunity to integrate a 'compliant' section of the proletariat into the production process whilst dividing the workers along racial lines. First of all, writes James,

> [Ford] wanted them for hard, rough work. I am also informed by the comrades from Detroit he was very anxious to play a paternalistic role with the Negro petty bourgeoisie. He wanted to show them he was not the person that these people said he was- look! He was giving Negroes opportunities in his plant.

The militancy shown by black proletarians in Detroit as well as elsewhere sabotaged this project of co-option. Significantly, from our point of view, it also meant that reactionary black bourgeois leaders had a hard task recruiting from these highly politicised sections of the proletariat. Raya Dunayevskaya (1973) quotes a black worker from Oakland, California, disgusted by the reactionary slogan of 'Black power':

> Black Power has become a gigantic reindeer – hat rack with many opposing hats hanging there, including the hat of black Capitalism. The possible unity of black and white workers to destroy the system of capitalism is a punch at the gut nerve of all middle class intellectuals and elitist groups, black or white.

Detroit at this period witnessed a number of significant wildcat strikes where "black workers joined with white coworkers … for better wages and improved working conditions" (Bush, 1999: 206). However, the union bureaucracy, which could do nothing about these acts of solidarity, once again showed its counter-revolutionary nature as soon as the wave of strikes was over. Bush (1999: 206) describes how,

> in the aftermath of the strike, however, punitive measures were launched at some of the Black workers … Despite the role these workers played in uniting these traditional antagonists, the UAW [United Auto Workers] did not defend the workers who were fired.

This act of 'betrayal'[12] led to the formation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) at Dodge Main. "In May 1968," writes Bush (1999: 207), "DRUM led a wildcat strike in which Chrysler's production dropped by 1,900 cars. This strike gained considerable publicity for DRUM and led to the proliferation of Revolutionary Union Movements throughout the Detroit area, at Ford and General Motors plants, and at the United Parcel Service." It is clear that as soon as proletarians from different ethnic or racial backgrounds unite to oppose capital, reactionary ideologies such as nationalism and separatism go into hibernation, to be revived whenever the threat of revolt has passed.

> In 1741, word-of-mouth spread a 'report' that blacks and poor whites were uniting to overtake [New York City] … Fear of the alliance was so great that the city offered rewards for names. Subsequently 200 blacks and whites were arrested. Eighteen blacks were hanged; thirteen were burned alive. Four whites, two of them women, were hanged (Dennis & Willmarh, 1984).

If a 'report' was sufficient to create such panic amongst the ruling class, one can imagine the psychological scars left by real events. The Watts riots of 1965, the Detroit riots of 1967 and the Los Angeles riots of 1992 provide proletarians with zones of autonomous development which when generalized to the workplace challenge the very fabric of capitalism. During the Detroit riots, for instance, proletarians made a direct attack on police stations and engaged in collective acts of 'shopping': "It was just like Negroes and whites were shopping together, only

they weren't paying for anything" (Dunayevskaya, ibid.). It is this togetherness, this cross-racial proletarian solidarity that terrifies racist filth like Farrakhan and his bourgeois crew. Once during an interview with Bermuda TV, he was asked: "Is it possible for you to look at people as people per se, without regard to any color, black, Yellow, white?" His response was categorical: "No, I think this is some of the folly that white people have taught black people."

Bill Fletcher, Jr. (1999: 5) has pointed out how black working class organizations have had a tough time establishing themselves on US soil. For instance, the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC, 1951-55) tried to organize against CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) backtracking on race and racism: "The NNLC demanded jobs for Black workers (from the corporations); opposition to Jim Crow segregation, and equity within the trade union movement. A victim of anti-communist repression, the NNLC was forced to dissolve at precisely the moment that the Civil Rights Movement was merging." Even a reformist organization, therefore, has the full weight of the state and the white trade union bureaucracy arrayed against them. Significantly, he adds,

> That the objectives of large sections of the Black petty bourgeoisie had been met resulted in their taking a different course of action- sometimes at the expense of the Black working class and sometimes displaying pure benign neglect. The collapse of the civil rights consensus coincided with the offensive of US capital against the working class. Living standards for the average worker declined significantly from around 1973 onwards. For Black workers, this decline has been matched by a growing gap between themselves and white workers, in which one factor was the disproportionate impact of so-called de-industrialisation on Black workers (Fletcher, 1999: 8).

A depressing historical pattern has developed over the years, which explains the appeal of Black Muslims to many young working class blacks. Racist pogroms against blacks are used as pretext by the state to attack secular and radical forces, creating 'a vacuum of leadership'. The Black Muslims then fill the void and recruit aggressively. Farrakhan talking about the need to change tactics and strategy whenever necessary is revealing: "It's not for me to tell you at every turn what stratagem or tactic I am applying to get us safely to the goal and objective. It's not for me as a general to tell you that. The generals are not to tell tactics, the generals give orders. And that's my job to give orders and your job is to obey the orders" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 262).

Once the recruitment drive is slowing down, the Nation withdraws inward in preparation for the next opportunity. The risks to the organization are minimal whilst the rewards are massive. For instance, during W/W II, when many blacks were fighting and dying for US capitalism, there was a wave of racist attacks. In one year (1943), there were 242 reported racial battles in 47 cities, including Newark, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago, Cambridge and Brooklyn. "Zoot suit riots occurred in many cities," writes Bush (1999: 153), "where a thousand white sailors and soldiers roamed the streets stripping zoot suits [a distinctive outfit worn by young working class blacks belonging to a sub-culture at odds with the church influenced orthodoxy] from Black and Chicano men ... FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover announced plans to

arrest communist agitators." Both inadvertently and by design, the path was cleared for the Nation's recruiting drive to commence.

Ideological contradictions

The platonic idealism, sense of racial superiority and parochial aspects of the NOI's ideology will always make it a minority within a global Islamic movement. Ironically, it is precisely these elements that make it popular amongst certain sections of the black population in the U.S.A. Farrakhan knows that any move towards Islamic orthodoxy is counterproductive, and yet because of his increasing financial dependency on Sunni Muslims from the Arab world, he has little choice but to make concessions to orthodoxy. For instance, throughout the 1980s Farrakhan had preached that the, "Arab way of Islam is not the NOI way. The messenger taught us … that we don't have to pray or worship like you. You, Arab, prostrate yourself because you have an evil nature. The black man is good by nature, he is a God" (Quoted in White, Jr., ibid., p 185).

Yet when it suited his financial designs, and against considerable opposition from the rank-and-file, he demoted the Nation's two greatest past leaders, Fard Muhammad and Elijah Muhammad, "from being divinities of the Quran to being merely great Muslim leaders" (ibid.). In a relatively recent annual Savior's Day convention in Chicago, Farrakhan declared, "We bear witness that there is no prophet after the prophet Mohammad" (*New York Times*, 2000). Since Wallace Muhammad's organization has been gaining members at an impressive rate lately (ironically despite its orthodox interpretations), Farrakhan also decided to let bygones be bygones. A meeting between Wallace Muhammad and Farrakhan was arranged with a view to bringing the NOI under the umbrella of mainstream Orthodox Islam. This is another example of the pendulum swinging between Black Nationalism and orthodox Islam depending on the direction of the wind. In a similar move the Nation has given Muslim/Christian unity top priority in its agenda (Gardell, 1996: 242). Although it is noteworthy that mostly black Christianity is being wooed, with Farrakhan still actively hostile to 'white-oriented' Christianity. In 1985 he said, "Very humbly, in the sight of God, I [Farrakhan] am much more important than the Pope … You can't
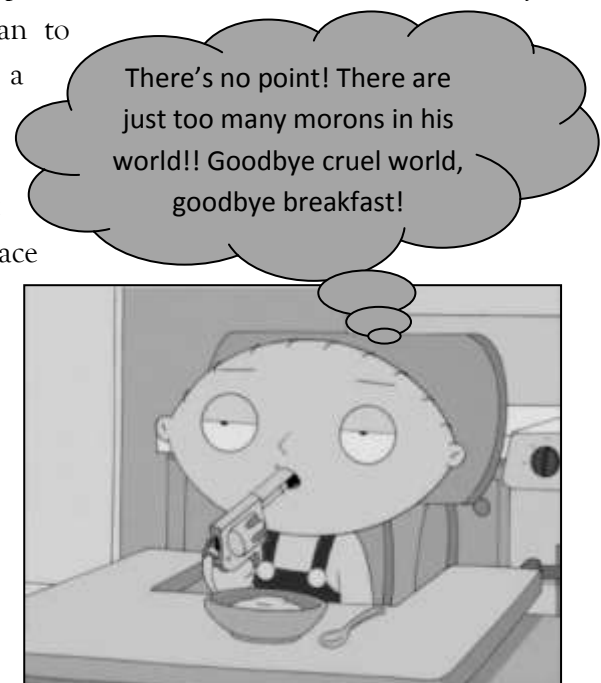
compare the leader of a false religion with God's servant who comes to condemn it" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 243).

As working class atheists who reject the very concept of god and authority, we see no choice but to 'humbly' decline to take side in this fascinating duel between Muslim Tweedledum and Christian Tweedledee. In a similar move, a beleaguered NOI has been forced into a humiliating U-turn by accepting membership from "whites, Hispanics, Asians and other ethnic groups" in recent times (Gadlin, *The New York Amsterdam News*, Oct 23-Oct 29, 2010). Only three years prior to this U-turn Farrakhan had assured his followers it was time to "separate from White America" on the grounds that "the Black male is nearly at the point of extinction"! (Richard Muhammad, *The New York Amsterdam News*, Oct 18-Oct 24, 2007). As suggested above, this constant toing and froing of the pendulum can be turned into an advantage by a skilful manager.

Precisely because the Nation combines various elements from Black Nationalist ideology, Islamic religion, cult-worshipping rituals and gang activity it always has to be nimble-footed in its dealings with the outside world. The road to Armageddon has to be speeded up and slowed down according to circumstances. In this respect, Booker T. Washington's inspired marketing techniques of offering a multiple choice of interpretations to readers/listeners has served the Nation well. However, it is a difficult balancing act fraught with danger.

Sometimes even tried and tested formulas let the Nation down. One of their most successful tactics over the years has been to recruit famous celebrities, usually sportsmen and milk the publicity for all its worth. Such was the case with Cassius Clay, later known as Muhammad Ali, who joined the Nation in 1964. In the 90s, the Nation spent a great deal of effort in trying to recruit another heavyweight champion, Mike Tyson, to the extent that Farrakhan sent his own son, Mustapha, with instructions to befriend the unpredictable champ. Later when Tyson was accused of raping Desiree Washington, Farrakhan embarked on a vicious and sexist character assassination campaign in order to ingratiate himself with Tyson and protect the NOI's *asset*. Before a Cleveland audience, he said:

> What type of a woman was [Desiree Washington]? What type of a woman would go to a man's room at 2:00 in the morning? She knew that they were not going to look at television. She knew what a hotel room looked like. And, now, she has the arrogance to cry rape (Quoted in White Jr., ibid., p. 218).

This language sounds shocking only if we forget that the Nation's propaganda deliberately targets those male members of the 'black' proletariat who feel inferior, both in relation to 'white' America and also in relation to educated 'black' women. Despite conducting a wonderful PR exercise on behalf of the soon to be convicted Tyson, the latter spurned the overtures of the Nation to convert instead to Sunni Islam. Not despondent, the Nation then targeted Riddick Bowe, who succeeded Tyson as heavyweight champion. However, nothing

came of this adventure either since Bowe decided to retire from boxing and join the United States Marines!

The trend towards Rainbow Coalitions with the NOI as the prime mover will, therefore, continue. Of course, the coalition partners will always be changing, since Farrakhan falls out with old friends on a regular basis. In a recent Saviour's Day (four-hour) speech, Farrakhan warns President Obama against attacking Iran; criticises Chicago Mayor David Denkins whilst at the same time claiming credit for his Mayoral success; further criticizes Jesse Jackson (who has now turned against him); and yes, of course, gives special attention to a discussion of the 'mother ship'! (cf. Baylor, *The New York Amsterdam News*, March 4-March 10, 2010).

The NOI will enhance the 'trading' network it has established over decades with Japan, Turkey, Argentina, Panama, Jamaica, Cuba, Costa Rica, Saudi Arabia and Ghana. This emphasis on material gain is perfectly in keeping with NOI's rejection of the concepts of heaven and hell. In future, we may witness wackier pyramid schemes as a desperate measure to balance the Nation's books. It is noteworthy that part of the reason for the NOI's more 'conciliatory' approach in recent months has been the criticism of prominent blacks. The Mendelssohn violin concertos, billed as a symbolic peace offerings to the 'Jewish community' were rebuffed. The harassment of rival black leaders is proving counter-productive. When the Nation threatened Elijah's own grandson in the 60s, "Hasan Harrieff, sought protection by the FBI" (Segal, 2001: 231).

However, in 1999 during a rally at Madison Square Garden, when the likes of David Denkins (at the time, a black City Clerk) were threatened with assassination from the podium and another councilman, Bill Perkins, was manhandled by the Fruits, several elected black officials stepped forward to denounce the intimidation, the message and the march (Herbert, 1999). This is in contrast to the 1970s when soldiers of the FOI could murder seven Hanafis (a rival Muslim sect) and get away with it. Gardell (1996: 189) writes, "five of the victims were children, including babies who were drowned in a bathtub." At the time, the leadership of NOI managed to distance itself from this act. Another problem for the Nation will be the concerted effort made by Christian evangelicals to win back recruits from them. Christians have decided that the church has neglected the 'issue of racism' for too long and is now instructing members to 'witness to the Nation of Islam.' This is as true of white Christians as black churches who having almost given up on black urban males are once again recruiting aggressively amongst this group:

> Don't overwhelm them [i.e. members of the NOI] with Scripture. They will not listen if they are overwhelmed. Don't use a King James Bible because, according to some Muslims, King James himself translated this version and corrupted it … Avoid all pictures of God, Jesus, or other biblical personalities as white with blue eyes and blond hair (Buckner, 1998).

The general intensification of the social struggle must lead towards a sharpening of class antagonisms between the NOI and those who find their historical roots in the tri-racial (white, black, native Indian) isolate communities of the past and the urban rioters of Los Angeles and elsewhere. Perhaps to go forward in the 21st century the 'black' proletariat needs to reclaim part of its tradition first. How can the Nation of Islam prosper in a climate where the achievements of Nat Turner, Fredrick Douglass, Lucy Parsons, Timothy Thomas Fortune, Angelo Herndon, Paul Robeson and most significant of all, James Carr have become part of our collective memory? Who will pay attention to the rants of a bourgeois demagogue like Farrakhan then? The resurgence of the autonomous proletariat throughout the world as witnessed in some sections of the anti-capitalist movement and the 'Middle East' parallels a newly found consciousness that dispenses with reactionaries such as Mao, Malcolm X, Lenin and Che Guevara. When today's wage-slave rebellions begin to be inspired by the 250-recorded cases of slave revolts throughout American history, wildcat strikes and proletarian riots, who will heed the Nation's strategy of class collaboration? Once the universal proletarian program of the abolition of wage-slavery, the money system, the state, racism, religion, sexism, homophobia and hierarchy are posited forcefully, reactionaries like the Nation of Islam (and their 'white', 'yellow' and 'brown' counterparts) will be consigned to the place they belong: the dustbin of history.

> *Communism* is the *positive* supercession of *private property* as human self-estrangement, and hence the true *appropriation* of the *human* essence through and for man [sic], it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social, i.e., human being, a restoration that has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development ... it is the genuine revolution ... between freedom and necessity, between individual and species.
>
> (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 1844)

Louis is coming back with me to my flat. Doesn't he have pretty lobes?

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published as a pamphlet, winter 2002, London.
Expanded and groovyfied, 14 August 2011, Hyderabad, India.

Endnotes

[1] Today 'uncle Tomism' is used pejoratively by some 'black' people (including Farrakhan) to denounce other 'blacks' who are perceived as lackeys of the 'white' establishment. However, "the conception of the black personality that Harriet Beecher Stowe illustrated in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a messianic one" (Moss, 1993). Uncle Tom was a far stronger character than the sneering connotations of the term might suggest today. The book was also a reaction against the outrageous Fugitive Slave Act (1850), which "denied testimony of accused runaway; assumed accused's guilt rather than innocence" (Dennis and Willmarth, 1984). Once Farrakhan's fiery *rhetoric* is exposed for the conformist, subservient homage to capitalism that it has always been, it becomes clear that he and his clan are the real 'Uncle Toms'!

The 'vegetables' refers to the *Fruit of Islam* (FOI), a paramilitary force set-up to instil the fear of Allah into the rank-and-file, as well as providing the media with photogenic image-bites. According to the testimony of former leaders such as Imam Warith Muhammad and Malcolm X, the Fruits practice intimidation against membership in order to ensure compliance. Allen has even claimed, "NOI members speak glowingly of the idea of administrating amputations to thieves and putting rapists to death under an Islamic government" (Allen, 1995: 2). They hold separate temple services, and act as a "constabulary and court-martial to root out and punish any hint of heterodoxy or any slacking of obedience among the Muslims themselves" (ibid.). During Michael Jackson's legal trial following charges of child molestation and subsequent death-threats, the Fruits of Islam acted as bodyguards.

[2] See http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/1526102 for further information.

[3] This documentary which propelled Malcolm X to stardom and the NOI to national prominence is available on YouTube in ten parts (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-odALf_1zs) and also at (http://www.archive.org/details/PBSTheHateThatHateProduced). It is difficult to know which discourse is funnier: the Nation's rhetoric about charging the 'white man' with 'being the greatest drunkard and gambler on earth' or the po-faced liberal hypocrisy of the commentator, Mike Wallace.

[4] This is an entangled web. Reactionary Jewish ultra-rightists founded by Meir Kahane called the *Jewish Defense League* attacked Jesse Jackson, following the latter's announcement to seek the Democratic Party's nomination in late 1983. Death threats soon followed. Jackson asked for Secret Service protection, which was initially refused. The FOI stepped in to guard Jackson. Then in January 1984, during an off-the-record chat with Coleman, he referred to Jews as 'hymies.' When this was publicised Jackson at first denied making the slur. By the time he apologised the damage was done and relations between 'Jews' and 'Blacks' had deteriorated. Kahane and Farrakhan won, Jackson lost (see Gardell, 1996: 250). Of course, every time class solidarity is jeopardised by a racial discourse (whether insulting or not) the proletariat is also the loser. Sadly in the current US political climate with its infantile identity politics, it is nigh

impossible to avoid giving offence when engaging in serious debate. The onus is on the US working classes to discover a way of talking about class without marginalising 'race' issues. Once this new discourse is in place, reactionary scum like Kahane, Farrakhan and Jackson will be exposed for the irrelevances they should always have been.

[5] Interpreting Malcolm X's legacy is still a profitable industry and every reactionary wants a piece of the action. During Spike Lee's confused and sycophantic homage to Malcolm X, "the script had to be written no less than ten times, in part due to the fervor with which the different camps marketed Malcolm as their champion … Farrakhan and others in the Nation were explicit in their warnings for Lee not to desecrate Elijah Muhammad" (Gardell, 1996: 66). It is, however, true that Malcolm X had broken with NOI and was planning an American tour to reach out to NOI members he felt he had misled. In his autobiography, he writes: "Since I learned the truth in Mecca, my dearest friends have come to include all kinds -some Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, and even atheists! I have friends who are called capitalists, socialists and communists! Some of my friends are moderates, conservatives, extremists – some are even Uncle Toms! My friends today are black, brown, yellow, and white!" (quoted in Malik, 2005: 32, a cringing text written for the 40th anniversary of Malcolm's assassination).

[6] Lincoln (1961: 218) has explained that to dismiss the black Muslims as a cult would be a 'tragic error.' We concur. We are also aware that the term 'cult' has a rather loaded judicial signification in North American aw. Briefly put, to designate a group a cult could undermine their legitimacy and allow federal government not only to tax their finances more aggressively but also to treat them as a potential 'terrorist' organisation. Whilst not trying to pave the way for government witch-hunts, and also whilst emphasising that the cultic aspect of the NOI is only one of four in fluencies, it is difficult to ignore the fetishisation of ritualistic behaviour within the organisation The NOI's reliance on charismatic leadership and manipulation of rank-and-file, its internal authoritarianism and propaganda functions suggests strong cultic tendencies.

[7] The NOI has been trying to expand in Britain in recent years, particularly using the Stephen Lawrence murder as a platform. For a self-serving and rather stupid discussion of the UK chapter of the NOI see (Tinaz, 2006).

[8] 'Part-white Negroes' was the derogatory term used by Garvey to put down mulattos, especially those who threatened his de facto leadership of the *Black community* (whatever that is!). Mulattos challenged Garvey on two fronts: first, they exposed the myth of *racial purity*; and second, by transcending racial discourse, they once again foregrounded the invisible issue of social class. So maybe he was right to be wary and suspicious of mulattos, after all, a very special one, Fredrick Douglass, had very eloquently seen through the self-serving nonsense of *race pride/black nationalism*. Being an offspring of a horse and a donkey (a mule!) has the advantage of allowing one to be simultaneously an insider and outsider. The *Melancholic Troglodytes* are superior to both Middle Easterners and Westerners precisely because we are mules!

[9] So that there is no misunderstanding let us note in passing that De Bois was not a radical. In fact his notion of *socialism* was authoritarian and atavistic: "[socialism is a] disciplined economy and political organisation in which the first duty of the citizen is to serve the state" (quoted in Gardell, 1996: 18).

[10] This paranoia needs to be seen in the context of very real attempts at infiltrating the NOI by the Japanese secret services, the FBI and the 'Communist' Party of the USA!! Nevertheless, fear of infiltration by state agencies is one thing, fear of 'contamination' by racial others, something completely different.

[11] It needs to be emphasised again that ADL (Anti-Defamation League) is itself an anti-working class, racist organisation that has in the past (deliberately) misrepresented the NOI, so everything it puts forward must be assessed with great caution.

[12] It is important to have a historical perspective on unions instead of merely listing a series of current misdeeds. Since today (almost all) unions are counter-revolutionary, it is incorrect to describe their activities as acts of betrayals. They are not of the proletariat and hence cannot be our betrayers. Of course, there have been exceptions. The origins of trade unionism were related to a fight for better wages and working conditions that proletarians identified with. In those early days there existed an organic linkage between unions and workers, and it may very well be possible to occasionally come across a newly-formed union or a low-ranking bureaucrat within an established union genuinely engaged in escalating the class struggle. One must never discount the possibility. However, *in general* contemporary unions are neither working class nor really middle class mediators between labor and capital. Today, they must be seen as part of the ruling class machinery responsible for regulating and disciplining the most precious commodity available to capitalism: labour power.

But, if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to *ruthless criticism* of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be.
-Marx (1843)

The slave 'frees' himself when, of all the relations of private property, he abolishes only the relation of slavery and thereby becomes a proletarian; the proletarian can free himself only by *abolishing private property in general*. Now spread them chubby cheeks, fat boy!
-Engels (1847)

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(A note on sources: usually when the *Melancholic Troglodytes* embark on researching a topic, we rely on the contribution of previous revolutionaries to help us negotiate the often-tricky ravines of class struggle. In the case of the present text it proved impossible to find many useful texts. Many of our sources are from the liberal/social-democratic academia and some from dubious organizations such as the Nation itself, various Trotskyites, Stalinists and the Anti-Defamation League. The latter especially has an annoying habit of employing out of context quotes and dishonest claims- a dishonesty tinged with racism. The dearth of radical work on this topic and the general neglect of religious issues by (western) revolutionaries are regrettable. We hope this text has gone some way in addressing these shortcomings. Hopefully it will act as a platform for more erudite proletarian critiques.)

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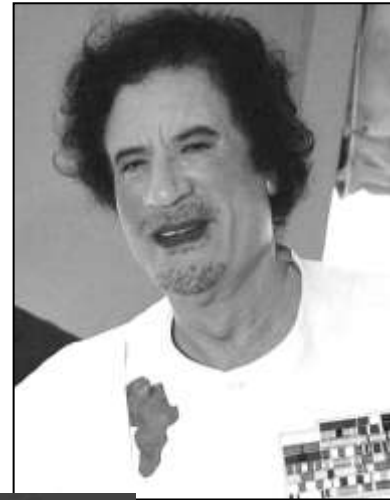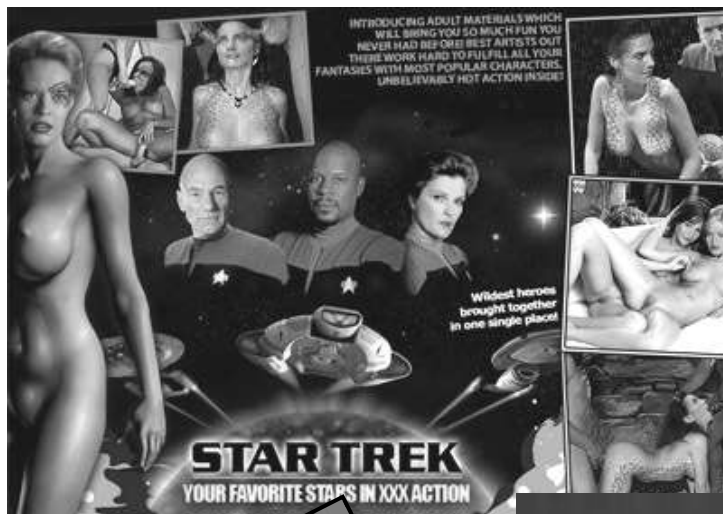
Quiz: What is the connection between Star Trek, Colonel Gaddafi, Lord of the Rings, David Beckham, Ronaldo, Peter Griffin, Marge Simpson, Rihanna and Farrakhan?

Answers to: meltrogs-books@hotmail.com for a mystery prize.

"GOD EMPERORS OF *DUNE*" was an outstanding calamity! A maximum of three people read it and only one of them possessed sufficient sobriety to respond to it judiciously. The remaining two critics dismissed it as mere whimsical pettifogging. This surprised the *Melancholic Troglodytes*. Like true artists, we know when we've achieved a masterpiece, and this text comes as close to pure perfection as Frank Herbert's original novel. *Dune* is an epic tale which over the years has spawned a number of sequels, movies, and computer games. It depicts economic, national, gender, and cultural conflicts in a far off future with an uncanny resemblance to contemporary 'Middle East'. Herbert studied Turkish, Iranian, Arabic, Islamic, Sufi, Jewish, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and green topics for years, incorporating many of their features into his work. US soldiers read *Dune*, 'Western' journalists read *Dune*, politicians and policy-makers read *Dune*, spooks and security 'experts' read *Dune*, scholars read *Dune*, but revolutionaries … well revolutionaries are probably too busy jerking off with Hegel, Negri and Žižek to read anything worthwhile! Ok, you fucking brain-dead jerk offs, why don't you give this text a miss and move onto the next which hopefully won't threaten your sedimented identities as much? Wankers, fucking stupid, ugly, cunt-in-wankers,* the whole lot of you!

Nowadays, one of the problems in discussing matters 'Middle Eastern' is that the topic has become everybody's declared Mastermind special subject. Overnight every Tom, Dick and Ali has become a fucking self-appointed expert! Armed with the semi-digested 'facts' of two travel guides, four articles, the ephemeral memory of a conference or a pox picked up at the local Mosque, Church or hoe house, our intrepid expert feels duty bound to share his syphilitic nuggets of wisdom with the world. Attitudes have become sedimented and interpretive repertoires constrained by a number of separated discourses. This, after all, is how bourgeois ideology wins its battles, by promoting the common sense of fool-fucks*!

"God Emperors of *Dune*" works by de-familiarising the 'Middle East', so that minds rigidified into certitude can once again navigate their way round complex issues. Novalis said it well, "To romanticize the world is to make us aware of the magic, mystery and wonder of the world; it is to educate the senses to see the ordinary as extraordinary, the familiar as strange, the mundane as sacred, the finite as infinite." In this case, the enterprise requires a basic cognizance of *Dune* and willingness to constantly juxtapose text and glossary. It also subverts both Orientalist and Occidentalist notions that have regained currency in recent times. Hell, it is so clever, it even undermines 'auto-orientalism'.

We've used illustrations from David Lynch's 1984 treatment of *Dune*, since this is the best known filmic version of the novel. But for those who despise Lynch's corruption of *Dune* as much as we do, there is always the much more thought-provoking TV-movie version (Dir. John Harrison, 2000).

* ***fool fuck*** according to the urbandictionary.com is "when an individual exceeds the limit of stupidity and is no longer funny."
* ***cunt-in-wankers*** does not have an entry in any dictionary yet! We'll leave this one to your imagination.

God Emperors of *Dune*

> "And that day dawned when **Arrakis** lay at the hub
> of the universe with the wheel poised to spin."
> - Princess Irulan, from 'Arrakis awakening,' *Dune*

For a man who had just spun the wheel of the universe, **Paul Muad'Dib** (aka George Walker Bush) was remarkably calm. But then he was no ordinary mortal. The **Bene Gesserit** witch had called him an abomination, a genetic freak. Maybe so. But Paul knew the essential truth of this capitalist universe and now that he possessed the Great **Voice**, his enemies would fear him.

"The class who can destroy a thing, they control it," said Paul. The **Mentat** Thufir Hawat (aka Dick Cheney), Master of the Assassins Gurney Halleck (aka Donald Rumsfeld), and the Reverend Mother Jessica (aka Condoleezza Rice), drew in a sharp breath. None of them could believe how their charge had matured. He had depth within depth. He had grown to be even more powerful and prescient than his father, Duke Leto Atreides (aka Bush Sr.). Could Paul really bridge time and space? Was he the promised 'shortening of the way', the true **Kwisatz Haderarch** who could be in many places at once?

Paul Muad'Dib (aka George walker Bush) who would be the Kwisatz Haderarch

"I must rule with eye and claw- as the hawk among lesser birds," whispered Paul. He would now share with them his stratagem. It was time.

Caladan (aka USA) had been a paradise for the House Atreides, explained Paul. We enjoyed huge resources of both raw and human potential. A technology to rival any planet of the universe, even the machine-worshipping **Ix** (aka Japan). Seemingly contended citizens and incorruptible administrators. Yet all was not well in paradise. Decades earlier the Keynesian efforts to use money to mediate the link between income and productivity had been ruptured through social struggle (cf. Harry Cleaver, *Work, Value and Domination*; George Caffentzis, *The End of Work or the Renaissance of Slavery?*). The academic-Mentat Robert Brenner had emphatically demonstrate the profitability crisis in Caladan's manufacturing industry which developed in the late 1990s (Robert Brenner, *The Boom and the Bubble*).

Paul recounted the efforts of House Atreides to counteract the falling tendency of the rate of profit. His father the Duke had increased the mass

The Mentat Thufir Hawat (aka Dick Cheney)

surplus value by raising the intensity and duration of the working day and at the same time decrease the mass of variable capital by depressing wages and expanding foreign trade. Paul would continue this good work by decreasing the mass of constant capital through raising the productivity of labour in the capital goods industry (Caffentzis, op cit.), and by launching the holy **Zensunni** Jihad. The Jihad, in particular, would catalyse innovation in technology and open up new areas for profitable capital investment (Peter F. Bell, *Marxist Theory, Class Struggle & the Crisis of Capitalism*).

The Jihad became the preferred option for House Atreides when crisis in the sphere of production was repeated with venom in the sphere of circulation. Historically, each crisis has been accompanied by the destruction of great mass of fictitious value in the trade and banking sector, usually through the regulatory practices of central banks themselves (Loren Goldner, *The Remaking of the American Working Class*).

Paul, who was Duke Paul Atreides, who is Paul Muad'Dib, who shall be the Kwistaz Haderarch, moved closer to underscore his point. "We came from Caladan," he continued, "a paradise world for our form of life. There existed no need in Caladan to build a physical paradise or a paradise of the mind- we could see the actuality all around us. And the price we paid was the price men have always paid for achieving a paradise in life – we went soft, we lost our edge but most unforgiving of all, we forgot that our paradise was created on the back of exploited Fremen." Gurney Halleck nodded silently. There was no denying the truth in Paul's words. Reverend Mother Jessica was observing the group's reaction as unobtrusively as her Bene Gesserit training allowed.

Although the restructuring of labour power on Caladan, Dune and the rest of the known universe was paramount, decisive military action was called for due to other considerations. As another mysterious Mentat had pointed out a decade earlier, "The first objective of House Atreides is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival" (The Mentat Paul Wolfowitz). Indeed "as the Ix (aka Japan) economic challenge receded in the course of the 1990s, the House of Ginaz (aka China) loomed ever larger as the major long term threat facing the Atreides (US) Imperialism" (Alex Callinicos, *The Grand Strategy of the American Empire*). If the House of Ginaz was the long term thereat, the Atreides needed to pre-empt crisis in various **Houses Minor** in order to weather the coming storm.

Two Houses Minor were causing particular concern: the troublesome **Benne Gesserit Sisterhood** (aka House of Saud) and the **Panoplia Propheticus** (aka Islamic Republic of Iran). The former in their desire to control the destiny of the **spice melange** had carried through

centuries of genetic manipulation ending in the renegade **Feyd-Rautha** (aka Osama Bin Laden). Paul was aware that some from his own House wanted the Bene Gesserit destroyed for their impiety, whilst others amongst his **Tleilaxians** (aka The Pentagon) were leaning toward 'regime change' within the sisterhood. Others such as his faithful **Fedaykin** (aka the CIA) wanted to maintain the present leadership. That the Sisterhood had lasted so long is due to five factors:

Feyd-Rautha (aka Osama Bin Laden, aka The <u>Failed</u> Kwisatz Haderarch aka Sting)

1) Atreides military and political support (a $60 billion deal for the latest ornithopter was in the offing);

2) The Sisterhood's manipulation of the gene pool to gain ultimate control of the spice melange (a manoeuvre with the backing of the Guild and the Atreides and all other cartel members);

3) Their propaganda wing, the brilliant **Missionaria Protectiva** (who only feigned stupidity in order to infect vulnerable minds with a mixture of superstition and banality);

4) Draconian measure against 'foreign' workers (which had thus far insured smooth capital accumulation) and finally,

5) 'Generous' welfare handouts to members of the Order to keep dissent manageable.

The Sisterhood's manipulation of the gene pool (point 2 above) had resulted in the increasingly unpredictable Feyd-Rautha (aka Osama Bin Laden) and his troublesome network of assassins. The Missionaria Protectiva had reported resistance to their propaganda work amongst the Fremen (Point 3). The Sisterhood could no longer afford 'foreign' workers and was expediting their departure (point 4). For the same reason there would have to be massive welfare cuts and austerity measures directed at the Order's membership (point 5). Native Fremens (aka Saudi proletarians) who had taken to heart Paul Lafargue's *The Right to be Lazy* would need persuading if they were to fall in love with wage slavery. All this spells trouble for the Sisterhood and may mean Atreides military and political support (point 1) having to switch to a more competent partner in the future.

> "Truth suffers from too much analysis."
>
> -Ancient Fremen Saying, *Dune Messiah*, Frank Herbert

The Panoplia Propheticus of Iran posed a different challenge altogether. Their merciless reign had created a volcano of hatred that was threatening to explode at any moment. Workplace 'molar antagonisms' were becoming generalised at an alarmingly rate and turning into street demonstrations without warning. His favourite Mentat, Thufir Hawat, called this osmosis, 'molecular proliferation' (Negri & Guattari, *Communists Like Us*). Teachers, students, pie-makers, oil-workers, and even football fans were clashing daily with security forces. Perhaps most discouraging of all was the anti-religious sentiments openly professed by the rioters. With the Panoplia Proheticus gone and every other ruling order discredited *Fremen* may really become *Freepersons*. If the volcano erupts at

Shaddam IV's last days

the wrong time, Paul thought to himself, no one, not even House Atreides would be able to stem the tide.

Besides regulating labour power and geopolitics, the Atreides were engaged in a bitter battle with **Shaddam IV** and a string of Houses Major and Minor over control of the second most precious commodity in the universe, the spice melange and the interstellar routes by which it was shipped around. The spice on Dune and the rest of the Canopus region was now interconnected to the spice around the Caspian region. Paul could never forget that most of his top generals and Mentats made their money in the spice industry before joining him on his Jihad. Would too close an association with the spice bring the Atreides down? After all, other sections of his family had commercial interests in competing industries. Some mutterings were being heard about spice addiction and its fatal consequences. But so long as the Atreides could retain their ideological cohesiveness, both internal and external murmurs of discontent could be held at bay. Paul knew this was strongest suit. Past Atreides administrations had been mere mandarins. His team were more. A lot more. They believed in the destiny of the Atreides to rule the universe and civilise the barbaric Fremen.

> "Control the coinage and the courts-let the rabble have the rest." Thus the Padishah emperor advises you. And he tells you: "If you want profits, you must rule." There is truth in these words but I ask myself: "Who are the rabble and who are the ruled?"
>
> Muad'Dib's Secret Message to the Landsraad

The fat Baron **Vladimir Harkonnen** (aka Ariel Sharon) had been instrumental in setting the trap. Now the Atreides would have to overthrow Shaddam IV or lose everything. You didn't have to be a Sandhurst general to know that the Atreides would be militarily successful. They may even use atomics against his bunker or perhaps against the more audacious Panoplia Propheticus. Who knows? Now that Paul was the Kwisatz Haderarch anything was possible.

Shaddam IV's courtiers could see the shock of realisation on his face. As if in a daze, he was occupying himself with reviewing his faithful **Sardaukur** and ordering evermore ambitious anthropological digs. Some of his Mentats were already preparing alibis for a post-Shaddam IV era. At least his Sardaukar would defend him until the end but the **Dictum Familia** was beyond saving. As for his subjects they were bored with human-gods already. Some had rediscovered the metaphysical variety. The mosques were going up at a faster rate than any period of his reign. Others were waiting patiently for the 'window of

The Fat Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (aka Ariel Sharon) with his protégé The Beast Rabban (aka Benjamin Netanyahu)

opportunity'- the time lag between Shaddam IV's demise and he Atreides consolidation of power on Arrakis. Maybe then they could unite to wage a fight back. The Atreides were sure to try to divide the Fremen along tribal lines. The spice melange would be monopolised by House Atreides at the expense of rival Houses. Paul Muad'Dib was posing a question to all: "Have you any idea what it means to be deprived of the spice liquor once you're addicted?" No one could answer him. They were too busy shuddering with fear.

With Shaddam IV gone, the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood reshaped and the Panoplia Propheticus weakened interminably, the fat Baron Harkonnen would be in an ideal position to

strengthen his domain. He would employ the Beast Rabban (aka Benjamin Netanyahu) to extract more spice and water from the Fremen. If they fought over spice today, tomorrow they would have to kill for the water of life. As for Feyd, the darling beautiful Feyd, the Baron still had plans for him. Feyd would continue dividing the Fremen of the universe until he had outlived his usefulness. Then a fatal 'accident', a poisoned **gomjabbar** needle would find his flesh. And Feyd, who could have been the Kwisatz Haderarch if it wasn't for a fatal genetic defect, would be no more. Paul and the fat Baron would rule unhindered.

"Keep your distance, God. You are the
past and the past is an embarrassment."

- Heretics of Dune

There was only one force they had not reckoned with and that was the mysterious Fremen. Intelligence agencies could not predict their behaviour, although recent reports of Fremen children chanting, 'No war but the class war' were ominous. They seemed impervious to both **Imperial Conditioning** and the Great Voice. How do you control in perpetuity slaves you rely on for profit? For as the orientalist Nietzsche once said: "There is nothing more terrible than a class of barbaric slaves who have learned to regard their existence as an in justice, and now prepare to avenge, not just themselves, but all generation."

The Fremen who would be Freepersons

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published as a leaflet on 18.01.2003
Expanded and groovyfied on 14.09.2011

Terminology of the Imperium

- **Arrakis:** the planet known as Dune, aka Iraq; third planet of Conupas system (aka Middle East system).
- **Bene Gesserit Sisterhood:** the ancient school of mental and physical training for female students (aka The House of Saud); the Sisterhood tries to control the future through genetic engineering.
- **Caladan:** birthplace of Paul Muad'Dib (George Walker Bush), aka United States of America.
- **CHOAM:** Combined Honnete Ober Advancer Mercantiles, aka the oil multinationals; controlled by Paul Muad'Dib (Bush), Emperor Shaddam IV (Saddam, before his untimely demise!), and the Houses Great (powerful capitalist nation states) with the Guild (IMF/WTO/WB) and Bene Gesserit order (House of Saud) as silent partners.
- **Dictum Familia:** the rule of the Great Convention (aka the United Nations) which prohibits the slaying of a royal person; first broken by Duke Leto Atreides (George Bush, Snr.), then by Shaddam IV (Saddam Hussein), the fat Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (aka Ariel Sharon), Feyd-Rautha (aka Osama Bin Laden) and Paul Muad'Dib (George W. Bush); a bourgeois-aristocratic convention upheld and suspended depending on circumstances.
- **Fedaykin:** Paul Muad'Dib's death commandos (aka CIA/FBI nexus).
- **Fremen:** free proletarians (aka 'sand pirates').
- **Gomjabbar:** the high-handed enemy; poisoned needle tipped with meta-cyanide used by Bene Gesserit Proctors in the death-alternative test of human awareness.
- **Houses Major:** interplanetary entrepreneurs, aka USA, EC, Japan, China, Russia.
- **Houses Minor:** planet-bound entrepreneur class, aka Middle Eastern, Central Asian and African capitalist-nations.
- **Imperial Conditioning:** the highest conditioning for taking and disrespecting human life. Initiates are marked by a dazed look due to too much/not enough TV.
- **Ix:** a planet noted for its machine culture. Specialists in extreme miniaturization (aka Japan).
- **Kwisatz Haderarch:** label applied by the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood (Saudis) to the unknown for which they sought a genetic solution in the form of a male Bene Gesserit witch whose powers would bridge time and space.
- **Mentat:** human computer. Paul Muad'Dib and Shaddam IV rely on Mentats for decision-making.
- **Missionaria Protectiva:** the arm of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood charged with sowing infectious superstitions on 'primitive' worlds. Thus facilitating exploitation (aka religious fundamentalists).
- **Panoplia Propheticus:** Grand ayatollahs, mysterious face-dancers from a distant planet known as Iran.

- **Paul Muad'Dib:** Paul Atreides (aka George W, Bush), ruler of the free universe.
- **Sardaukar:** soldier-fanatics of the Padishah Emperor Shaddam IV (aka The Republican Guards).
- **Shaddam IV:** The Padishah Emperor (aka Saddam Hussein).
- **Spice melange:** the second most precious commodity in the known universe (after labour power). Paul Muad'Dib claimed the spice as a key to his prophetic powers.
- **Tleilax:** lone planet of Thalim, training centre for renegade and twisted Mentats (aka The Pentagon).
- **Vladimir Harkonnen:** commonly referred to as the fat Baron Harkonnen (aka Ariel Sharon), desires control over Arrakis and the whole Canopus region.
- **Voice:** training originated by Bene Gesserits which controls subjects merely by selecting tone shadings of the voice. Only Paul Muad'Dib has attained the Great Voice (aka total control over the media).
- **Zensunni:** a schismatic sect that broke away from the teachings of the great prophetesses Kylie Minogue, Madonna and Sharon Stone. The Zensunni religion is noted chiefly for its synthesis of fundamentalist, millenarian and mystical tendencies. Aids capital accumulation through mobilising the faithful.
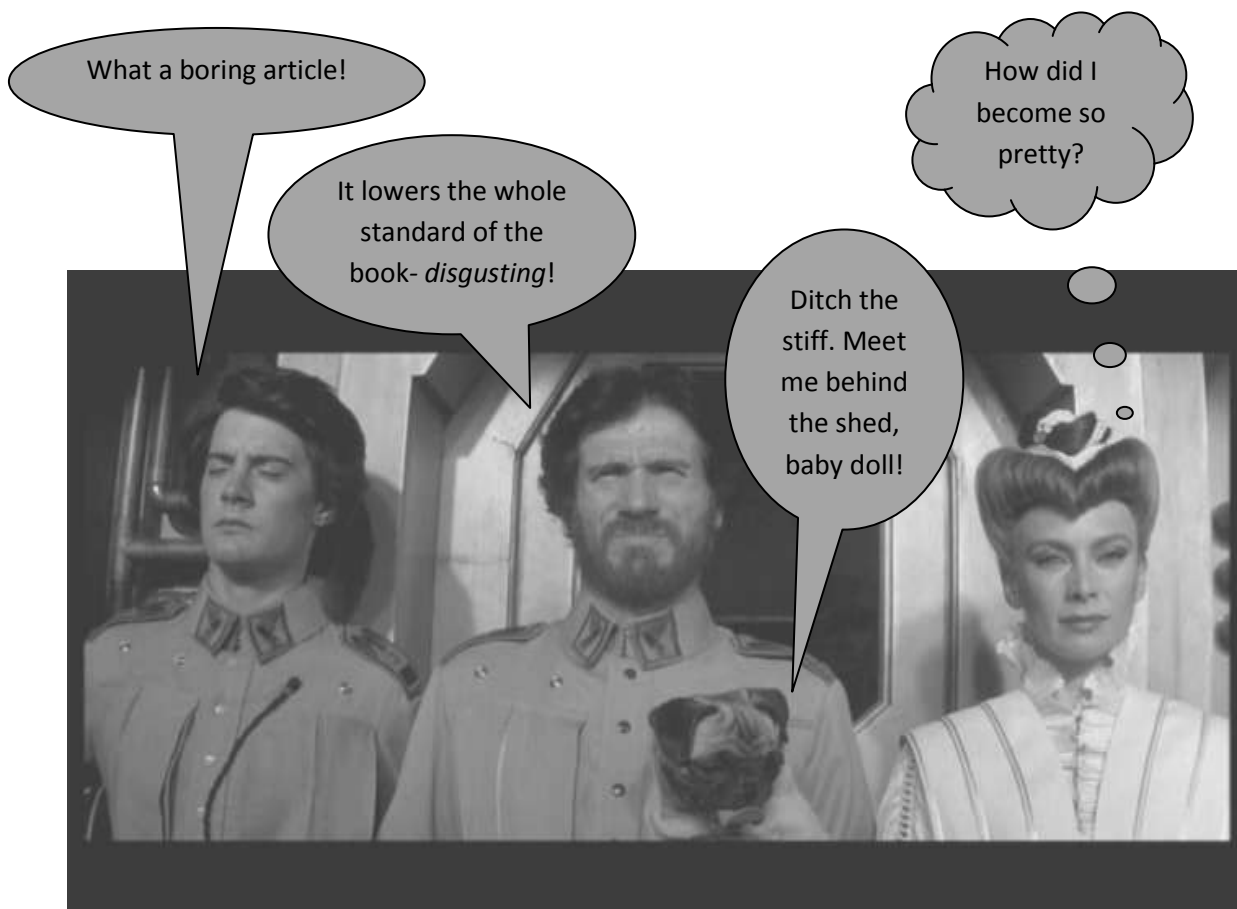
Paul Muad'Dib (George W. Bush), his father Duke Leto Atreides (aka George Bush, Snr.), Lady Jessica of the Weirding (aka Barbra Bush), and The Dog (aka Dick Cheney)

"Godfathers of Levant" was originally written in 2005 as an extended pamphlet. Since nearly all contemporary Middle Eastern radicals are fucking brain-dead, the text received little feedback. On top of that, the great Al Pacino took exception to the images sprucing up the narrative and decided to bring a libel case against us. Man, these Hollywood celebrities are weird! Instead of suing us, maybe you should try something you haven't done for a decade: *make a half-decent movie, you fucking midget!*

Anyway, in this text we begin with a critical chronology of the region in order to contextualise things. A few 'bourgeois maps' are offered to help the reader visualise the Levant more readily. Some descriptive statistics are then marshalled to provide the text with pseudo-scientific credibility, followed by the main text.

Unfortunately, a proletarian analysis of the Levant is faced with a number of immediate obstacles: the current low level of class struggle in the region; the prevalence of nationalistic and religious bigotry amongst large sections of the world proletariat; lack of communication between us and autonomous proletarian elements within the region; and, finally, the unreliability of information pertaining to the Levant. By choosing to foreground the class struggle in Syria (and to a lesser extent Lebanon), we have not made our task any easier. The internal volatility of Syria and Lebanon and the real threat of military intervention by Israel or USA (against almost any foe in the Middle East and at any time), make prediction of future events unfeasible. Even Asad does not know whether to respond with more coercion or reform. Will he be in power by the time this book comes out? No one knows. We, therefore, apologise to readers for the shortcomings of the present work and hope their constructive criticisms help us improve our understanding of the 'Levant'.

Life would be dismal if it weren't for the ill-disposed. They season this dish of noodles. I suspect that when Jesus said to his disciples: *You are the salt of the earth*, he had in mind those successors who would make it their business to piss-off the rest of humanity.

- Julien Torma (assuming he existed!)

Chronology of events in the Levant (The Rising Land)

Melancholic Troglodytes have a problem or two with chronologies. Firstly, chronologies tend to be very selective. Which events should be included/excluded from a historical chronology? What criteria one should use for making such decisions? Secondly, no matter how disjointed they may seem, chronologies still tell a story- one based on a classical narrative, with plots and sub-plots, 'great' heroes and villains, wars and massacres, etc. Everyday activities are dismissed as banal and unworthy of recording. Thirdly, they tend toward reductionism and stereotypes. *Imagined communities* (Anderson 1983) such as nations, ethnicities and religions figure excessively in chronologies, whilst real notions such as social class are conspicuous by their absence. Fourthly, alongside the classical narrative format employed, chronologies also tend to be positivist since facts are embedded in a subtle cause and effect relationship.

In short, chronologies both suppress and mystify the class struggle. But perhaps the most aggravating thing about chronologies is that, they are so damn handy! The following chronology was clobbered together from a few 'bourgeois chronologies' (algis.com 2005; news.telegraph 2005; George 2003; Gilmour 1983).

500,000BC
The Levant is first inhabited by nomadic tribes migrating in search of food and pasture.

2100BC
Amorites came from the Arabian Peninsula and were the first important Semitic settlers in the area of Damascus. They established many small states.

168BC
Syria's Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled over Israel and tried to outlaw Judaism. He tried to Hellenize the Jews by erecting idols. The Jews resisted and began the Maccabean revolt. The Maccabees were successful until internal dissension tore them apart.

63BC
Jerusalem is captured by Roman general Pompey who begins the era of Roman rule. In this era the Christian religion begins.

526
An earthquake killed 250,000 in Antioch, Turkey. This was the capital of Syria from 300-64BC.

636-1099

Mohamed's followers conquer the Arabian Peninsula, closely followed by the 'Holy land' (Exactly what makes a land 'holy'? Is it the moral certitude and self-righteousness of its inhabitants? The number of 'holy' places it possesses? The arrogance of its bourgeoisie? A rejection of masturbation and animal-love?).

c800-900

The Alawi faith was founded by a 9th century Muslim, who declared himself the 'gateway' to the divine truth and abandoned Islam.

1098-1291

A series of wars (Crusades) between European Christians and the Muslim rulers of the 'Holy Land' begin. The crusaders capture Jerusalem with the Knights Templar (a group of yuppie warrior-monks) occupying the Temple Mount. Muslim Mamluks eventually put an end to Christian domination and rule the area until 1517.

1110

Crusaders marched into Beirut causing a bloodbath.

1201

An earthquake in Syria and upper Egypt killed some 1.1 million people.

1912

Italy bombs Beirut in the first act of war against the Ottoman Empire.

1916

The Sykes-Picot Agreement secretly carve up the Levant into an assortment of monarchies, mandates and emirates. It enshrined Anglo-French imperialist ambitions at the end of W/W II. Syria and Lebanon were put into the French orbit, while Britain claimed Jordan, Iraq, the Gulf States and the Palestinian Mandate.

1920

Faisal I ibn Hussein ibn Ali becomes the 1st king Syria (Big name, little brain!)

1921

At the Cairo Conference, convened by a racist, war-mongering Winston Churchill, Britain and France carve up Arabia and create Jordan. France was given influence over Syria and Jewish immigration was allowed into Palestine.

1926

French air force bomb Damascus, Syria. The French launch a major military campaign in Syria to suppress a revolt by the Druze, which began in 1925 under the leadership of Sultan al-Atrash. A large French force sent against them was defeated and the revolt spread into the Druze portions of Lebanon. When the insurgents gained a foothold in Damascus, the French bombarded the city.

1936-1939

Jews migrate to Palestine as Nazi persecution escalates in Germany. Palestinians launch an uprising against Britain.

1943

Lebanon declares 'independence'.

1945

Syria declares war on Germany. Hitler commits suicide! (Is there a connection?)

1946

British and French forces complete their withdrawal from Syria, which they had captured from the Vichy government in 1941. Later that year Syria gains 'independence', becoming a founder member of the United Nations and of the Arab League.

1948

The British mandate over Palestine expires and the Jewish National Council declares the establishment of Israel. The armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq immediately move their forces across the Palestine frontier.

1956

Egypt nationalizes the Suez Canal zone in order to finance the Aswan dam. Israel, in collusion with England and France, invades Egypt taking the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Anglo-French forces bomb Egypt and the Anglo-French alliance seizes the Suez Canal zone. The canal reopens under Egyptian control.

1958

Egypt and Syria combine to form the United Arab Republic. This dissolves in bitterness in September 1961.

1958

First civil war in Lebanon begins.

1970

King Hussein sees the PLO as a threat to his Hashemite rule and Jordan expels Palestinian guerrillas, declaring martial law. When 250 Syrian tanks move into northern Lebanon in support of the PLO, Israel comes to Jordan's aid and the Syrian threat is averted. The PLO moves its headquarters to Lebanon. Hafez al-Asad takes power in Syria.

1975

The Lebanese civil war starts and Syrian 'peacekeeping' forces move into Beirut in the summer of 1976. PLO launches attacks across the border into Israel.

1982

A Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the Syrian city of Hama is crushed by President Asad's regime at the cost of some 20,000-40,000 lives.

1984

US troops leave Lebanon after a suicide bomber kills 241 Marines.

1987

Palestinians begin the first Intifada (Uprising) against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel responds with curfews and mass arrests.

1989

The Taif Agreement maintained sectarian divisions in government and led to the end of the civil war in Lebanon. It stipulated that Syria withdraw its troops to the border and leave within 2 years. But it did reorient Lebanon toward Syria (and in general the Arab world) and it also reduced the powers of the (Christian) presidency in favour of the (Sunni) premiership.

1995-1996

Israeli and Syrian delegations hold direct talks at the Wye Plantation in Maryland to discuss a possible framework for peace between the two countries. The talks fail.

2000

Israel, in a hasty retreat following the collapse of its ally, the South Lebanese Army, ends its 22-year occupation of southern Lebanon, and withdraws from its self-declared 'security zone.' Hezbollah calls the withdrawal, the Arabs' first military victory over Israel in 50 years!

2000

Violence flares in the Old City of Jerusalem after a provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa mosque complex by the Israeli Likud leader Ariel Sharon. Mr Sharon is unpopular with Palestinians because of his role in the massacre of thousands of Palestinian refugees during Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and his illegal settlement-building.

2000

In Syria President Hafez al-Asad (69), the 'Lion of Damascus', dies. His son Bashar al-Asad (34) is named his successor.

2001

Somewhere in the world, a section of the proletariat is on strike dreaming of a life worth living. The episode is missed by the world media and all hitherto chronologists.

2002

A large area of the Jenin refugee camp is flattened by Israeli forces in a major week-long military operation. A siege develops at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem where up to 50 Palestinian 'militants' are surrounded by Israeli troops.

2002

US immigration officials seized Maher Arar, a Syrian-born Canadian, after his name popped up on a watch list at JFK. US officials refused to allow legal council or a phone call. The CIA questioned him and then handed him over to Syrian intelligence where he was held and

tortured for 10 months before being released. The case came to be called an instance of 'torture by proxy'.

2004

Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, is assassinated by French doctors in a Paris military hospital (or so they say!). Kurdish uprising in Qamishli put down ruthlessly.

2005

Melancholic Troglodytes throat-gag Zizek, who remains totally silent during the 32 second ordeal! The masses rejoice!

2007

Syrian oil exports were expected to almost cease by this time.

2008

Syrian and Lebanese bourgeoisie establish diplomatic ties for the first time after years of distrust and tension. *Melancholic Troglodytes* are thrown out of the 'anti-capitalist' movement for date-raping Chomsky and Negri! What a night that was ☺

2010

As a sign that the 'Middle Eastern' proletariat has gone *temporarily* gaga, the Iranian President, Ahmadi-Nezhad, is received as a hero by 'Southern Lebanon'. Yes, things *were* that bad!

2011

Hezbollah brings down the coalition government as a protest against the impending indictment of its operatives in the 2005 Hariri assassination. And then, as if by a miracle, The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt erupts.

2011

In March thousands demand release of 'all political prisoners' in Damascus. A group calling itself 'Syrian Revolution against Bashar Asad' calls for more demonstrations. Every new death becomes a 'political funeral' against the regime. A mosque in the southern city of Daraa is assaulted by the army. Daraa's governor resigns under pressure from demonstrators. Hundreds of Syrians protested in Homs, Aleppo, Daraa and the coastal city of Banias. Hama is turned into rubble. On March 17th, 'The Friday of Dignity', the momentum picked up. Ah, but exactly is 'dignity'? (cf. Melancholic Troglodytes, 2006).

2011

Children are arrested for writing anti-government graffiti. Demonstrations in support of the children are met with bullets. Neo-liberal reforms have lowered the living standard of millions of Syrians. Both working and (some sections of the) middle classes are disgruntled, although the regime can still mobilise hundreds of thousands to come out in support. Cabinet 'resigns'! Amidst the killings, arrests and tortures no one notices the lifting of the state of emergency. In August Iran, Syria's staunchest ally, calls on Asad to consider protestors' demands! Cheeky fuckers!!!

Maps of the Levant

Melancholic Troglodytes have a problem or two with maps. Firstly, maps tend to freeze and reify fluid social relations. In so doing they tend to de-memorise the proletariat. Secondly, they reinforce every vile and obnoxious attribute of the dominant bourgeois ideology, such as *common sense*, dualistic thinking, empiricism, determinism, fetishism, instrumentalism, nationalism, borders and the dictatorship of time and space. Thirdly, maps are inherently de-humanising which is why historically they have been used for promoting colonisation in *virgin and unpopulated lands* (O'Brien 2004). Fourthly, maps are about creating and regulating desire in readers. If they depict military deployment, as many computer-generated and satellite imagery seem to, the result is the promotion of warfare. Fifthly, maps are *banal* (Billig 2002), which is why their ideological power usually goes unnoticed. For instance, weather reports are constantly flagging national entities even though clouds, rain-storms and hurricanes do not recognise artificial boundaries. Maps are dangerous precisely because they are banal.
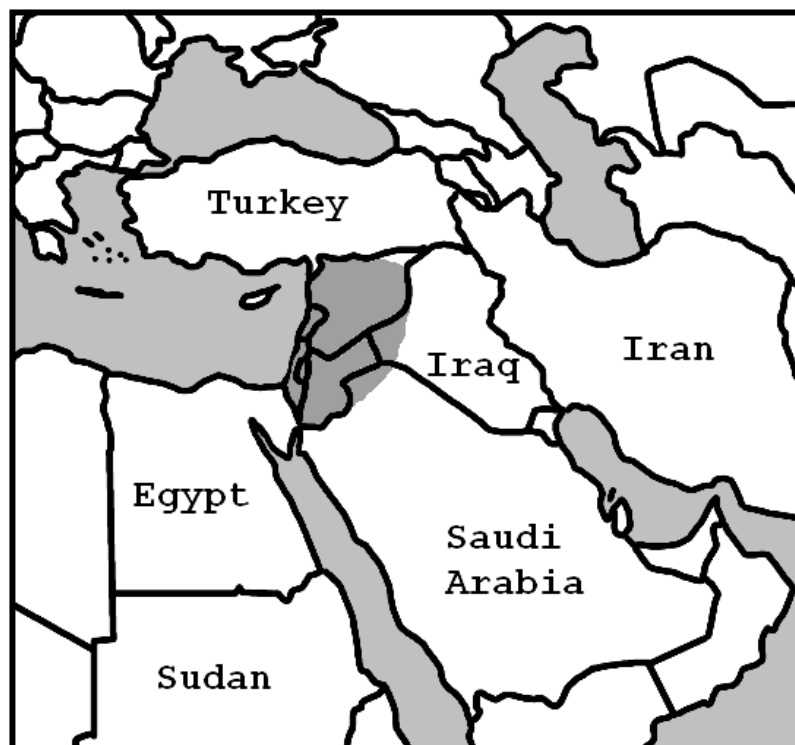
Levant in relationship to the rest of the Middle East

Levant (with cities but without national borders)
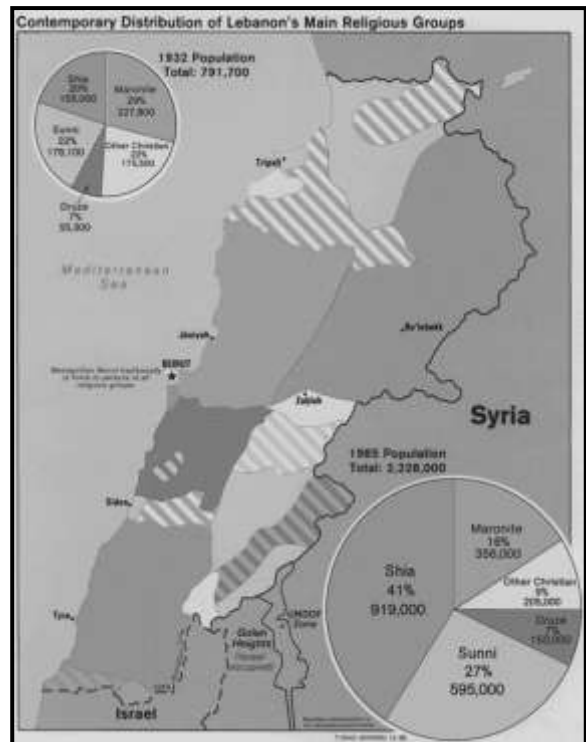
Where are all the atheists?
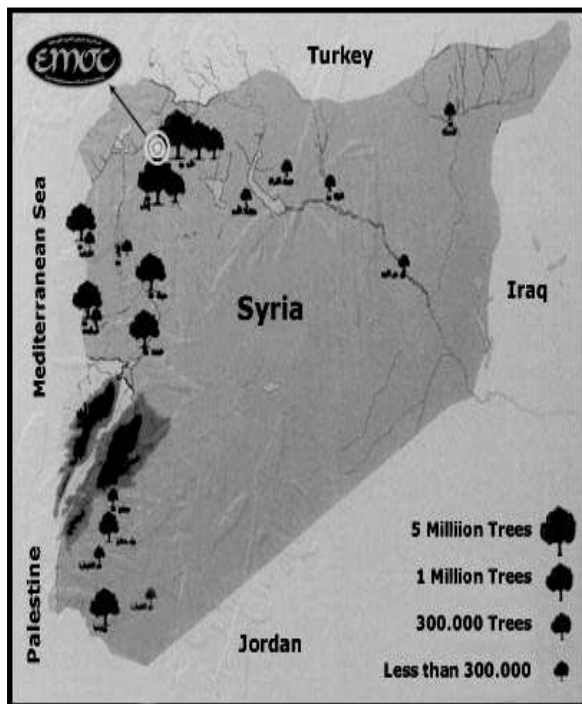
Syria (for tree lovers)

Damascus old town

Statistics of the Levant

Melancholic Troglodytes have a problem or two with statistics. Firstly, statistics attempt to emasculate in quantitative terms entities that are basically qualitative- freedom, development, motivation, happiness, etc. Secondly, statistical categories usually act to classify and disempower people. One name for statistics, especially in France, had been 'moral science' (Hacking 1981: 16). This 'moral science' was initially used to criminalise unruly proletarians. Thirdly, statistics are ideologically embedded. What contemporary statisticians call 'regression to the mean', for instance, was referred to by Francis Galton as 'regression to mediocrity' (Hacking 1981: 21). Fourthly, since the age of industrialisation the 'normalising' tendencies in statistics have helped create a dehumanising bureaucracy. Fifthly, fetishisation of numbers and data has created a mistrust of theory and dissent. 'In 1710, John Arbuthnot proved the existence of God using a kind of significance test!' (Gigerenzer 1996: 43). Sixthly, statistics are usually misapplied to buttress naïve objectivity and hierarchy.

Melancholic Troglodytes do not reject statistics, figures and data out of hand, as can be seen below. We merely wish to take a critical approach toward statistics in an attempt to supersede the false dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative dimensions of interpretation (cf. http://www.radstats.org.uk/). The following data have been lifted from bourgeois websites since 'proletarian data gathering' is not a practical option for the time being (CIA World Fact Book 2005).

2010 CIA ESTIMATES	Syria	Lebanon	Israel
Population	22 million	4.1 million	7.4 million
Life expectancy	74 yrs	75 yrs	81 yrs
Literacy rates	79.6 %	87.4%	97 %
Public debt	32 % of GDP	156 % of GDP	78 % of GDP
Class-conscious proletarians	14.5 %	19 %	7.1%
Unemployment rate	8.5 %	9.2 %	7.6 %
Gross Domestic Products (GDP)	$101 billion	$54 billion	$206 billion
Per capita GDP	$4,600	$13,200	$28,400
Current account balance	-$326 million	-$3.682 billion	$7.22 billion
Debt - external	$7.621 billion	$21.11 billion	$84.69 billion
Reserves of foreign exchange	$6.328 billion	$39.16 billion	$60.61 billion
Military expenditure- % of GDP	5.9 %	3.1 %	7.3 %

Recent Lebanese demonstrations

Godfathers of Levant: Syrian-Lebanese dispute and its implications for the class struggle

Godfather II (you know, the one with Robert De Niro)

The Ottoman empire (circa. 1516-1918), "the longest continuous dynastic state in human history" (Beinin 2001: 5), has left an indelible mark on the region. This influence did not suddenly vanish at the end of World War I, when the victorious entente powers dismantled the empire.

Under the 'tutelage' of the Ottomans, Syria was a largely self-sufficient agrarian and trade-based economy (Lesch 1999: 94). "The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, as well as the continuing economic problems of the Ottoman Empire in general by the 1870s (climaxing with its bankruptcy in 1875), forced a downturn in the Syrian economy that lasted into the early twentieth century" (Lesch 1999: 94). According to Beinin (2001: 16), "the Ottoman agrarian regime was neither an Asiatic nor a feudal mode of production," although it shared a number of characteristics with both. The Ottoman state administered the largest share of the land. Interestingly, the "Ottoman peasants who farmed state administered lands had more rights than European feudal tenants because they could not be evicted so long as they maintained cultivation and paid taxes" (Beinin 2001: 15).

In urban areas, artisans were organised into a guild system that grew out of "popular religious or social solidarity associations that became consolidated as craft associations between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries" (ibid., 17). Guilds turned into impressive nodes of power acting to "restrain unfair competition, regulate entry into professions, and establish standards of quality" (ibid.). They worked on the assumption that every producer had the right to a certain share of the market. This approach led to the producers of Aleppo selling more goods to France than they imported by the end of the eighteenth century (ibid., 23).

When whiggish and orientalist historians decry the slow uptake of capitalist relations in the Middle East, they tend to portray the strength of artisans and peasants in maintaining their class interests as mere economic impediments or cultural backwardness. Hinnebusch (1997: 249) has shown how such a perspective can easily lead to either economic or cultural determinism. The defensive reflexes of the Levant's underbelly need to be born in mind when contemporary analysts disparage proletarian rejection of bourgeois *progress*, whether the promotion of *progress* emanates from Bashar al-Asad's technocrats, the deceased Hariri or White House ayatollahs.

> Certainly, Don Corleone can present a bill for such services. After all, we're not Communists. But he must let us draw the water from the well.

"They worked on the assumption that every producer had the right to a certain share of the market."

In modern times, external forces began interfering with the Levant during the nineteenth century but it was the crumbling of the Ottoman empire that gave Britain and France the opportunity to move in. The secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 was the diplomatic culmination of this process. Accordingly, "this envisaged a French sphere of influence in Lebanon and Syria, while Britain would control Palestine, Iraq and a new kingdom of Jordan" (Ashford 2005: 8). The French bourgeoisie gerrymandered their sphere of influence, as will the Syrian bourgeoisie many years later, to ensure the newly created Lebanese state would have a competing patchwork of 'ethnicities' and religions.

The Muslims were divided into areas more or less associated with Shi'a, Sunni and Druze *communities*. However, it was the Maronite Christians (The Maronites took their name from the fifth century Saint Maro, a Syrian hermit who died in 435 AD. They have been the traditional allies of the French bourgeoisie) who were given a 'wafer-thin majority' in Lebanon (Ashford 2005: 8; Schwartz 2005: 2). In Syria proper, the French pursued their divide and rule policy by creating "a semi-autonomous Alawi state in the north–west and a similar Druze state in the south" (George 2003: 65).

There were anti-colonial uprisings, peasant uprisings and strikes in what used to be called 'Greater Syria' (today's Syria, Lebanon and parts of Turkey, Jordan and Israel). "In fact," writes Beinin (2001: 61), "from the late eighteenth century to the Syrian revolt of 1925-27 there were over thirty Druze and Alawi peasant revolts and half a dozen or more revolts in Mount Lebanon and the coastal mountains over northern Syria."

In 1920 "Railway and tramway workers, printers, glass and textile workers, electric company workers and artisans launched a wave of strikes demanding higher wages" (Beinin 2001: 90). When in the same year, Emir Faisal acquiesced to a French ultimatum, "crowds took to the streets, accusing the emir of selling the nation like merchandise and denouncing him as an outsider and traitor. Government buildings, including the emir's palace and citadels in most cities, were attacked, political prisoners were freed and the arms stored in the citadels distributed" (Gelvin 1994: 39). "Between 1925 and 1926," writes Ashford (2005: 8) "a massive [peasant-based] revolt spread in opposition to colonial rule which the French crushed with difficulty, twice bombing the capital Damascus. Finally, in 1946 another popular rebellion forced the French to evacuate their troops." It would be erroneous, however, to portray the resistance that took place in this period as merely part of a nationalistic revolt against colonialism. Many workers refused to succumb to nationalism and struggled against both native bosses and French authorities.

The 1946 struggle of women tobacco workers at the Beirut branch of the Regie (a French-Lebanese consortium which held a monopoly of Lebanese tobacco) is a case in point. It is estimated that the "overwhelming number of female strikers may have been single and below the age of thirty" (Abisaab 2004: 69). The workers occupied the factory and the central warehouse of the Regie to prevent the loading of shipment of cigarettes. They also formed a strike committee "and called upon male workers to follow suit" (Abisaab 2004: 56). By their actions they tied together anti-colonial and labour demands, "casting their roles not in terms of domesticity or pre-industrial images of motherhood, but rather in terms of waged work" (Abisaab 2004: 55). The management of Regie with the help of the Lebanese government smashed the strike but not before the strike became the focus of proletarian unity throughout Lebanon. There were even solidarity strikes by Syrian workers who refused to be used by Regie as scabs. Just as significantly, "the women exhibited little national paraphernalia during this phase and in later confrontations with the police, thus avoiding the use of nationalist symbols to claim their rights as citizens" (Abisaab 2004: 57). The contrast with recent Lebanese and Syrian flag-waving demonstrations cannot be starker. When one observes that there was also an abundance of nationalist paraphernalia in both the 2005 anti- *and* pro-Syrian demonstrations in Beirut, the radicalism of the 1946 Regie strikers becomes even more impressive.

In Syria, from the outset, there were two forms of nationalism competing for the people's affections (Tripp 2001: 200). First, there was the pan-nationalism of the ruling elite, aided by the 'men of letter' who circulated petitions demanding the right to shape the national identity in return for 'educating the masses' (Gelvin 1994: 26); and, secondly, there was the populist nationalism of all those who felt neglected and marginalised "by economic and status

revolutions and who shared a common resentment and nostalgia" (Gelvin 1994: 27). At the end of W/W I, this latter populist grouping of nationalists included "conservative notables, lower-middle class religious dignitaries, shopkeepers, textiles and grain merchants, and local toughs" who joined together to form innovative national and local defence committees (Gelvin 1994: 26). The two nationalistic camps attempted to mobilise the masses behind reactionary agendas. It is claimed much of the urban population was indifferent to the activities of both camps (Tripp 2001: 201). When nationalists were successful in galvanising crowds, the pan-Arabist elite used demonstrations to reinforce the verticality of political relationships and induce sacrifices such as acquisition to conscription and supplementary taxes. "In contrast, populist groups used demonstrations to represent a political community in which relationships of power were primarily horizontal and in which civil society was not only separate from the state, but was predominant" (Gelvin 1994: 6). In short, those in charge (pan-Arabist elite) emphasised political society and used civil society in order to modernise their hold on power, whereas those seeking power (populist nationalists) emphasised civil society as a tool for winning political power. Today, these tendencies still compete with each other in both the Levant and in large swathes of the 'anti-globalisation' racket (see the conclusion for a vital distinction between 'middle class anti-globalisers' and 'anti-capitalists).
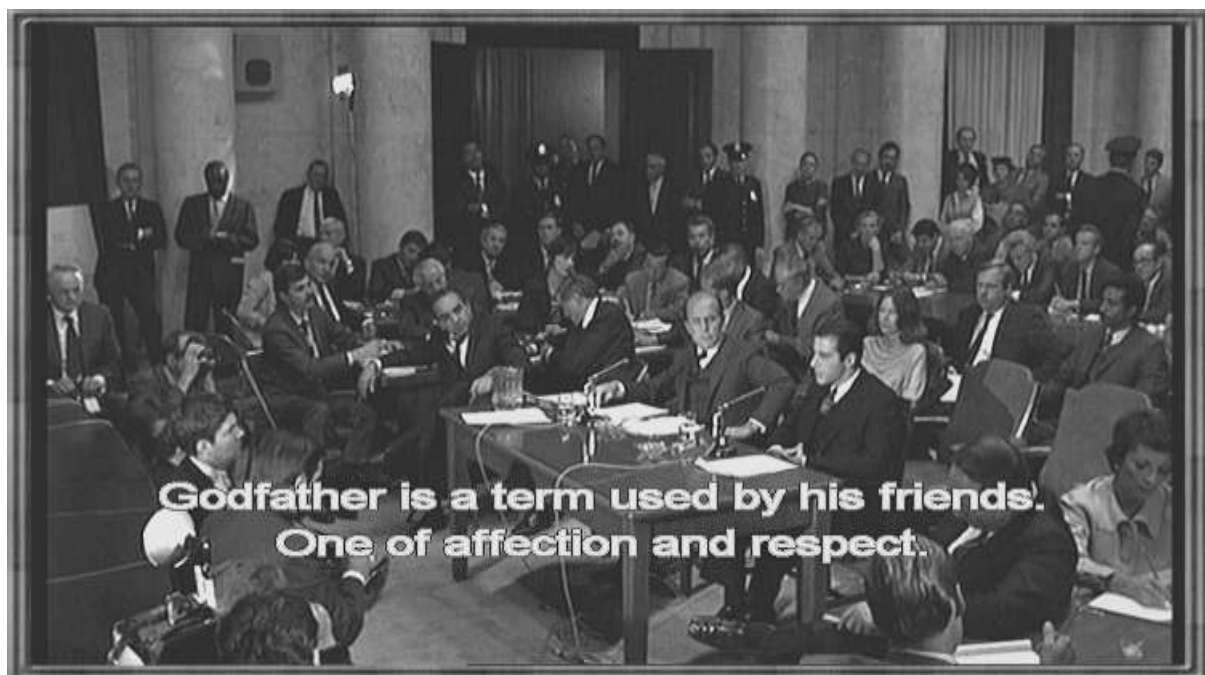
"In Syria, from the outset, there were two forms of nationalism competing for the people's affections."

By the 1920s and 1930s, pan-Arabism had begun to get the better of local populist nationalism as "Arabism came to be defined by language rather than by geography" (Devlin 1991: 1397). However, the gradual evolution of pan-Arabism into Baathism in Iraq and Syria was mired by inconsistencies and antagonisms. At the outset Baathism's apparent ability to

transcend religious and ethnic divisions appealed to various factions within the elite. Two of its main theoreticians, the orthodox Christian Michel Aflaq and the Sunni Muslim Salah al-Din Batar, were from "Damascene merchant families of middling status" (Devlin 1991: 1397). Their slogan 'Unity, freedom, socialism' encapsulates their politics: 'Unity' of all Arabs, 'freedom' from foreign control and 'Socialism' (meaning 'state capitalism'), as the tool for achieving their modernist goals. The founding congress of the Baath Party took place in 1947, in Damascus, with about 200 attendees (Devlin 1991: 1398). Most of the members were "students from rural background- a reflection of the high proportion of teachers in the Party's leadership" (George 2003: 66). So the Baath Party had played no part in the rebellion that finally ousted the French a year earlier in 1946. Ashford (2005: 8) writes, "the landowners and merchants who formed the first post-independence government soon faced workers' strikes for better pay and conditions, while peasants rebelled."

In the 1950s, as a result of political mergers, the Baath Party had become "a coalition of the white-collar urban class, school teachers, government employees and the like, with revolutionary [sic!] peasants" (George 2003: 67). During this time "vigorously supported by the Baath leaders, a delegation of [nationalist] Syrian officers went to Cairo … and asked Nasser [the foremost Arab nationalist of the era] to agree to the union of Syria and Egypt" (Devlin 1991: 1400). In time Syrian nationalists would come to rue this overture, since Nasser was a dictator who tolerated no rival and brook no power-sharing arrangement. Nasser agreed to the request after much deliberation on condition that all political parties in Syria dissolve in favour of a single, mass party. Most Syrian leaders agreed, some with misgivings. The Communist [i.e., Leninist] Party of Syria knew what was coming and decided to go underground. Aflaq and Bitar foolishly agreed to dissolve the party without consulting members, a move that stunned party members and caused much friction and alienation amongst working class members. Nasser became the de facto leader of the United Arab Republic (UAR). "The union cabinet sat in Cairo, and decisions were made there" (Devlin 1991: 1400).

"The Communist [i.e., Leninist] Party of Syria knew what was coming and decided to go underground."

Nasser's dictatorial approach, his treatment of Syria as Egypt's Northern Province, and the economic impact of his land reforms led major units of the Syrian army to rise in rebellion in 1959. The rightist officers were ably supported by Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Although Nasser's

instincts were to fight to save the UAR, he was left with few options and in 1961 the UAR was dissolved. Apologists for Nasserism (e.g., see the latest sycophantic rants of the reactionary wanker, Tariq Ali, 2004: 33-34), should note that the infamous *mukhaberat* made their first appearance during Nasser's reign over Syria. Moreover, the labour code banning strikes in Syria (which are still operational today) were imported from Egypt courtesy of Don Nasser.

Syrian Baathists became even more authoritarian after their bitter experience with Nasser. Military commanders became more influential in the everyday running of the party. "Selection … replaced election" (Devlin 1991: 1402) and when in 1963 a coalition of Baathist and non-Baathist officers joined forces to seize the state, the Baath had only around 2,500 members (George 2003: 68). Most of the officers seem to have been from the Alawi clan, "a historically underprivileged and oppressed rural community from a minority Shi'a sect" (Mora and Wiktorowicz 2003: 108). Their lack of a popular base made the Syrian Baathists paranoid and repressive from the outset, a custom they were unable to relinquish even in those brief periods when they enjoyed social popularity (Seale 1995: 85). The next seven years witnessed a protracted intra-classist feud within the Syrian ruling class with two poles- the state capitalist oriented wing supported by Baath party and the more 'pragmatic' military wing supported by a very shrewd and opportunistic Hafiz al-Asad. Using the 1967 defeat by Israel as a pretext to get rid of his rivals, Asad united these two factions under the auspices of the Alawi clan who have been at the apex of Syrian society ever since.

The Godfather (the original one with Marlon Brando)

Hafiz al-Asad ruled Syria from 1970-2000. Numerous US presidents privately described him as "extraordinarily intelligent and the premier strategic thinker of the Arab world" (Kessler 2000: 69), whilst U.S. interlocutors were impressed by his ability to hold his bladder during marathon negotiating sessions (Zizzer 2003: 31). During this time Syria fought and lost another war to Israel (1973), two attempts at economic 'liberalisation' met with limited success, a Muslim rebellion was crushed by the state (1982), and Syria became embroiled in Lebanon (1976-present) and the First Gulf War (1990), both at the behest of the USA. Despite these setbacks the period is perceived nostalgically by many Syrians as a golden age of stability!

One of Hafiz al-Asad's first tasks was to restructure the weakened Baath party. He needed the party, after all, to garner proletarian support for various economic and military campaigns (Perthes 1995: 154). But what he needed was a more conformist party that would do his bidding. He dramatically expanded membership figures. According to Alan George (2003: 71) "Today, party membership is put at 1.8 million- 18 per cent of the fourteen plus age group." He also increased the remit of various 'populist organisations' in order to enhance his grip on rural and urban workers. The largest of these organisations is the General Union of Peasants with just under one million members. Urban 'public' workers are controlled by the General

Federation of Trade Unions which links 194 trade unions with a slightly smaller overall membership than the General Union of Peasants. Some of the most strategic segments of the proletariat such as petroleum and chemical workers, transport and information workers are 'mobilised' by Syrian godfathers within this body. Workers in the 'private' sector have been conservatively estimated at 400,000, around 20% of whom are unionised (terms like 'public' and 'private' are mystifying since all property in Syria, as elsewhere, is *private* property and the overwhelming majority of this private property belongs to the ruling classes). There are women's organisations, writers' organisations, university student organisations and various professional organisations. These latter groupings of doctors, lawyers and engineers have traditionally been less conformist and, in fact, played "an important role in the opposition movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s when their members suffered arrests and torture" (George 2003: 75-76).

Godfather, it's time for a break!

"… U.S. interlocutors were impressed by his ability to hold his bladder during marathon negotiating sessions …"

Aoude (1997: 191) writes, "by 1970, Syria became a net importer of food stuffs, which eventually, along with industrialisation and consumer goods imports, increased the trade deficit and developed a serious foreign exchange crisis." The ruling class decided to use this crisis to restructure Syrian capitalism. Once Hafiz al-Asad felt secure, he launched the first attempt at liberalisation in 1973. Pretentiously referred to as 'the infitah [opening] of abundance' (1973-1981), the measure was intended to increase the rate of exploitation by restructuring both rural and urban environments. In the countryside land reform allowed middle-ranking peasants to forge a profitable alliance with wealthy farmers and agribusiness at the expense of small peasants and rural wage-slaves (Aoude 1997: 192). Since the state bourgeoisie (meaning Asad, the Baath party, high ranking military officers and the trade union hierarchy) still had the upper hand within the ruling class, they managed to draw a red line around nationalised industries such as banking, mining, oil, insurance and manufacturing of strategic goods. Entrepreneurs would have to wait many years before gradually resting these segments of the economy away from the state bourgeoisie. However, Asad was more than willing to use the 'infitah of abundance' to create a mixed economy in areas such as tourism.

A closer look at the changes instituted in tourism sheds light on the evolution of Syrian capitalism. The reasons they moved into tourism are not very different from the Corleone family seeking interests in the tourist industries of Cuba and Las Vegas. "First," explains Gray (1997: 58), "the potential for tourism to generate foreign currency is important, all the more so in states ... suffering balance of payment problems. Second is the fact that tourism is labour intensive, and creates employment throughout the economy; tourists spend money on hotels, transport, and meals, but also on a wide variety of goods and services. Third, is the fact that the

My father is no different than any other powerful man … any man who's responsible for other people, like a senator or president.

You know how naïve you sound … senators and presidents don't have men killed.

Oh, who's being naïve, Kay?

tourism industry does not, on the whole, require expensive or complex technology or a highly skilled workforce [with the exception of the need to operate an airline]."

Syria, by all accounts, has a whole host of tourist attractions, spread across the country and easily accessible. Traditional industries in the countryside (bedrock of the Syrian ruling class) could potentially benefit. Finally, and this is very significant for a regime as paranoid as the Syrian state, "tourists themselves pose little threat to the stability or popularity of the regime" (Gray 1997: 60).

In keeping with the historical analogy of the mafia in Las Vegas, the initial profits from the Syrian tourist industry were small. However, during the second infitah (1986-2000), substantial expatriate investment began to filter through and a 'new bourgeois class' coalesced around hotel and restaurant ownership. These new capitalists are said to be

We are bigger than US Steel Michael!

"… The reasons they moved into tourism are not very different from the Corleone family …"

exempt from labour laws, allowing them to sack 'obstinate' workers at will (Gray 1997: 65). Vast profits have enabled them to converge with the bourgeois elite represented by the chambers of commerce and industry. Although relative late-comers to tourism and not as successful as Israel, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco in this regard, Syria has been developing joint-tourist agreements with Lebanon and Jordan. It is hoped that tourism will become one of the three most important sources of foreign income and employment for Syria. This section of the economy, at least, could gain greatly from a 'peace-dividend' with Israel.

Contrariwise what has become known as the Syrian 'military-mercantile-complex' does not seek a lasting capitalist peace throughout the Levant (nor, incidentally, does this grouping seek a full frontal confrontation with Israel which would be suicidal given the imbalance of forces, but rather the continuation of *a fake state of emergency*). At the core of this 'military-merchant-complex' is an uneasy alliance between Alawi officers (state bourgeoisie) and Sunni capitalists (old private bourgeoisie). The unease and lack of trust is illustrated by the low incidence of intermarriage between the two groups (Hinnebusch 1997: 252). It has been suggested Bashar al-Asad's marriage to a young Syrian Sunni woman from London was perhaps an attempt "to widen the family base within the country and open it to Europe" (Glass 2005: 1).

"The man is *egotistical* because he consumes love, and the woman is *generous* because she produces it."

- L. Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction*, 1995: 75.

"… an attempt to widen the family base within the country."

As Mora and Wiktorowicz (2003: 113) make clear, "the regime has lavished spending on the military, though it has not been involved in major combat operations since 1973. From 1977 to 1988, military spending (including Soviet arms transfers) was estimated at 30 percent of GDR and the army (including reserves) employed 21 percent of the male labor force … the high level of spending attracted strategic rents from regional sponsors …" The rent (not dissimilar to the protection money the Corleone accrue from their clients) is not to be scuffed at. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the dividend from other Arab countries was at 5 to 6 percent of GDP (Mora and Wiktorowicz 2003: 113). There is also open 'protection' work for the army, which in the continued absence of a proper and binding legal system, offers its muscle to businesses for 'protection'.

The military through its contacts in the government and the Alawi clan has over the years gained substantial interests in various sections of the economy including "public works, construction, basic industry, farm production, and the manufacturing of batteries, bottled mineral water, and furniture" (Richards and Waterbury 1997: 431). Hanna Batatu (1999: 215-225) estimated that 61% of the inner circle of decision-makers, whose power exceeds the parliament and the party and who are only unanswerable to the President, came from the Alawi clan. In return for their loyalty, many military officers were allowed to run illicit smuggling operations from Lebanon (Mora and Wiktorowicz 2003: 113) - a perk which has recently come to an end. Drugs, tobacco and luxury cars used to be favourite commodities for the smugglers. Although the 'military-merchant-complex' may prefer to continue the pretence of hostility against Israel in order to guarantee its budget, it is also ideally placed to take advantage of further liberalisations. Access to cheap labour power and raw materials gives them the edge over rival bourgeois 'families'.

Following Marx (1852/1981: 143-249), a number of writers have described the Syrian regime as a *Bonapartist* state (Hinnebusch 1997). There is *some* truth in this, at least under the rule of Hafiz al-Asad (1970-2000). By Bonapartism Marx was referring to an exceptional situation where the working classes are too weak to affirm their own hegemony and where factions of the ruling class cancel each other out and thus cannot rule amicably through the more stable form of liberalism and the rule of law. The executive branch, usually under the 'divine' leadership of a 'charismatic' individual, then steps in as a kind of dictatorial mediator, acquiring for the moment, a certain degree of relative autonomy. This 'charismatic' individual who 'represents' the small-holding peasantry, attempts to speak for all classes in society through a populist ideology (Bottomore *et al.* 1988: 53).

Syrian 'Bonapartism' certainly enjoyed formidable power under Hafiz al-Asad, although it would be folly to assume emergency-Bonapartism can last for three full decades without 'normalising' tendencies reasserting themselves. Perhaps it would be more accurate to characterise the state as a kind of "presidential monarchy, resting on huge civil and military bureaucracies, whose chain of command are reinforced by patronage and kinship" (Hinnebusch 1997: 250). This 'Bonapartist' regime, based on the passive 'support' of unionised workers, public employees and small peasants, knows itself to be a temporary measure. It must

modernise its base, structure and superstructure if Syrian capitalism is to grow and yet to do so would be to attack the very constituencies it depends on for its survival.

Moreover, a strong state is needed to manage liberalisation and the synchronisation of base, structure and superstructure. "The proper sequence of liberalisation is to expand the private sector before tackling reform of the public sector so as to have a dynamic private economy able to absorb the resultant unemployment" (Hinnebusch 1997: 255). The creation of a mixed economy in tourism and agriculture was a prerequisite of this strategy. The state contributes land and infrastructure, while the 'private' sector contributes capital and entrepreneurship. Following this first phase, carried out in the 1970s and 1980s, the welfare system (notably subsidised food, fertilisers and medicine), will be curtailed. Already this has led to murmurs of discontent amongst workers. According to Hinnebusch (1997: 261), "the private sector, which had only accounted for about 35% of gross fixed capital formation from 1970-85, climbed to 52% of the total in 1989 and 66% in 1992."

However, even Bonapartism is not always in complete charge of affairs. There were a number of challenges to the state under the reign of Hafiz al-Asad, admittedly not all of them emanating from a revolutionary proletarian direction. There was, for example, the persistent recalcitrance of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, with serious consequences for Syrian stability itself. An alliance between these refugees with the Lebanese *left* (i.e., the left wing of capital in the shape of the National Movement, an assortment of Baathists, Nasserists and Leninists) in the 1970s, threatened the pro-Western (Maronite Christian dominated) government. Syria was encouraged to intervene by both the US and Israel. After calculating the pros and cons of the situation, the ever-pragmatic Hafiz al-Asad decided to invade. The Palestinian proletariat had to be subdued.

Almost immediately the Syrian army had to get its hands bloody. One of the most notorious barbarities of the occupation occurred at the Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp, in East Beirut. According to Ashford (2005: 8), "In April 1976 Syrian troops encircled a Palestinian camp at Tel al-Zaatar while the Christian militias carried out a massacre – the Israelis would do the same at Sabra and Shatilla camps in September 1982." Whilst Israel's invasions of Lebanon (in 1978 and then again in 1982) was posing new challenges, a prison revolt inside Syria (in the eastern desert near Tadmur) was put down at the cost of 1,000 lives (Ashford 2005: 9). Before 1980, the prisoners were mostly military personnel who violated military rules or were punished for misdemeanour. With the increasing military activities of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, the prison regime became more brutal. The Tadmur massacre was

Look how they massacred my boy.

"However, even Bonapartism is not always in complete charge of affairs."

in retaliation for a failed assassination attempt on the life of Asad in June 1980. Rumour has it that some of his own guards tried to kill him while he was coming out of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus's Old City.

A more serious threat surfaced in 1982 which culminated in a three-week uprising led by the Sunni Islamists of Muslim Brotherhood in the central city of Hama. Yassin-Kassab (2005: 1) has described how the Syrian regime's response resembles the US army's more recent destruction of Fallujah, "Enraged by what they perceive as the Westernising, anti-Islamic policies of the authorities, militants take control of a conservative Middle Eastern city. They impose their harsh version of Shari'a law on the inhabitants and launch attacks in other cities on government forces and any civilians associated with them ... Military command is unable and perhaps unwilling to distinguish between insurgents and civilians. Besides, an example needs to be made. The city is besieged, its roads closed so nobody can escape. The historic centre and residential areas are pulverized by aerial and artillery bombardment. There is intense house to house fighting, and then clearing operations ... Thousands are killed ..." George (2003: 16) estimated the casualties to be between 5,000-10,000, whilst Ashford (2005: 9) argues "at least 30,000 civilians" were killed. As Yassin-Kassab has argued this is an accurate description of the Hama massacre of 1982 which could double up as a narrative of the 'liberation' of Fallujah in 2004. The fear that this brutal massacre instilled in Syrians did not just scupper the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power, it also suppressed the nascent proletarian movement that was beginning to assert itself.

"… They impose their harsh version of Shari'a law on the inhabitants …"

The 1980s also witnessed a drop in oil prices, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982) and a mafia-style succession crisis (1983-84). The drop in oil prices "not only [adversely affected] Syria's own oil export revenues, but it also reduced remittances from abroad as well as financial aid from oil-rich Arab Gulf countries" (Lesch 1999: 96). The 1982 Israeli invasion could not be met by the Syrian military directly thus exposing the regime's hollow jingoism. The succession crisis occurred after exhaustion or a mild heart attack (depending on which report you choose to believe) had temporarily incapacitated Hafiz al-Asad. According to George (2003: 18), Asad "vested responsibility for managing state affairs in a six-man committee of trusted associates" (the Corleone would call them *consiglieri*). Alawi generals angered by their apparent demotion, encouraged Asad's brother, Rif'at, to oust the six-man committee. When Asad recovered, he punished his brother and seventy Alawi generals who were banished abroad. All but Rif'at were

soon recalled. Rif'at became a bit player of little consequence after this episode. Ironically, before Rif'at so clumsily ruined his chances of heading the family, he was Hafiz al-Asad's first choice as successor (Ghadbian 2001: 24).

Having weathered these storms, the regime was in a better position to tackle economic stagnation in the 1990s. It was aided in its task by "good harvests throughout the 1990s [which] produced a tremendous grain (mostly wheat) surplus" (Lesch 1999: 93). Greater agricultural output was prevented mainly due to the migration of many small peasants and rural wage-slaves to the cities. Incremental economic *progress* was made when Syria "concluded significant contracts with European partners (such as a $118 million deal with Ericsson to install telephone lines and a $400 million oil and gas deal with Elf Aquitaine and Conoco) and recently signed a framework for an association agreement with the European Union ... [known as the] Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Program" (Lesch 1999: 101). Shell and TotalFina also invested in new oil fields (Ashford 2005: 9). The multi-national, Nestle, is also an investor in the country's economy (Robinson 1998: 162). All this points to a patient strategic manoeuvre on the part of the European Union whose interests would be undermined by a US-Israeli military invasion of Syria. However, since 'Europe' was so woefully unable to prevent the loss of its investments in Iraq, it would be naïve to assume it could be used by the region's ruling class as a counterpoint to US aggression, unless the balance of forces between Europe and USA shifts in favour of the former.

You're not gonna wanna hear this Sonny, but if your father dies, you make the deal.

"... Hafiz al-Asad 'vested responsibility for managing state affairs in a six-man committee of trusted associates' (the Corleone would call them *consiglieri*) ..."

During the 1990s the number of wage slaves grew steadily. No reliable figures are available and the ones brandied about by scholars employ sociological criteria and should, therefore, be treated with extreme caution. However, to give an idea, we could quote Aoude (1997: 192), "Many in the urban working class are of rural origins. This class is weak politically even though it comprises 35 percent of the population. In the early 1990s, the average wage in the public sector workers covered only one-third of a worker's family expenses. However, private sector workers are employed in small enterprises where the labor code does not apply fully." Aoude also mentions another dubious sociological category, the 'semi-proletarians'. He defines this group as "the temporarily employed and vendors, comprising 15 percent of the population" (Aoude 1997: 192). This latter group, he argues, is a greater threat to the regime since their precarious existence compels them to seek violent confrontation. Similarly, "the self-employed middle class [about 17 percent of the population] is anti-regime and religiously conservative but poses no threat because a significant part of it has reached a modus vivendi with the regime" (Aoude 1997: 192). Given that revolutionary definitions of social class are more expansive than sociological categorisations, it is likely that many rural workers, 'semi-proletarians' and even 'self-employed middle class' individuals should be included as part of the Syrian proletariat. When one adds to this estimate, Syrian workers employed throughout Lebanon and the Gulf States, the contours of the new Syrian proletariat begin to take shape.

The Syrian proletariat found itself increasingly at odds with the regime's *modernisation* policies. The alienation of this vital group, forced the state bourgeoisie to forge more durable ties with other factions of the ruling class as a precaution against future social unrest. The 'private bourgeoisie' is, according to Hinnebusch (1997: 252), "still politically weak ... it is divided between pro-regime new bourgeoisie and elements of the older bourgeoisie still unreconciled with the regime." Although some sections of the 'private bourgeoisie' have entered into a long-term alliance with the 'state bourgeoisie', other factions have preferred to forge alliances with the urban *petty* bourgeoisie.

"... a greater threat to the regime since their precarious existence compels them to seek violent confrontation ..."

We would not like to give the impression that the new bourgeois alliances being forged are merely a knee-jerk response to proletarian intransigence- that would be wishful thinking. Sometimes the reason is far more mundane. For example, in the 1980s lack of funds prevented the state bourgeoisie "[from preventing] scrap metal to run the public iron and aluminium factories," forcing it to rely on private bourgeois financiers (Hinnebusch 1997: 253). A division of labour seems to be forming "in which the public sector continues to meet local needs and serve the regime's constituency [i.e., public workers and peasants] while the private sector

specialises in production for export" (Hinnebusch 1997: 255). The establishment of a stock market is a measure intended to further this internal accumulation of capital and catalyze the "natural expansion of small industries into larger scale firms" (Hinnebusch 1997: 262). It is also hoped that once a transparent investment law is operational, it will attract some of the $60 billion held by Syrians abroad. At the end of Hafiz al-Asad's reign, we were therefore witnessing a recomposition of both capitalists and proletarians - a process pushed forward by a combination of internal and external tensions.

"I do heartily repent; I repent I had not done more Mischief, and that we did not cut the Throats of them that took us, and [addressing the authorities] I am extreamly sorry that you an't hanged as well as we."
- Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations,* 2004: 168.

"… At the end of Hafiz al-Asad's reign, we were therefore witnessing a recomposition of both capitalists and proletarians …"

Godfather III (the one with Al Pacino and Andy Garcia)

After his father's death in 2000, Bashar al-Asad came to power with a clear agenda. As with Michael Corleone, who dreamed of legalising the family business, Bashar al-Asad's main objective was to normalise Syrian capitalism, which nowadays means pursuing neo-liberal policies. And again just like Michael Corleone, Bashar's carefully thought-out plans soon lay in ruins due to the machinations of dark and secretive forces beyond his control.

In his inaugural speech, Bashar's buzz-words were 'modernisation' and 'technology' (George 2003: 32). By Arab bourgeois standard, his assessment was frank. His intentions were to speed up his father's reforms, starting with the 'base' and the 'structures' of Syrian capitalism and hope that the 'superstructure' will fall into concordance at a later date and with a minimum of friction. The 'superstructure', or at least that part of it characterised by marginalised middle class activists, however, had a different agenda. Long-standing intellectual dissidents, such as the filmmaker Nabil al-Maleh and the writer Michel Kilo, lost no time in inaugurating what later became known as Syria's civil society movement. Kilo was very clear that "the only social force able to implement a political project is the middle class" (quoted in George 2003: 34). Intellectuals, lawyers, professionals and students were to be galvanised as the agent of political change. In a throw-back to previous bourgeois/petty-bourgeois reform movements, the ensuing political upheavals of 2000 became known as the 'Damascus Spring.'

The 'movement' soon won the support of 'independent' parliamentarians such as Riad Seif who, benefiting from his parliamentary immunity, organised study groups at his home. This 'dialogue' was extensively reported by *Al-Jazeera* satellite station resulting in a surge of 'civil society' forums across Syria. Although cognisant of ideological parallels with both western and eastern European conceptions of civil society, the movement's intellectuals prefer to emphasise its native credentials. Western liberals tend to describe civil society as an "order in which morally and intellectually fallible citizens organize themselves to monitor an incorrigible state, seeking either to minimize state intervention in their lives or to use some state intervention to check allegedly oppressive elites outside the state" (Metzger 2001: 1). This western notion of civil society can be expressed by either 'rightists' (with the emphasis on upholding the rule of law, private

"… morally and intellectually fallible citizens organize themselves to monitor an incorrigible state."

property and capital mobility) or 'leftists' (with the emphasis on 'empowering' disadvantaged groups and minorities).

Middle Eastern liberals and social democrats, by contrast, prefer to find equivalents from within 'native soil.' For instance, the Syrian intellectual Sadiq Jala al-Azm believes *tanzimat* is a far more valid historical precedence for the Syrian civil society movement. Tanzimat was a state-sponsored project introduced around 1830 by the Ottoman Turks as a way of cementing an identity around the notion of 'citizenship' which transcended ethnic, religious, and familial allegiances (George 2003: 38). This new notion of citizenship was to act as a platform for modernisation in commerce and technology. Al-Azm makes a direct analogy with Gorbachev's

perestroika. Other Syrian intellectuals prefer to link their promotion of civil society to the teachings of the Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), who was attempting to renew the 'social covenant' based on a new set of rights and obligations which were mediated by emerging bourgeois law and not 'divine right' claimed by dictators and emperors (George 2003: 184).

Regardless of its historical baggage- whether it is put forward by European or Middle Eastern intellectuals and again irrespective of its 'rightist' or leftist' orientation- the *civil society* movement does not question the essence of capitalism. Moreover, despite a predilection for reform, the notion of the state as a historically given entity remains sacrosanct. Its aim is to *humanise* and *regulate* capitalism and not to overthrow it. The humanisation of capitalism is itself promoted with a view to creating the preconditions for increased profitability. This is true of all the NGOs which uncritically take onboard the project of civil-society-building.

What we wish to underline here are the doctrinal ties of continuity between Bashar al-Asad, the Syrian 'opposition', most sections of the emergent Lebanese 'opposition', huge chunks of the 'anti-globalisation movement' and the European liberal bourgeoisie. The fact that there is also real competition between these groups for a bigger piece of the cake should not blind us to their common anti-working class agenda.

"The fact that there is also real competition between these groups for a bigger piece of the cake should not blind us to their common anti-working class agenda".

It would be an oversimplification, however, to suggest that the 'Damascus Spring' contained no proletarian element. The protests did attract fragmented proletarian elements but it is fair to say that these currents remained subservient to the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois leadership of the civil society movement. What is incontestable is that at first Bashar tried to utilise the protests in order to modernise Syrian capitalism and ease the system's internal tensions. 'Political' prisoners from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist Action Party were released in batches of hundreds throughout the second half of 2000 (George 2003: 40). The notorious Mezzeh prison was closed down. Unofficial human 'rights' organisations began to re-emerge with the tacit consent of the regime. Bashar also encouraged the parties allied to the Baathists in the Progressive National Front (a collection of Leninists, state-capitalists, social democrats and nationalist hangers on) to publish their own newspapers once again. In short, Bashar's plan then was to reinvigorate a manageable 'opposition' from both political and civil societies and use this dynamic to push through changes.

Predictably, the plan soon ran into a brick wall of hostility in the shape of regime 'hardliners' centred, in this instance, on the Vice President Abdul Hakim Khaddam. The brick wall was guarded by a coalition of party and trade-union bureaucrats, state-dependent writers, journalists and professors who owed their position to the system (Perthes 2004: 14). Civil right activists were denounced as corrupt foreign stooges. Students protesting against the neo-liberal policies of the government were arrested. Scare stories about the possibility of Syria imploding like Algeria or Yugoslavia if the tempo of change is not slowed down were spread to divide the 'opposition'. The licenses of many civil society forums were revoked. The veteran Leninist leader, Riad at-Turk, was rearrested after he criticised the regime's

"… a brick wall of hostility in the shape of regime 'hardliners' centred … on the Vice President …"

corruption in an interview on Al-Jazeera. The civil society movement was put on ice to be thawed out at a more opportune moment.

It is noteworthy, however, that the endemic corruption of Syrian society has a real material basis. The mediation (in Arabic, *wasta*) of the so-called five-percenters (corrupt officials who for 5% of the total deal put you in touch with the right people or provide the correct paper work)

"The mediation … of the so-called five-percenters … is in reality an additional form of control by the state …"

is in reality "an additional form of control by the state that fragments the bourgeoisie from the upper middle class, who might in its absence coalesce into a recognizable opposition. In addition, it spreads the wealth to certain classes, supplement the income to government officials tied into the five-percenter organisations, and co-opts more people into the idea of maintaining regime stability" (Lesch 1999: 93). What the father built, the son cannot dismantle overnight. Therefore, Bashar has consolidated his own position patiently, first within Syria and second in the wider Arab arena, as a prelude to instigating new economic reforms. The 'Damascus Spring' had turned into a chilly 'Damascus Winter' years before The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt erupted.

Perthes (2004: 9) claims that by 2002, "three-quarters of the 60 or so top political, administrative and military office-holders had been replaced" by technocrats loyal to Bashar. Whenever Bashar feels safe, censorship becomes milder (Perthes 2004: 20). More businessmen,

tribal and religious leaders are becoming parliamentarian deputies thus widening the regime's basis. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, as with Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, "have been developing a democratic discourse, and [have been reaching] out to liberals and leftists" (Perthes 2004: 22).

In 2003 a group of French consultants were brought in to restructure and modernise a number of ministries (ibid., 24). A concerted effort has been made to teach bureaucrats new skills such as languages and computing. Bashar who is himself a keen computer user has encouraged the production of local affordable computers and Net connectivity. This is crucial if the 20% unemployment rate is to be reduced. Gradually the private sector has become more prominent so much so that by 2001, "the entire private sector accounted for an estimated 65% of GDP and employs almost 75% of the workforce, compared to less than 70% a decade earlier" (ibid., 30). A law based on the Chinese model has created zones for foreign investment. In January 2004 the first private bank opened its doors. 'Privatisation' may have contributed to a marginal increase in GDP but income differentials have widened despite budget increases and Syrian capitalism still relies on 10% of ten to sixteen year olds working for pay (ibid., 31).

Bashar improved Syria's relationship with Iraq. Old Baathist rivalries took a back seat to economic imperatives. Iraq's need for cheap consumer goods provided Syrian industrialists with a great opportunity. The Kirkuk-Banias pipeline came on-stream after two decades of closure and Syria became Iraq's main export route outside the UN-controlled oil-for-food

"Old Baathist rivalries took a back seat to economic imperatives".

agreement (Perthes 2004: 39). Troop numbers were reduced in Lebanon and redeployment of troops made the Syrian presence more low-key, even before the anti-Syrian movement had gained ground. On 26 April 2005, the Syrian army completed its withdrawal from Lebanese territory. Hezbollah's combat operations were also "reduced to almost zero" although Syria "wants to maintain the organisation as a means of putting pressure on Israel" (Perthes 2004: 43).

Relations with Europe were also cemented. After all, Europe is Syria's main trading partner. Initially Syria kept away (and made sure Lebanon did likewise) from the Euro-Mediterranean meetings but after the second Gulf War, and Syria's unavoidable 'blunder' in supporting Saddam Hussein, there was a desperate need to reorient toward Europe. 'Unavoidable' because the Syrian population demanded resistance against US-British aggression and also because the Syrian economy had a lot to gain from supporting Iraq in the short term. Co-operation between Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan resulted in the connection of electricity networks. Syria also delivered badly needed water to Jordan. Under military pressure from Turkey over its support for PKK, Syria expelled Abdullah Öcalan, who is now languishing in a Turkish jail. Moreover, realising that the cost outweigh benefits, Syria has stopped encouraging 'jihadist tourism' through its porous border with Iraq (Perthes 2004: 51) and has even "denied entry to escaping Iraqis" (Zizzer 2003: 34).

At this stage the regime seemed reasonably stable, at least, internally. By the first decade of this century, Bashar has established himself. The Baath administration, political affiliates, the parliament and trade unions are firmly in the grip of the regime. Huge segments of the rural population and the urban petty bourgeoisie actively support the regime whilst the private bourgeoisie are making profits and, therefore, reasonably content. The petty-bourgeois intellectuals have been silenced; their forums curtailed and, so long as the US acts aggressively, this will remain the case. Bashar even felt secure enough to release some 317 Kurdish 'political prisoners' as a good-will gesture. Some 250,000 Kurds who have always been denied citizenship are having their cases reviewed. All this despite of, or perhaps because of, Jalal Talabani's (current Iraqi President and Kurdish feudal chieftain) avowed aim of mobilising Kurds in Syria to stage demonstrations against Damascus (*The New Worker* 2005: 1).

The major class that has felt alienated in recent years and whose living standards will fall even further once 'modernisation' is speeded up is, needless to say, the proletariat. This is as true of the urban as the rural proletariat. Whether this class will have the might to exert itself autonomously during and beyond The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt remains to be seen. Meanwhile, the Syrian state had external threats to contend with. It is to an analysis of the Syrian-Lebanese dispute that we must now turn.

St Valentine's Day Massacre

The authorities in Lebanon began "clearing up the scene of Rafik Hariri's assassination on St Valentine's Day before forensic evidence had been collected, although they stopped in the face

of protests" (Whitaker 2005: 13). As it becomes clear below, this was not the only unusual aspect of the assassination. The assassination was claimed by a hitherto unknown and unpretentious sounding bunch of dickheads called, *Group for Advocacy and Holy War in the Levant*. The analysis that follows aims to clarify some of the issues triggered by the killing of Hariri.

You sonofabitch, do you know who I am? I'm Moe Greene! I made my bones when you were going out with cheerleaders.

"The assassination was claimed by a hitherto unknown and unpretentious sounding bunch of dickheads …"
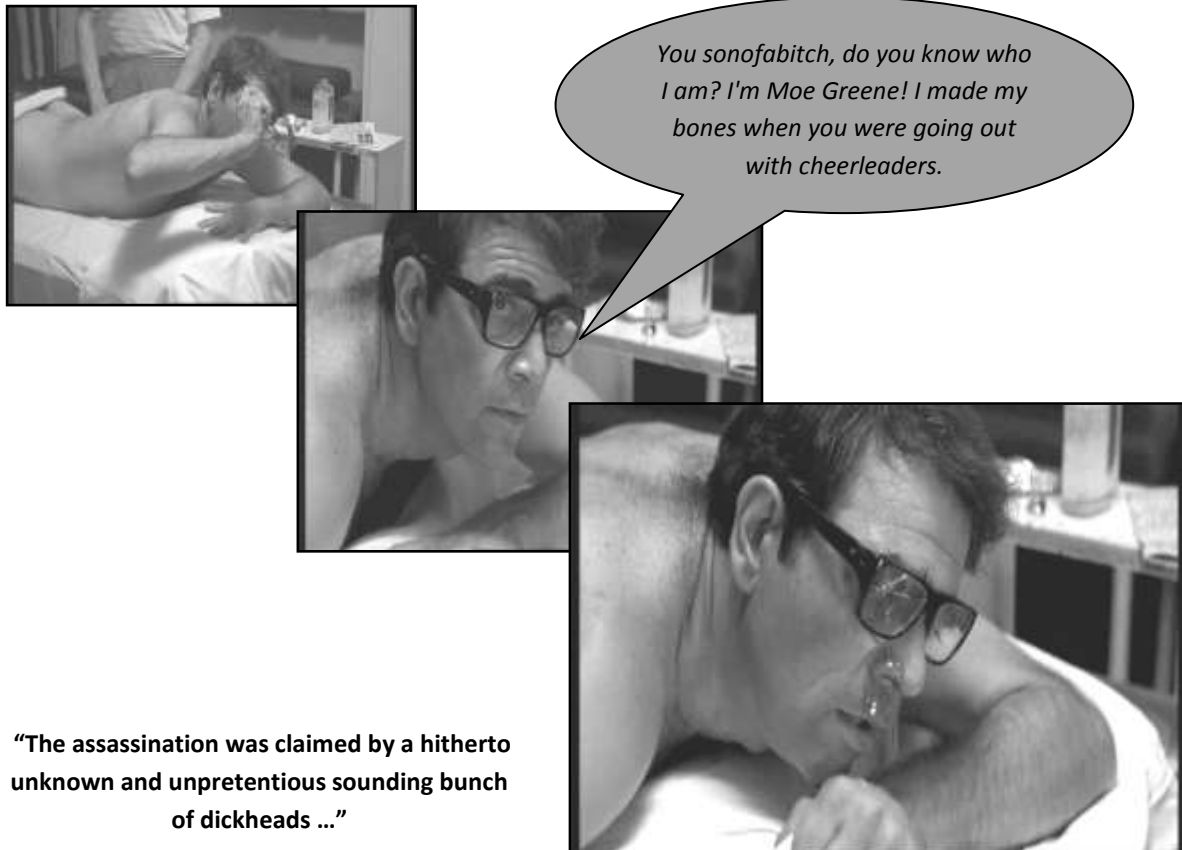
Melancholic Troglodytes do not know who was really responsible for his murder nor, frankly, do we inordinately care. His son Sa'eed Hariri (ex-Prime Minster, 2009-11) initially blamed Syria but seems to have changed his mind recently. And Nasrallah, Hezbollah's chairman, has urged the Lebanese to reject the Hague Tribunal investigating Hariri's death (Fisk, 2010). Robert Fisk suggests it was the 'Syrian Bath Party security apparatus,' without Asad's knowledge, who committed the deed (2011). A number of 'families' could have potentially benefited from such a spectacular manoeuvre, including: 'Islamic fascists' (significantly Hariri and Hezbollah publicly clashed twice over the latter's military operations against Israel); Hariri's Lebanese business rivals; the Syrian or Iranian authorities; the Israeli ruling class (Hariri had used his prestige to prevent Hezbollah's name being added to US's list of terror

organisations despite his disagreements with them); Palestinian rulers (e.g., Palestinians were accused of attacking Rafik Hariri's Beirut television station in 2003); or US capitalism. The point is not to indulge in idle speculation but to understand the implications of the event for the class struggle in the Levant.

Hariri was a billionaire of Lebanese-Saudi origin who attempted to ingratiate himself with Beirut's proletariat by restoring the city to its former glory after the devastations of the 1980s. He hired thousands of workers to clean up the beaches, resurface roads and plant palm trees (Fisk 1991: 465). He used his 'philanthropy' to purchase devalued land and by the 1990s he possessed a great chunk of Beirut through his shares in Solidere, the company that owns "buildings, roads, services, security, cafes, hotels, office blocks, pavements, parks, and even Beirut's municipality" (Ghassan 2005: 1). When occasionally another capitalist objected to his take-over, such as the St Georges Hotel west of the Corniche which refused to sell up, pressure was brought to bear through dubious means (Ghassan 2005: 1). It is even claimed, although we have not been able to verify this, that "when people refused to vacate buildings [Hariri] wanted demolished, he had the buildings collapse on them, killing 12" (Knox 2005: 2). He used his massive influence to marginalise rival capitalists. For instance, AbuKhalil (2001: 1) writes, "Before returning to the prime ministership in 2000, he halted many *rebuilding* projects and orchestrated a daily drumbeat of economic doom and gloom in the media to undermine the government of former Prime Minister Salim al-Huss. These moves basically spread the message that economic misery would not end as long as Hariri was kept out of the premier's office."

Gradually downtown Beirut was turned into a business and entertainment centre for the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie. It is even claimed that security routinely prevents "people wearing Palestinian headscarves" and young proletarians from entering the area (Ghassan 2005: 2). As'ad AbuKhalil (2001: 2) condemns Hariri's rebuilding ethos in these terms, "Beirut's new Olympic stadium, expanded and modernized airport and lavish conference centre do little for the average Lebanese. The rebuilding effort also aims to recapture for Lebanon its pre-war status as the casino, playground and brothel of the region." Hariri then moved into politics, becoming the Lebanese Prime Minister before resigning in protest at Syrian machinations, although he remained an advocate of investment in Syria's recently privatised industries (Ashford 2005: 9). It is ironic that his first cabinet consisted of many

"… pressure was brought to bear through dubious means …"

'ex'-warlords and pro-Syrian collaborators, any one of whom could be responsible for conspiring to have him killed.

The real 'conspiracy', of course, relates to the fact that the assassination of Hariri and subsequent moves by the US ruling class has overshadowed the rising tide of class struggle in Lebanon. In 2004, some 200,000 Lebanese protested against the US occupation of Iraq. This was followed a week later by strikes and demonstrations for lower petrol prices. The protestors included "public and private school teachers, bank employees, transport workers, the workers of the national electricity company ... Lebanese university staff, farmers, agricultural workers, the water authority workers ... construction workers, the workers of Trans Mediterranean Airlines and civil servants ..." (Schwartz and Weston 2004: 1). The anti-government protests were not confined to Beirut and all over Lebanon taxi services and van drivers brought the traffic to a standstill. Ironically, "the Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, was actually travelling back from a state visit to Syria, [when he] was blocked by the protests and had to find an alternative route" (Schwartz and Weston 2004: 2). The response of the Lebanese ruling class was rather brutal. It is claimed that "by the end of the day ... the army had killed at least five people and wounded more than 30 demonstrators .... Enraged by the killings of civilians, the protestors stormed the Labour Ministry and set it on fire" (Schwartz and Weston 2004: 2). The General Confederation of Labour and Trade Unions did its utmost to sabotage the class struggle by refusing to expand the strike but in the process only managed to expose its distance from the proletariat. Even the bourgeoisie was beginning to criticise the unions for their incompetence in recuperating the struggle.

The images of mourners crying uncontrollably at Hariri's funeral are in stark contrast to his general unpopularity following the saddling of Lebanon with a $35-40 billion debt. His economic policies as Prime Minister and his behind the scene dealings as the Godfather of Lebanon are directly responsible for this huge debt (Schwartz and Weston 2004: 2). Significant economic growth between 1994-1997 began to slow down and by 2000 Lebanon was once again in recession (ibid., 4). Hariri was also unwilling (as are the rest of the warlords running Lebanon) to publish a list of the 17,000 Lebanese who disappeared during the civil war (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 5). We are referring here to the second Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) which severely dislocated the economy, destroying an estimated $25-30 billions, whilst "most of the rest of the Middle east enjoyed an economic boom" (Cohen 2003: 2).

"Even a lame South African 'truth and reconciliation' type of commission was considered too risky by the Rafik Hariri government."

Even a lame South African 'truth and reconciliation' type of commission (which is a reactionary co-option of proletarian anger using legal and religious discourse) was considered too risky by the Rafik Hariri government. Too many skeletons still need to remain buried. His tenure as Prime Minister (1992-98 and 2000-2004) is, therefore, characterised by mismanagement, corruption and huge budget deficits. His attempts to down-size a bloated administration, as for

instance in Lebanon's national airline, ran into entrenched proletarian and 'ethnic' interests and had to be abandoned (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 11). Even though his relationship with Syria went through a number of tense periods, he was, by and large, an *ally* of Syria (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 16).

The Syrian position on Lebanon itself has gone through a number of phases. When Hafiz al-Asad was pressurised into invading Lebanon in 1976 by Henry Kissinger and the Israeli government, it was to "repress the PLO and the Muslims" and prevent a Christian defeat (Schwartz 2005: 3). Hafiz al-Asad was reluctant to police Lebanon but when he was told the alternative was for Israel to do the job, he succumbed. Asad sought and received "Arab League validation for Syria's move" before embarking on his Lebanese mission (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 2). Ironically, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 anyway thus exposing Syria's anti-Israeli rhetoric for a sham. As Syria became entrenched in Lebanon, the occupation began to accrue certain political, economic and military advantages. The USA, in the shape of James Baker, once again granted Hafiz al-Asad the right to invade the Christian eastern half of Beirut in order to impose 'order' (Glass 2005: 1).

Politically, the occupation maintained "some control over potentially restive Palestinian communities in Lebanon" (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 3), since the Lebanese bourgeoisie proved incapable of policing Palestinian proletarians. It is noteworthy that Palestinian proletarians in Lebanon "cannot work outside the refugee camps except in two categories of work, common labor in construction and agriculture" (ibid., 8). They are not allowed to own property or passports. Their children cannot attend public schools. There are stark anti-PLO sentiments amongst Palestinians in Lebanon since they feel abandoned by the Palestinian bourgeoisie. Even NGOs have now directed their attentions to the West Bank and Gaza leaving Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps at the mercy of 'Islamic welfarism'. Incidentally, this trend in Islamification chimes with the Syrian regime's attempt "to impose Syrian-style standards on the school curricula, including the requirement that Arabic and Islam be taught" (Pipes 2000: 22).

Economically, Syrian capitalists became reliant on the legal and semi-legal business opportunities the more dynamic Lebanese economy had to offer. George E. Irani claims, "out of any business deal that goes ahead in Lebanon, the biggest example being the mobile phone companies, the Syrians take a cut. The same applies for a cement factory in North Lebanon. There's a very close connection between the ruling elites in Syria and the ruling elites in Lebanon" (in Freeman *et al.* 2001: 8). Syrian capitalists have benefited from the more 'liberal' (i.e., profitable) Lebanese banks and financial institutions, which both launder money and invest profitably. Their opaque banking laws are also a boon to capitalists who need to keep their transactions secret. Syrian 'state-capitalists', as already mentioned, have accumulated huge sums through smuggling operations across the border with Lebanon. Despite these monetary benefits there is still a considerable disparity between the countries of the Levant. Per capita income in Syria is estimated around $1000, compared with $3000 and $17,000 for Lebanon and Israel respectively (Ghadbian 2001: 32). Finally, there is the thorny question of Syrian workers in Lebanon.

An extremely racist (though comprehensive) account of the tensions between Syrian workers and Lebanese society is provided by Gary C. Gambill (2001). We would advise readers to treat this source with particular scepticism. Gambill estimates there are some 1.4 million Syrian workers in Lebanon (this has been questioned as an exaggeration), a figure which roughly distributes as follows: construction (39%), seasonal agriculture (31%), municipal and sanitation jobs (20%), services, including street vendors and taxi drivers (8%) and industry (2%) (Gambill 2001: 2). In addition the 35,000 Syrian soldiers stationed in Lebanon (2001 figures) often work to supplement their meagre income. The Lebanese state may not receive much taxation from these workers, since "Syrian workers are not required to pay taxes" (ibid., 2), but Lebanese employers prefer Syrian workers to Lebanese counterparts because the transaction is off the books. According to Gambill, "Syrian workers remit around $4.3 billion from Lebanon to Syria every year. The Asad regime has worked carefully to discourage Syrian workers from spending their wages in Lebanon. It is illegal, for example, for workers to send Lebanese-made consumer durables back to their families in Syria" (ibid., 3).

Gambill not only recounts instances of resentful Lebanese attacks on Syrian workers but positively cheers them from the side-line, "In December 1996, a van carrying three Syrian workers from North Lebanon to Beirut was attacked by an armed gunman in a passing vehicle ... A number of Syrian workers were brutally assaulted by Lebanese Shi'ite youths after the Lebanese soccer team's loss to Syria in the Summer of 1997 ... In October 1998, townspeople in the Mount Lebanon village of Iklim al-Kharroub attacked and injured 54 Syrian laborers after a 17-year old girl was raped by two Syrians" (ibid., 4).

However, and admittedly we are indulging in speculation here, the spontaneous examples of resentment against Syrian workers began to give way in 2000 to a more organised, politically motivated form of hatred by a "shadowy terrorist group calling itself Citizens for a Free and Independent Lebanon" (ibid.). A Syrian workers' hostel, for example, was attacked by dynamite on two consecutive nights. A parallel form of these terroristic anti-working class attacks is to be found in Michel Aoun's 'grassroot organisation' known as the Free National Current (a.k.a. Free Patriotic Movement). The organisation encourages students on summer holidays to take over the selling of produce and bread from Syrian street vendors in an orgy of nationalistic 'self-sacrifice'. One of the reasons, therefore, Syrian godfathers wished to retain a presence in Lebanon was to protect this source of wealth from hostile Lebanese godfathers.

"... a very 'disciplined' march with Hezbollah black shirts imposing bourgeois-Islamic law and order ..."

Militarily, Syrian presence also strengthened Hezbollah, allowing the latter to engage in raids and sneak attacks on the vastly superior Israeli machine, especially in the disputed Sheba farms

(area occupied by the Israeli state since the 1967 war). Admittedly, these operations have been scaled back in recent years. However, the dividend of Syrian protection is powerful enough for Hezbollah and 17 smaller pro-Syrian groups to organise 'pro-Syrian' demonstrations, the latest of which in March 2005 attracted around half a million people (Fisk 2005a: 4). It was by all accounts a very 'disciplined' march (Fisk 2005a: 5) with Hezbollah black shirts imposing bourgeois-Islamic law and order. No dissent or criticism of the party line was tolerated. Sheikh Hassan Nasrollah, the leader of Hezbollah, thanked Syria and its army and apologised to Syria for the ingratitude of the Lebanese' opposition (Schwartz and Weston 2005: 2). It is significant that many 'rank-and-file' Shi'as as well as prominent families like the Baydouns and Khalils, only gave their passive support to the demonstration and stayed at home (Malik 2005: 1). Presumably some of the non-participants consisted of Hezbollah families with long memories, whose loved ones were 'massacred' by the Syrians in 1987 (Fisk 2005a: 4).

The "Shi'a group, Amal, as well as [some] Sunni politicians are [also] in favour of continued Syrian military presence in their country," and ironically until very recently "a small but important segment of the Lebanese Christian community [had come] to accept the Syrian role in the country" (Ghadbian 2001: 23). The top military aim of the Syrian ruling class is to regain the strategic water-rich Golan Heights through negotiation and to prevent the Bekaa valley from being used as a conduit by Israel to attack Syria.

"There had been anti-Syrian grumblings by various sections of the Lebanese people in the past but …"

There had been anti-Syrian grumblings by various sections of the Lebanese people in the past but what distinguishes the latest anti-Syrian mood is twofold: first, there seems to be a part-genuine, part-engineered re-emergence of Lebanese nationalism which has encouraged Maronite Christian, Druze and even Muslim 'communities' (i.e., capitalists, clerics, intellectuals, students and *some* workers) to unite in opposition to Syria (Blanford 2005: 2). We say 'genuine' despite being fully cognisant that there is a well orchestrated campaign behind the anti-Syrian demonstration. As Abhinav Aima (2005: 1) asks rhetorically, "... how come thousands of Lebanese demonstrators spontaneously pulled out thousands of Lebanese flags and identical red and white sashes in the Beirut Square? The presence of large screen TVs and the complex technical infrastructure behind the demonstrations raises questions regarding who is behind Lebanon's velvet revolution"; and, secondly, alongside this partly engineered and partly genuine nationalist upsurge there is an ongoing US-Israeli strategy of discrediting Syria which is taking full advantage of the prevailing mood.

We do not object to these demonstrations on the grounds that they consisted of too many middle class people (some have derisively referred to it as the 'Gucci revolution'), since we cannot ascertain the crowd compositions from afar. We merely observe its nationalistic character and the total absence of social demands. In true Stalinist fashion one member of the Democratic Left has tried to justify this, "... we are concentrating on getting [the Syrians] and their Lebanese political allies, out. Then, in the elections, we'll raise issues about poverty and education" (Knox 2005: 1).

To complicate matters, the ineptitude of the Syrian ruling class has played into the hands of Whitehouse. For example, (and again this is based on the dubious work of Gary C. Gambill 2001: 3), it is claimed "in 1994, under pressure from Syria, the Lebanese regime granted citizenship to over 200,000 Syrians resident in the country. Many of these newly-naturalized citizens were registered in the electoral districts of pro-Syrian political elites, such as former Interior Minister Michel Murr, in order to consolidate Syrian authority over the Lebanese political system." If true, this is heavy-handed gerrymandering that would have sooner or

> *I know it was you, Fredo. You broke my heart … You broke my heart!*

"… the Syrian elite has traditionally rather enjoyed making its enemies 'sleep with the fishes' …"

later caused a backlash amongst the Lebanese people. Furthermore, the "constitutional amendment to extend the term of President Lahoud in the face of almost universal Lebanese opposition" made matters worse (Rabil 2005: 1).

It is also patently true that one does not have to go back to the era of the eleventh century assassins (cf. Ridley 1988) to realise that the Syrian elite has traditionally rather enjoyed making its enemies 'sleep with the fishes'. The assassination of Kamal Jumblatt, President-elect Bashir

Jumayil and the assassination attempt on an ally of Walid Jumblatt (the current Druze leader who in 2001 aligned himself with the Maronite Christians probably because with bourgeois Shi'a buying land in the Chouf mountain, the Druze are feeling vulnerable) in October 2004 were widely believed to be Syrian inspired (Rabil 2005: 1). The February 2005 Bristol Hotel opposition meeting which demanded a 'total withdrawal' of Syrian troops was endorsed by Hariri. The assembled guests ranged from the Democratic Left Movement (a splinter from Lebanese Communist Party), 'centre-left' intellectuals who supported the US-led invasion of Iraq, the Phalanges (extreme right wing Christians influenced by German Nazis, Franco's and Mussolini's black shirts), and the Druze sect (Ghassan 2005: 3). A very nice bunch of Godfathers whose relations with the Syrians had turned sour in recent years. So, to summarise, it is not inconceivable Hariri was bumped off by the Syrians for his 'treachery' – we simply have no way of knowing at present. If Bashar al-Asad is overthrown, however, the new regime made find it expedient to start with a clean slate and open up some of the files.

Making offers people can't refuse!

When all is done and dusted, the tantrums of Levant's Godfathers fade into insignificance compared to the fury of the world's real gangsters- US capitalism. And since this fury is quite capable of creating another blazing hell, it would be instructive to review the ups and downs of US-Syrian relations over the years.

> *You will not give, I'll **take**! As for Don Corleone, well he makes it very clear to me that he is my enemy. You must choose between us.*

When Eisenhower replaced Harry S. Truman as president of the USA, a New Look foreign policy was hammered out to "correct [the perceived] deficiencies in the Truman administration's approach to containing communism" (Lesch 1998: 92). "Whereas Truman," writes Lesch (1998: 92), "had perceived a bipolar world where zero-sum play meant any gain by the Soviets was a loss for the United States, requiring costly military preparedness to combat Soviet aggression anywhere, Eisenhower advocated a less

"The element of farce, however, does not make its brutalising potential any less real".

costly asymmetric strategic deterrence, based on the threat of *massive retaliation* using nuclear weapons to check Soviet advances. The nuclear threat was supplemented by strategic alliances,

psychological warfare, and covert operations to counter indirect and non-military communist aggression."

Now if we were to replace George W. Bush for Eisenhower, Bill Clinton for Truman and Islamic terrorism for the 'communist' threat in the above paragraph, a clear historical analogy presents itself. Syria's support for the First Gulf War was welcomed by the USA. Former President Bill Clinton "praised Asad upon receiving news of the Syrian leader's death ... [and] Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's attendance at Asad's funeral" reflected a thawing of relations and tacit approval of the transition of power (Ghadbian 2001:35). She went further, "Syria has played a constructive role as far as Lebanon is concerned. We hope they will continue to do so" (quoted in Pipes 2000: 24). Even under the auspices of George Bush the relation was initially amicable. The US asked, and received, intelligence support from the Syrians regarding al-Qa'ida cells. Bush even phoned Bashar al-Asad to thank him personally (Zizzer 2003: 31).

The fact that today, Hillary Clinton and President Obama are not calling for harsher measures against Bashar al-Asad is partly a reflection of this thaw and partly because Asad is pursuing neo-liberal policies. However, some things have changed in the last few years. The 'new' unilateralism, notions of pre-emptive strike and even dark whisperings in and around the Pentagon about the deployment of localised nuclear weapons against America's enemies are the farcical repetition of a previous tragic episode. The element of farce, however, does not make its brutalising potential any less real. The Syrian ruling class is fully cognisant of this threat due to its own history with the USA.

All highly ironic of course since most Syrians throughout the 1920s expressed an overwhelming preference for a US rather than a French mandate- that is if they could not have full autonomy immediately (Lesch 1998: 93). The Suez war of 1956 and a series of attempts to overthrow anti-western regimes in the Middle East had created justifiable paranoia. The USA overthrew the Iranian nationalist Mossadeq in 1953; there was an unsuccessful British-Iraqi attempt to overthrow the Syrian regime (called Operation Straggle by the British); and the discovery of a US-engineered attempt in 1957 to do the same by Eisenhower's administration (Lesch 1998: 92). In the same year CIA had "intervened covertly in the Lebanese elections to ensure that the constitution would be amended to allow far-right Maronite President Shamun to have a second term" (Worker Freedom 2005: 2). The Syrian regime's 2005 manoeuvre to extend pro-Syrian Lahoud's presidential term is an exact repetition of the 1957 events.

At this junction the United States seriously contemplated direct military action against Syria but the failure to gain Arab backing for the invasion prevented the plan. At the end the Eisenhower administration calculated that if it could not keep the USSR out of Syria, "it might entrust the job to someone who could [i.e., Nasser who had successfully kept the USSR at arm's length in Egypt]" (Lesch 1998: 11). The US even stood by 'Jimmy' Nasser when the British attempted to restore the Muhammad Ali dynasty (Springborg 1993: 23). However, the Eisenhower Doctrine rapidly lost the US all the goodwill it had garnered by its opposition to

the tripartite invasion of Egypt at Suez. This is in keeping with the extraordinary loss of sympathy which the US briefly enjoyed after 9/11. The 'axis of evil' speech by President Bush put the seal on a turbulent phase of the US-Syrian relationship which has lasted until today.

Of course there is very little *direct* economic pressure that the USA can bring to bear on Syria. Bush did freeze Syrian assets in America in 2003 but the amounts are not thought to have been substantial. As Orbach (2004: 1) makes clear, "economic relations between Syria and the US are limited, diminishing the impact of sanctions. In 2002, Syria exported a mere $148 million of goods to the US and imported $274 million in American goods ... this made Syria the 93rd largest trading partner of the US ... In fact, a ban on US investments in Syria would probably have a greater negative bearing on US firms than on Syrian ones. For example, a potential victim is Occidental Petroleum, part of an international consortium preparing to negotiate a $750 million gas field development contract with the Syrian government."

However, the US is more than capable of tightening the economic noose round Syrian neck *indirectly* by either vetoing World Bank and IMF loans or blackmailing other countries from trading with Syria. There also exist diplomatic and military forms of leverage that have helped to isolate Syria. The US-British-Israeli 'axis of bullies' works in tandem in this regard. When Israel bombed Syrian soil in October 2003, Pentagon advisor Richard Perle egged them on with undisguised glee, "I am happy to see the message was delivered to Syria ... And I hope it is the first of many such messages" (quoted in Yassin-Kassab 2005: 2). The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed to have owned the bombed base. They also claimed it had been deserted for years (Marshall 2003: 6).

Likewise, after the Hariri assassination Israel demanded the expulsion of Iranian 'Revolutionary' Guards from Lebanon, "who in reality left Lebanon more than 15 years ago" (Fisk 2005b: 1). Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon weakened it regionally as well as *vis-à-vis* the US-British-Israeli axis. Following the recent bloody turn of events in Syria, the United States began by "slapping sanctions on Syria's intelligence agency and two relatives of Bashar al-Asad" (Reuters, 29 April 2011). Predictably a few days later Britain encouraged a European targeted sanctioning of members of the regime, including asset freeze and travel ban (BBC, 2011). A week later more punitive measures were introduced by the European bourgeoisie this time targeting members of Asad's family.

What we are witnessing is a nuanced (and highly hypocritical) response from the USA to the upheavals of 2011. These events have provided the US with the pretext to oust recalcitrant and troublemaking elites (e.g., in Libya), ease out former friends in favour of more stable regimes (e.g., in Egypt) and hope that pressure for change will eventually fizzle out without any significant change amongst staunch allies (e.g., the Gulf States).

Power wears out those who don't have it

The depository of power is always unpopular!
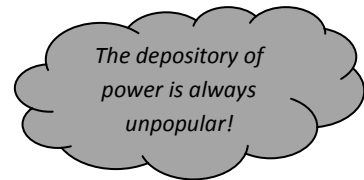
Made guys!

In this section we would like to analyse the chances of further Muslim gains in the Levant. Will the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood topple Asad? Will Hezbollah take over in Lebanon? What are the implications for the class struggle of a shift toward/away from Islamic doctrine?

The most prominent Islamic force in Syria is the Muslim Brotherhood (a.k.a. the Muslim Brethren). A derivative of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, "Syrian Islamist thinking was often burdened with the legacy of that movement, particularly in its confrontation with Nasserism" (Talhami 2001: 110). For example, the Syrian Brotherhood's opposition to unification with Nasser's Egypt in 1958 was a strategic blunder of immense proportions caused by its desire to follow the advice of its Egyptian branch. Furthermore, for a region where collective memory is nourished constantly, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is still perceived with suspicion by large sections of the population for its failure to be actively engaged against French colonialists (Talhami 2001: 110).

The Muslim Brotherhood is essentially an urban movement. This is in dire contrast to the Baath Party which has always found inspiration and membership from rural areas. Batatu (1988: 116-117) writes, "The religious class with which the Muslim Brethren were and still are closely connected is not, relatively speaking, very large in Syria. It is not, in the numerical sense, anything like its Iranian counterpart ... [but there is as with the Iranian case] a substantial degree of coincidence between the class of tradesmen and the religious shaikhly class. The shops of the tradesmen-shaikhs are usually located in the neighbourhood of mosques." Again, unlike Iran, the Syrian 'clergy' have usually 'worked' for a living and are therefore not generally regarded as 'parasites' by the proletariat. This explains, according to Batatu (1988: 119), the

absence of widespread anti-clerical sentiments within Syria. It also goes some way in clarifying the reasons for the 'Communist' Party's failed anti-religious propaganda campaign in the 1920s.

Another reason which Batatu does not contemplate but is worth noting could be the atavistic version of atheism propagated by Syrian Leninists. This is an *ideological* atheism which attempts to dislodge theism through 'rational' arguments. In so doing, ideological atheism ignores both the 'irrational' causes of religiosity as well as the social basis of religious activities. One thing that is clear is that a rejuvenated atheism must either base itself on everyday proletarian activities or it ends up functioning as yet another top-down ideological imperative.

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s and the 1960s the Brotherhood was marginalised and out of touch, since all the running was made by the Syrian National Social Party (championing the vision of regional nationalism) and the Baath Party (with its notions of Pan-Arabism) (Talhami 2001: 111). When parliamentary delegates were engaged in heated debates about land reform, the Brotherhood was courting ridicule for its call to ban youths from frequenting movie houses and females from participating in scouting parades (Talhami 2001: 119). Perhaps under the ideological influences of the times, the Brotherhood in the 1940s and 1950s initially flirted with an undefined 'Islamic socialism' which was hastily excised from their political vocabulary by 1961 (Batatu 1988: 112).
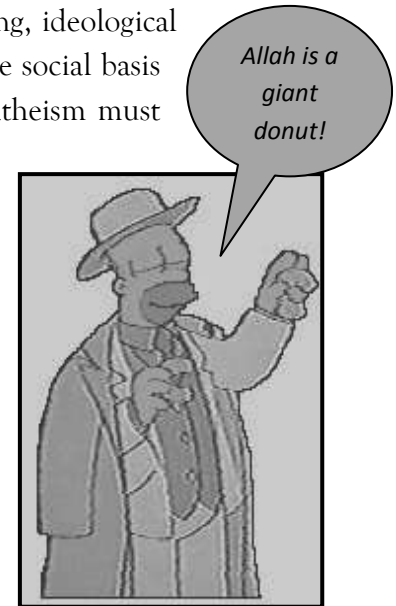
From then on, they preferred to portray themselves as the 'natural' spokesmen of the Sunni 'community' and to stoke up the 'religious' divisions of Syria by opposing the Alawi clan. As Batatu (1988: 11) wryly observes this is a long term strategy in support of the "social interests of the upper and middle elements of their landed, mercantile and merchant classes" that may at last be bearing fruits. These groupings, however, do not feel obliged to repay the compliment. The bourgeoisie of urban and rural areas only support the Muslim Brotherhood as a form of protest when their profits are threatened, otherwise they keep their distance. For instance, during W/W II when inflation, speculation and profiteering had enriched the local bourgeoisie, they cold-shouldered the Muslim Brotherhood. This is also true of the periods of liberalisation inaugurated by Hafiz al-Asad in the 1970s and 1980s. Whether this relationship still holds after the widening of the army's offensive in the north and east, and mass exodus of villagers to turkey, remains to be seen (Al Jazeera, 2011a).

To demonstrate how protective of their class interests Muslim tradesmen are, one need only bear in mind their unremitting hostility to agricultural co-operatives in rural districts and consumers' co-operatives in urban area. According to Batatu (1988: 120), "Co-operative stores were the first establishments to be destroyed in a rising organised by the Muslim Brethren in 1980 in Aleppo." From 1980 onwards the Brotherhood allied itself openly with liberalism and pluralistic democracy. This was partly because their friendly overtures to Khomeini with his

more populist/fascistic interpretations of Islam were rebuffed by him and Iran that had already established a firm alliance with the Syrian Alawi elite. And it is partly a nod to the persistent appeal of Syrian nationalism and the re-emerging civil society movement. It also represents a major and real difference with the Egyptian branch of the Brotherhood which has traditionally dismissed the notion of parliamentary life. In recent years the weakening of the Islamic world movement (see more on this below) has accentuated the Brotherhood's desire for legitimacy and recognition.

The Brotherhood's *putsch* of the early 1980s was, in a sense, a sign of weakness and political inexperience. It was not even supported fully within the organisation, since some could see its counter-productive futility. As Talhami (2001: 124) explains, "the [Syrian] Baath regime ... not only crushed the Islamic Front [i.e., Muslim Brotherhood and new allies] militarily, it was able to mount a determined propaganda campaign against it." Their training camps in Jordan were attacked. Leading journalist sympathisers of the Brotherhood, such as the Lebanese Salim al-Lawzi, were assassinated by Syrian security (Talhami 2001: 125). Immediately after the threat of an Islamic uprising had receded, the regime took great care to co-opt its Islamic critics. Official Islam was promoted through more government-financed mosques and Shari'a institutions in order to divide and weaken the Islamic opposition. Today the Brotherhood has indirectly acknowledged the success of this strategy by allying itself to the Syrian 'Communist' Party in a front against the Asad regime (Talhami 2001: 126). Worryingly for the regime there are signs that more members of the 'private bourgeoisie' are once again joining the ranks of the Islamic opposition.

Besides the Muslim Brotherhood, one should also briefly mention the influence of Sufi brotherhoods in the Levant. The Syrian Baath Party has been generally hostile to Sufism especially during the Islamic uprising that culminated in Hama in 1982, although Sufis had next to nothing to do with the uprising (Weismann 2004: 303). As a result there has been a marked decline in Sufi brotherhoods there but significantly they have managed to make inroads in other 'niche markets'.

To be more precise, the decline has been amongst urban-elitist brotherhoods which have become either existential study groups or tourist attractions, whilst "their rural-popular counterparts have proved more capable of holding to their traditions" (Weismann 2004: 304). The 'paganistic' veneration of saintly tombs has played a vital role in preserving Sufism in rural areas- a Sufism that has "tapped into its reformist traditions in an effort to adapt itself to the modern situation" (Weismann 2004: 307). The Naqshbandi brotherhood is the only Sufi organisation allowed freedom of action by the Syrian regime. The 'apolitical' Yashrutis are also tolerated. They have many members in Palestinian camps south of Damascus and even more near Beirut and Sidon. This latter is one of three brotherhoods with a following in Israel (Weismann 2004: 315). It is also noteworthy that the much lauded welfare and charity work carried out by these brotherhoods has its origins in not only the Ottoman-sponsored Jamiyat al-Maqasid al-Khairiyah, which emerged in 1878 in Beirut and was then exported to other Arab countries but also in the Truman Doctrine which built the first educational and medical

infrastructures, later to be augmented by 'Petro-Islamic largesse' (al-Azmeh 1998: 6). Middle Eastern proletarians, whilst still accepting such 'charity' out of desperation, are beginning to notice the hypocrisy attached to it.

Hopefully the above summary has gone someway in de-mythologizing Islamic influence in the Levant. In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood is re-emerging after years of internal dissention. Their disillusionment with the masses (who failed time and again to heed their call for an uprising in the 1980s) seems, thankfully, to be reciprocated by a sceptical population unwilling to go down the Iranian route. The Muslim Brotherhood's recent rapprochement with the Syrian 'Communist' Party would not have occurred if the Brotherhood believed it could take on the regime single-handedly. The Sufi brotherhoods are dispersed, isolated and mostly in decay. The ones still thriving seem 'apolitical' and 'reformist' and, therefore, not a threat to the regime. In the unlikely event Islamists gain power in Syria it will be as part of a broad 'Populist-liberal-social democratic' civil society movement. The end result will be closer to the Turkish model than the Iranian one.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah is trying hard to forge a new identity for itself. It has established co-operative supermarkets in the suburbs of Beirut and it has steady revenue coming in from "bookshops, farms, fisheries, factories, and bakeries" (Khorrami, 2011). It makes millions out of the booming property market in Lebanon and UAE, and it is now receiving state-funding for its welfare projects. It also operates its own TV and radio stations.

Some believe that since it was founded as a Shi'a military resistance network against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah lost part of its *raison d'être* after the 2000 Israeli pullout. The skirmishes around the Sheba farms, are then viewed, as a desperate ploy to extend the emergency mood of Lebanese politics, since low-level internecine warfare are always to the advantage of warlords. This standpoint ignores that Hezbollah has always been an ideological organisation with strong personal and ideological ties of continuity with the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is an adaptable entity. In recent years, since the business oriented faction within Hezbollah prefers a stable political regime and since the Syrians have been reigning in the military faction, the balance within Hezbollah has gradually shifted toward political 'normalisation'. Hezbollah does not even recruit from the *troublesome* Palestinian refugees in Lebanon anymore (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 9). Hezbollah's clumsy overtures to both the West (high level meetings between Hezbollah officials and 'ex'-CIA and MI5 interlocutors), as well as engagement with middle class operators within the 'anti-globalisation movement' are testimony to this trend. Scum such as Walden Bello (executive director of Focus on the Global South) have quite consciously welcomed Hezbollah's sudden 'conversion' to the cause of 'anti-globalisation' (Karmon 2005: 2). But then again Bello "does not hesitate to embrace the Republican Right in the USA as allies" either (The League for the Fifth International 2004: 42).

As for the so-called 'secular' Amal movement, they still seem to be backing Syria. Amal was established in 1975 in response to the civil war in Lebanon by Iranian born Musa al-Sadr. One

of its leaders used to obtain diamonds from merchant friends in Sierra Leone to fund Amal. It fought with Arafat's PLO and Jumblatt's Druze against Syria and the Maronite Christians but opportunistically switched sides to Syria (Moubayed 2005: 1). This has become a long term alliance (at least since the early 1980s) which will probably stand the recent realignments. Amal has lost a great deal of its appeal since the 1970s, principally due to corruption. Another family, Hamas, "which was aided by Israel during its founding and has taken a life of its own" may be able to win supporters amongst Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (Freeman *et al.* 2001: 9). Of such unscrupulous, deceitful stuff are Godfathers and their families made of!

Melancholic Troglodytes believe what goes by the name of 'Islamic Fundamentalism' or 'Islamism' is, *in general*, on the wane. In societies such as Iran, Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria the proletariat has, *by and large*, seen through its façade. In countries like Afghanistan massive military setbacks have dented its aura. In Algeria the Islamists undermined themselves by proudly opposing "a dust workers' strike ... a civil servants' strike and a one day general strike" (Harman 1999: 32). In Sudan the regime is desperate to make deals with USA, providing the CIA with vital information regarding Al-Qaeda 'terrorists' (Goldenberg 2005: 17). Iraq is perhaps a temporary exception to this general trend, although even there people have demonstrated against hostage taking and assassination of atheists. We are not in a position to offer a balance-sheet regarding Saudi Arabia but welcome comments from readers. The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern and North African' Revolt has undoubtedly delivered Islamism a further body blow.

The term 'Fundamentalist' is, of course, problematic since it brackets together a number of heterogeneous movements which have different class compositions, socio-political agendas and cultural imperatives. 'Political Islam' is not much better since all forms of Islam are political. 'Radical Islam' is perhaps worst of all, since it gives the mistaken impression that this is a movement capable of going to the root of contemporary problems and offering a real alternative. In Spain the term 'integristas' is preferred to fundamentalism. It implies a closed *community* where dissent and conflict is suppressed by foregrounding a particular form of identity. Although this may describe accurately a certain aspect of the *umma* (Islamic pseudo-community), it tends to overemphasise discourse and identity-formation at the expense of the material basis of Islamism.

"Without wishing to pathologise our class enemies, it is worth pointing out ..."

Whatever we choose to call this wave of Islamism there are certain commonalities that bind its adherents: a political philosophy steeped in extreme conservatism which is, nonetheless, flexible enough to take on board some attributes of modernism *and even* postmodernism; intrusive moralism

as a way of disciplining the proletariat and neutralising liberal bourgeois rivals; a genuine desire to regenerate capitalist 'base', 'structures' and 'superstructure' in accordance with a belief system; reverence for the 'sacred' word at the expense of historical experience; a petty-bourgeois leadership; and, finally, a desire to recreate a mythical 'golden age'.

Without wishing to pathologise our class enemies, it is worth pointing out that the latter attribute is sometimes referred to by social psychologists as the 'Quondam Complex'. Lipset and Raab (1071: 488) have defined it as, "... more than nostalgia; it describes a condition whereby the *primary* symbolic investment, the *primary* status investment is in the past and is related to some reference in-group whose symbolic and status significance has dwindled." Aziz al-Azmeh (1998: 1) puts this in its Islamic context, "Fundamentalism is an attitude toward time, which it considers of no consequence, and therefore finds no problem with the absurd proposition that the initial condition, the golden age, can be retrieved: either by going back to the texts without the mediation of traditions considered corrupt ... as with Luther and Sunni Salafism ... and the Muslim Brothers now, or by the re-formation of society according to primitivist models seen to be copies of practices in the golden age ..." One should not make too much of this since 'pre-modern Fundamentalism' is perfectly compatible with certain aspects of both 'modernism' and 'postmodernism'. To castigate 'Fundamentalism' of rigidity would leave us dazed and confused when it morphs with the rapidity of western politicians following the latest opinion poll. 'Fundamentalism', despite its desire for a golden age, is more than capable of integrating the latest technological and scientific know-how into its matrix of discipline and punishment.

Al-Azmeh (1998: 2) is basically correct when he says, "[the ideological output of contemporary Islamic movements] is inconceivable without the universally-available equipment of right-wing, para-fascist, populist movements. It is not by accident that they emerged in the 20s and 30s of [the twentieth century], at the same time as the Indian Hindu fascist RSS, at a time when the West also was very strongly veering towards the extreme right ..." He then goes on to discuss the organismic and Romantic politics of restoration in Islamism, "Both Ali Shariati and Sayyid Qutb were great admirers of Alexis Carrel – a famous eugenicist of the 1920s, cultural advisor to the Maréchal Pétain, who railed against degeneration within, and advocated the cause of a small saviour minority which will bring health to the body of society diseased by degeneration" (al-Azmeh 1998: 4; see also Greason 2005: 126 for more Islamic thinkers enamoured of European fascism; there is also Achcar's interesting but problematic work, 2010).

The gist of our argument is that this brand of Islamism, whether one wishes to refer to it as 'Islamic Fundamentalism', 'Islamic Fascism', 'Islamic Populism', 'Political Islam, or 'Islamic Integralism', is no longer capable of suppressing the class struggle as it did two or three decades ago. This is true of both the Shi'a and (to a lesser extent) Sunni varieties of the brand. *Those whose knowledge of the 'Middle East' is not confined to the Western media can see this declining trend with clarity*. We agree with al-Azm's (2003: 2) analysis, "when Islamists become a power to be reckoned with or when they actually take power, they ultimately fail. They did not even offer a

hint of a workable Islamic alternative – from Iran to Taliban. I have pointed out that the resorting to blind terrorism is an expression of the depth of the Islamist movement's crisis ..."

The popularity of Islam in the West amongst a new generation of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, African and Middle Eastern youth, which is more to do with defensive identity-formation in a racist environment, should not blind us to the fact that at its heartland in the Middle East, 'Islamic Fundamentalism' is past its zenith. This does not mean it is no longer capable of massive mobilisations or (occasionally) toppling regimes. That would be wishful thinking. However, increasingly the arrogance of its advocates has been replaced by confusion, disappointment and in some cases where the proletariat has expressed itself in atheistic terms, with shear horror.

By way of conclusion

A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm (Perle *et al.* 2000) is a remarkable document. Written by a study group of top-notch opinion makers at *The Institute for Advanced and Political Studies*, it provides a clear strategy for the Israeli ruling class to adopt in order to strengthen its position *vis-à-vis* its neighbours and the Israeli proletariat. The project leader, Richard Perle, became a leading light of the Bush administration.

What is striking about this document is not its racist tone which one has come to expect from US politicians but its explicitly anti-working class stance. In fact, the 'analysis' begins with an attack on the Israeli proletariat in a rather confused opening paragraph: "Israel has a large problem. Labor Zionism, which for 70 years has dominated the Zionist movement, has generated a stalled and shackled economy. Efforts to salvage Israel's socialist institutions- which include pursuing supranational over national sovereignty and pursuing a peace process that embraces the slogan, *New Middle East* -undermine the legitimacy of the nation and lead Israel into strategic paralysis and the previous government's *peace process*" (Perle *et al.* 2000: 1).

Using their own mystifying discourse, Perle and chums are saying that the Israeli bourgeoisie has two major problems: first, the low rate of exploitation of the Israeli proletariat who henceforth should not be shielded by subsidies, protectionism and social democratic compromises; and second, its previous overly generous peace offerings to the 'Arabs'! Benjamin Netanyahu should make a "clean break" with the "land for peace strategy" and pursue a binding agreement "based on peace through strength" (Perle *et al.* 2000: 1-2). This is precisely what Netanyahu has been doing, an achievement acknowledged by an enthusiastic US Congress who gave 'Bibi' a standing ovation in May 2011.

The document goes on to argue that the Israeli economy has to be liberalised, taxes cut, public lands and enterprises sold off and free-processing zones established (Perle *et al.* 2000: 2).

By working closely with Turkey and Jordan and "upholding the right of pursuit" into Palestinian areas, Israel can employ its dominance more effectively. The US could then cut its aid to Israel thus catalysing economic reform. This is related to the class struggle 'at home'. As Cohen (2003: 4) explains, "When recently the Israeli rulers tried to smash the Israeli workers on strike in the ports of Israel, they were calling on the help of the Egyptian and the Jordanian capitalists to use the ports in Egypt and Jordan."

Israel should also, it is argued, strike "Syria's drug-money and counterfeiting infrastructure in Lebanon" (the Bekaa valley is *allegedly* home to some of the most sophisticated forgers of US currency) and attack Syrian forces in Lebanon and, if necessary, Syrian territory itself (Perle *et al.* 2000: 2). The Lebanese opposition should be used "to destabilize Syrian control of Lebanon" and any "land for peace" deal on the Golan Heights should be rejected. The Israeli rulers dutifully obliged. For good measures they also reduced the number of Palestinian workers in Israel and imported less subversive workers from abroad as replacement (Reuveny 1999: 4). Incidentally, in 2001 the Israeli state was accused of dumping toxic waste in the Golan Heights, "Syrian university students in the Golan demonstrated on Dec. 20 outside the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations to protest Israel's dumping of toxic waste in the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967, and the distribution of poisonous paint by Israel to the Syrian citizens in the area" (Washington Report on Middle East Affairs 2001: 39). The pro-Palestinian protestors who were shot at in June 2011 at the Golan Heights by Israeli troops faired rather less well, with at least 20 killed. The Bashar al-Asad regime probably enjoyed not being in the spot light for a day or two.

"Israel should … strike 'Syria's drug-money and counterfeiting infrastructure' in Lebanon"

What is most startling about this document is how much of it came to pass under Sharon and Netanyahu's premierships and the explicit linkage made between the need to attack the Israeli *and* Arab proletarians. The situation in Lebanon and Syria is extremely complex. In order to make some concrete sense of it all, we would like to summarise some key points regarding the Levant:

1. In Lebanon, the assassination of the multi-billionaire Hariri has acted as a slow fuse which is burning its way toward a new powder-keg. Whether this is going to be a controlled 'neo-Liberal' detonation, yet another civil war or a massive 'disorderly' social revolution remains to be seen. The balance of class forces is not currently favourable but things are gradually shifting. Capitalist instability and prospects for intensifying the class struggle do not always go hand in hand.

2. In *general*, the US ruling class is encouraging a transfer of power from incumbent Islamic and Arab nationalist 'state-bourgeois' elites to 'private-bourgeois' elements. The Syrian rural bourgeoisie have always been relatively successful in mechanising agriculture and producing profits (Springborg 1993: 16). The first wave of Arab bourgeoisie was always more capable than they were given credit for. They favoured, for example, the joint stock company. By 1954 Syria had 94 joint stock companies. However, throughout the twentieth century, it was the 'sate bourgeoisie' that was given political backing by the US ruling class since they were deemed more able to maintain bourgeois order. This is now changing and the second wave of Arab 'private bourgeoisie' will curry favour in high places.

Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in. Our true enemy has not yet shown his face.

"… this manoeuvre will have severe repercussions for the current Syrian rulers …"

The struggle in Syria is widening in focus and variety of activities. In Daraa a "football game was interrupted because the public went on the field and chanted slogans for freedom" (Counterfire, 2011). Unemployment rate at 25% is unsustainable especially since neo-liberal policies have eroded welfare safety nets, and the poverty rates are also soaring. Demonstrations against police brutality and corruption are adding a visible political edge to the demands (Al Jazeera, 2011b). Homs, Latakia and Banias have joined other cities in raising anti-government slogans. The residents of Banias went on a three-day strike in April. There are unconfirmed reports of soldiers being shot by security forces for refusing to fire on protestors (The Guardian, 2011). The TV confessions of 'foreign infiltrators' looks as rehearsed as the parliamentary salutations performed in praise of Asad. The state is losing its once considerable *hegemony*.

The drop in oil revenues will hasten these trends. If there is an Egyptian type uprising in Syria without a thorough social revolution, then the chances are the 'military-mercantile-complex' will be broken up in favour of new intra-classist alliances. Should the US ruling class

decide to maintain a weakened Bashar al-Asad in power and urge Israel to return some parts of the Golan Heights in a comprehensive 'peace deal', the move will pave the way for a final reckoning with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

3. Both Islamism and Leninism have had to acknowledge their shrinking constituencies in the Levant by joining forces. Islamic forces in the Levant (and further afield in Egypt, Iran and Iraq) are distancing themselves from 'rogue-terrorists' and kidnappers. The Lebanese 'Communist' Party called for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and moved closer to Sunni, Druze and even Amal forces. Whilst in Syria, an opposition front is forged by Syrian Leninists and the Muslim Brotherhood. These realignments will, they hope, provide them with a more solid foundation within the civil society movements of Lebanon and Syria and a bigger slice of the cake when it comes time to sharing the spoils.

4. The class struggle is escalating in Syria. We know there are 'hidden struggles' thanks to anecdotal information from friends and comrades but felt their inclusion would be unwarranted since we have no way of verifying them at present. This may have led to an inadvertent exaggeration of the power of the bourgeoisie. We are hoping to rectify these problems in future investigations. Despite these shortcomings we feel that the Levant and Middle Eastern scenes, in general, are becoming less cluttered. The dust is beginning to settle.

5. The 'civil society movement', in all its guises, is showing its true anti-working class spots. Proletarians are beginning to insist on autonomous social resistance against *both* political and civil societies. Trade union bureaucracies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the left wing of capital are less able to sabotage the class struggle (see Federici 2001, for a good critique of aid and NGOs). Increasing numbers of proletarians are dismissing 'reasonable' NGOs (a term designating those NGOs the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund can work with) as 'heirs of the US Peace Corps' (al-Azmeh 1998: 4). And even 'unreasonable' NGOs (those that refuse to work directly with the WTO, WB and IMF) alienate proletarians by employing similar discourses, developmental philosophy and culturally-specific aid. NGOs policy of supporting middle class prisoners by making a distinction between 'prisoners of conscience' who should be released and the rest (who presumably should remain in jail) is exposing the reactionary nature of these organisations further still.

6. 'Secularism' and the sham bourgeois slogan of the 'separation of church from state' are nearing the end of the road. The contradictions of this nonsensical (bourgeois) demand have become overwhelming. In no country has the church/mosque been separated from the state.

What can be said with certainty is that in most countries the state used to be subordinated to the church, whereas today it is usually the church that is subordinated to the state. The fact that some liberals and the left wing of capital are the only elements still dutifully calling for this is indicative of its anachronism. 'Proletarian atheism' will emerge to oppose both theism and bourgeois 'secularism'. This will be a slow process entailing a number of setbacks.

7. All politicians are scum. All nation-states *equally* reactionary. We do not choose between liberalism, neo-liberalism, liberal-fascism, neo-libertarianism, social democracy, neo-Keynesianism, populism and Leninism. This does not mean we are unaware of the different challenges and opportunities that each of these capitalist political philosophies represent. We adapt our tactics and strategies mindful of these nuances. However, more and more proletarians are beginning to view Bush, Blair, Obama, Putin, Berlusconi, Khamene'i, Netanyahu, Castro, Chavez, Lula, Asad and their ilk as Godfathers. The combined power of Godfathers is immense but it is also a power based on shaky foundations. Once fear deserts us, the aura of Godfathers will crumble.

8. We feel those proletarians in the 'West' who wish to assist our 'Middle Eastern' counterparts in escalating the social conflict can do so on a number of fronts: First, we should step up the struggle against those sections of the bourgeoisie we have an impact on (this is sometimes the bourgeoisie 'at home' and sometimes vulnerable pockets of the ruling class 'abroad' and sometimes both at the same time); Second, we should acknowledge, demarcate and foreground the qualitative class divisions within 'our movement' by articulating the distinction between middle class 'anti-globalisers' and working class anti-capitalists. Middle class 'anti-globalisers' represent a neo-libertarian trend paralleling the ideology and structures of neo-liberalism. Tourist summit-hopping and joint-activities between some sections of the 'anti-globalisation' movement and reactionary scum like Hezbollah and Hamas are merely the most obvious and superficial manifestation of this symbiosis; and finally, we should establish better channels of communication with our comrades in the Middle East, learning from their experience whilst informing them of ours.

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally written 01.05.2005, Beijing
Updated and groovyfied 01.09.2011, Peckham

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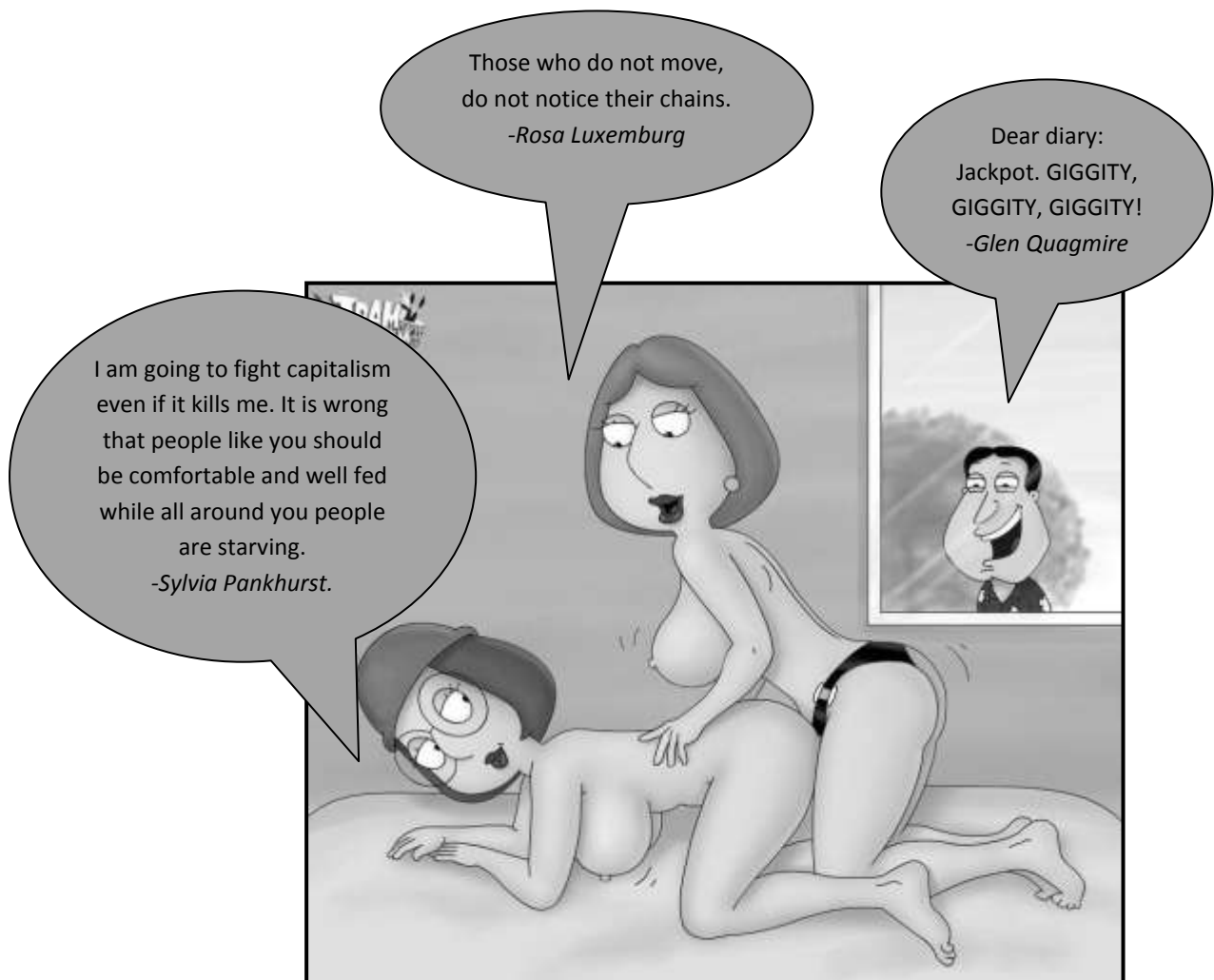
"Pakistan: The Mummification of the Class Struggle?" was originally written in 2001 as an anti-war leaflet. This version has been fully updated, bringing the narrative up to the present. It is not a fantastically original text (we would be the first to admit) but by providing a correct framework of analysis, it does lay the ground for more rigorous analysis in the future. The triangular entity India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (with tentacles attached to Afghanistan and Sri Lanka) is an organically integrated unit and should be analysed accordingly whenever possible. This is not to deny the genuine differences within these societies but to use their shared socio-cultural and economic attributes as a gateway to understanding. For example, Imran Khan's 'god-complex' only finds a favourable echo amongst right-wing Pakistani voters and leaves the rest reaching for the sick-bucket.

Melancholic Troglodytes believe that since crude versions of Sunni and Hindu Fundamentalisms have gained currency with some sectors of the region's population, a distinctly proletarian rebellion can go a long way in redressing the balance of power between us and our masters. A proletarian revolt in Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh, even if not fully successful, will have a disproportionately significant impact on the class struggle worldwide. Is such a revolt likely at present? With the exception of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the answer has to be negative. Nevertheless, the region's volatility suggests we should do our outmost to establish channels of communication with autonomous proletarian groupings in the region now, in anticipation of future opportunities.

King Lear

Sir, 'tis my occupation to be plain.
I have seen better faces in my time
Than stand on any shoulder that I see
Before me at this instant.

- Kent, Act II, Scene 2, *King Lear*, William Shakespeare

Pakistan: The Mummification of the Class Struggle?

"The highest heroic effort of which old society is still capable of
is national war; and this is now proved to be a mere humbug,
intended to deter the struggle of classes, and to be thrown aside
as soon as that class struggle bursts out into civil war."

Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*

The 'illegalization' of the economy

Any meaningful analysis of Pakistan has to treat "Pakistan and the Taleban-controlled Afghan territory as one economic zone," wrote B. Raman more than a decade ago (Raman, 2000). Otherwise, one would not understand how an economy in deep crisis, devoid of extensive mineral and natural wealth, deprived of financial loans, burdened by an inefficient bureaucracy, a wasteful military-complex, sky-rocketing debt-service costs and with a burgeoning labour dispute, does not simply fold in on itself. These territories may have changed hands within Afghanistan during the last decade, but Pakistan's organic reliance on its wealth generating powers remains undiminished. This is especially true of the north-western region of Pakistan.

There was a concerted effort by the previous Nawaz Sharif (billionaire, ex-prime minister, 1990-93 and again 1997-1999) government to transfer all heroin-related infrastructure to Taleban controlled territory, a process expedited by the government of Perviz Musharraf (ex-military, President from 2001-2008). Significantly, "while the opium cultivation in Afghanistan is largely in the hands of Afghan farmers, all heroin refineries in Taleban territory are owned by Pakistani narcotics barons, enjoying the protection of the Pakistani military and intelligence

establishment" (Raman, 2000). The billions earned each year in the narcotics trade plus a tax collection improvement of around 20 percent prevented the collapse of the Pakistani economy.

This economic concordance and Pakistan's desire to limit India's influence in Kabul explains the army's continued support for Afghani Taleban. We must remember that even under Musharraf's rule (a pro-US general we hasten to add) no "move was made against Mullah Omar" (Gregory, 2008), which ironically did not stop both Al-Qaeda and the Taleban denouncing the general as a traitor! The Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency provides the Afghani Taleban with sanctuary, training and funds. It is alleged they have a permanent representative on the Afghan Taleban's 15-memeber leadership council. The current incumbent, President Zardari, even boasts openly that ISI and CIA created the Taleban together (Buncombe, 2010).
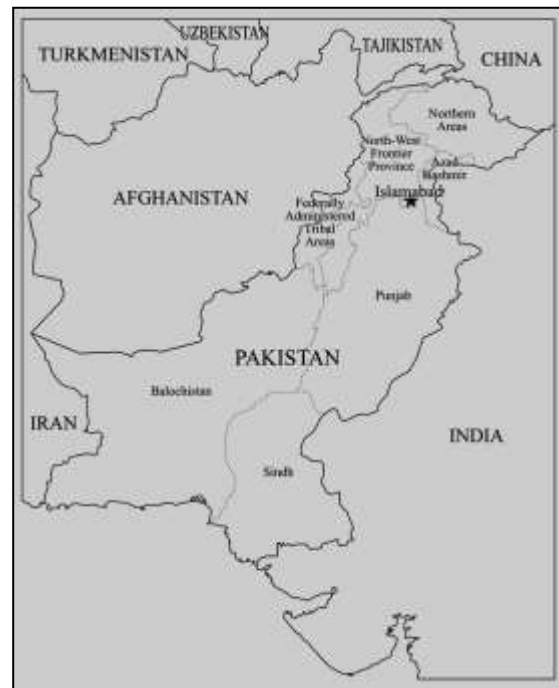
If this is true, and all indications suggest it is, how can we explain the 2009 army assault against Taleban units in Swat, Dir and Buner or alleged ISI collaboration in Osama bin Laden's assassination in 2011? In retrospect the assault seems to have had both a real element and a performative one- *real* in the sense that recalcitrant tribal leaders and armed fighters disloyal to the state were weakened but *performative* since ISI's real assets were left unharmed. The ISI also has strong links with the Haqqani and Hekmatyar networks as well as Lashkar-e-Taiba on the eastern border with India. It is essential to understand, however, that unlike Afghani Taleban, the Pakistani Taleban are fierce enemies of the Pakistani state, and probably responsible for most of the suicide bombings inside Pakistan since 2001. In the past, the state has tried bribes and 'peace' offerings without much success, which is why the

"Both read the Bible day and night, but thou read black where I read white."
-William Blake

"But I do nothing upon myself, and yet I am my own executioner."
-John Donne

Poppyfield English-speaking élite, speaking in tongues

current preferred strategy is a sustained military campaign against the insurgents. As for bin Laden's demise, it appears at this stage that at least some section of ISI was protecting him whilst another considered his continued presence a liability.

We are not in a position to predict the dire consequences of the Indus flood and the displacement of millions of farmers or the internecine fights between the executive and judiciary branches of the state or the corruption allegations at the centre of cricket and its implications for 'national unity,' but a combination of 'natural,' economic, political, cultural and security disasters do seem to be creating a vicious vortex of instability within Pakistan. The iniquitous allocation of funds to Punjab (at the expense of Sind and Baluchistan regions) has caused deprivation and discontent. Wealthy landlords own "40 percent of the arable land and control most of the irrigation system" but are less productive than small holders (cited in Ali, 2003: 11-12). The army runs large conglomerates controlling "real estate, rice mills, stud farms, pharmaceutical industries, travel agencies, fish farms, six different housing schemes, insurance companies, an aviation outfit and the highly accommodating Askari Commercial Bank, many of whose senior functionaries had earlier served at the discredited Bank of Credit and Commerce International" (Ali, 2003:12).

Therefore, we have to agree with Cockburn's assessment that in Pakistan, "the merry-go-round of open or veiled military rule alternates with feeble civilian governments. But power stays in the hands of an English-speaking élite that inherited from the British rulers of the Raj a sense of superiority over the rest of the population" (Cockburn, 2010). Things are so bad, that some sections of the army/ISI are manoeuvring for Imran Khan to become Pakistan's next 'strong man'! To understand the precarity bedevilling this 'English-speaking élite' (and its parliamentary constituents- The Muslim League in Punjab and Pakistan People's Party in Sind), we need to revisit past antagonisms. The parliamentary weakening of the ('secular') Muslim League and PPP has been inversely correlated to the electoral rise of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). The MMA is a religious coalition of five organisations aiming for a theocratic Pakistan.

"This opium you feed your people, so that, drugged, they do not feel their hurts, inflicted by you." - Marquis de Sade

"If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him." - Michael Bakunin

"I want to come all over Sharapova's face!"

"In bourgeois society, capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality." - Marx & Engels
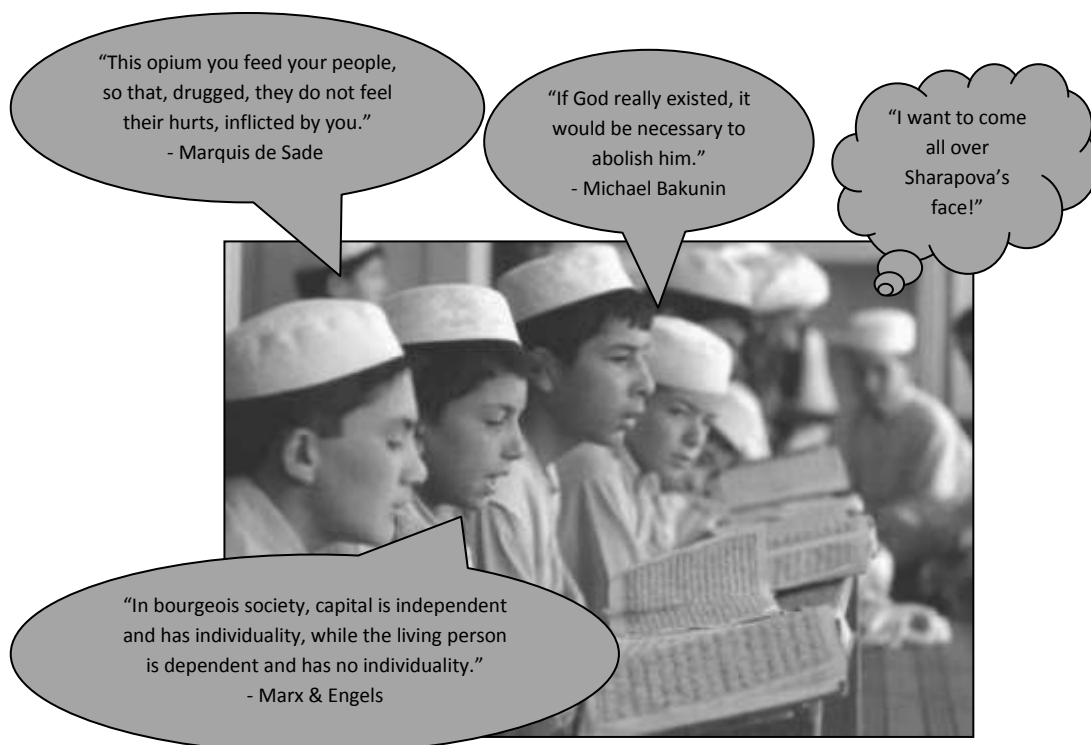
The class struggle makes a welcome appearance

After a long lull, the class struggle went into overdrive in the 1990s and contributed significantly to the economic stagflation. Pakistani proletarian migration to the Middle East (and its monetary benefits) was curtailed due to both the Gulf War and world recession. Disputes, riots and strikes were responded to by ever-harsher IMF inspired austerity measures.

Child labour disputes played a prominent role in these escalations. Some six million children are forced to work in Pakistan and there are 20 million bonded workers (Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign Bulletin, 17 November 1995). In the carpet industry alone there are 1 million child labourers (this amounts to 90% of the workforce). Employers are quoted as saying that they choose factory locations according to the "availability of children". The 300,000 children in the Brick-Kiln industry are virtual bonded labourers. Even to keep this miserable occupation they have to bribe the police routinely. About 50,000 children, some as young as 5 years old, work in the football manufacturing industry, manually sewing thick leather. According to Tariq Ali Pakistan has "one of the worst public education systems in Asia-70 per cent of women, 41 per cent of men, are officially classified as illiterate" (Ali, 2003: 11). A prominent militant who successfully organized a strike against privatisation, and the abolition of contract and child labour was assassinated in 1995 as reprisal. Two years later 20,000 carpet-workers in Lahore went on strike demanding wage rises, retirement pay, and an end to child labour. Since the 2010 monsoon, child labour has surged up to a third.

In 1997 Pakistan witnessed the spread of disputes to the banking sector when hundreds of militants were made redundant unceremoniously as a way of breaking up their organization and curbs were imposed on strikes. The frequent exhortations by the IMF to impose a 15 per cent general tax on imported and processed food, gas and petroleum is both unpopular and unworkable as "the revenue collection system still suffers from widespread corruption and inefficiency" (Bokhari, *Financial Times*, 2/Sept/1999).

In order to abide by this tight agenda the Pakistani bourgeoisie launched an attack on electricity and water workers through downsizing and 'privatisation'. For instance, the federal government "inducted 30,000 to 35,000 junior commissioned officers and around 250 officers of the Pakistan army into the Water and Power development Authority" (Tariq, *Green Left Weekly*, 27/Jan/1999). 'Privatisations' were resisted by workers at Habib Bank through a successful three-week strike and rail workers who launched a national campaign involving mass protest meetings and hunger strike camps.

Women have played a prominent role in campaigns against imported baby food as a substitute for mother's milk and the tobacco companies targeting 'third world' countries. The state hits back by imposing (even more) Islamic *morality*: "At any one time hundreds of women are imprisoned under the Zina Ordinance, a law that punishes extra-marital sexual intercourse

... The Zina Ordinance also applies to rape. Under this law ... specific types of evidence must be produced which exclude the testimony of women. By bringing a charge of rape, a woman is taken to admit that unlawful sexual intercourse has taken place. A rape victim can therefore be punished after a trial in which she was given no chance to testify" (*Amnesty International*, 5 December 1995). In fact around 15% of women who bring a case against rape are themselves charged and imprisoned! Here the state, Islamic jurisprudence and rapists form a terroristic united front against women (especially proletarian women) in order to weaken the whole movement. Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) has been instrumental in attacking women's rights through Shari'a courts. Its intentions to ban cable-TV and co-education are part of a long term cultural stratagem of imposing patriarchal values on the population.

Struggles at the workplace and at home against capitalist and residual feudal artifacts have recently been conjoined by students and university staff who have struck as a protest against educational cuts. Despite paranoid newscasting by (mostly) US journalists about the impact of madrasehs, only 1.3 of children attend such institutions with the rest being educated at non-religious schools. The intermingling of educational protests with service sector disputes will create its own momentum. Once we get away from media exaggerations regarding the imminent takeover of Pakistan by Taleban influenced 'jihadists', what remains is what has always been the most significant determining factor of all: the class struggle.

Ethnic Cleansing as Immobilization

For decades the division of proletarians into Punjabis or non-Punjabis, Hindus or Muslims, Indians or Pakistanis aided the bourgeoisie in its strategy of divide and rule. However, the fragmentation of Pakistan itself into Eastern (Bangla Desh) and western sectors, triggered by the Pakistan's army assault "aimed at nullifying the dramatic 1970 election victory by the Bengali-nationalist Awami League," was dramatically destabilising (Ali, 2003: 19). It is noteworthy that the underprivileged position of Bengali bureaucrats and army officers was "a driving force behind Bengali nationalism in Pakistan that led eventually to the liberation (sic) of Bangladesh" (Alavi, 1988: 73). The 1971 'liberation' was accompanied by the death of 2 million innocent people. Kashmir is another region where a concerted effort by the Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri bourgeoisies has tried to deny proletarian identity. As usual the mix of nationalism and religiosity proved a potent weapon in undermining proletarian solidarity.

We are beginning to see the very gradual break up of such artificial divisions as the subcontinent's proletariat tentatively creates horizontal links regardless of nationality, ethnicity and religious affiliation. This is a convoluted trend with many obstacles in its path and moments of slippage that reactionaries will no doubt take full advantage of. Nevertheless, there

seems to be a real rapprochement amongst some section of the region's proletariat. A major factor has been the wave of strikes, as for instance, by transport workers in Jammu and Kashmir beginning in 2008. Slowly other state-employees have joined them in organising similar protests. By 2010 many government offices were shut down. A series of draconian government measures against strikers and acts of sabotage by the union bureaucracy attempted to weaken the movement. However, the mere existence of such widespread proletarian opposition to Indian nationalism, Kashmiri separatists, religious reactionaries and trade union bureaucrats has altered the political discourse of the landscape.

Another factor encouraging a unified proletarian consciousness is the realization that since both Pakistan and India now possess nuclear weapons, a border dispute at Kashmir can easily trigger total mutual annihilation. The history of nuclear development in India and Pakistan shows how every major capitalist power is implicated in the subcontinent's arms race. With regard to India, President Eisenhower offered atomic technology in 1953 for 'civilian use.' Three years later the US supplied India with heavy water, which is used to control nuclear fusion. In 1959 US trains Indian scientists in reprocessing and a decade later France agrees to help India develop breeder reactors. The USSR becomes India's main supplier of heavy water in 1976 and a year later India develops supercomputers capable of testing nuclear-weapon explosions. In 1998 India conducts five underground nuclear tests, declaring itself a 'nuclear state' (see timeline at http://www.angelfire.com/nh/kashmir/nuclear.html).

Pakistan launched its program somewhat later reflecting its less 'developed' economy. In 1972, following its third war with India, Pakistan starts its program with the aid of Canadian 'Imperialism'. Five years later, Britain sells 30 high-frequency inverters for controlling centrifugal speeds. In 1981 the Reagan administration begins "generous military and financial aid because of Pakistani help to Afghan rebels battling Soviets" (ibid.). Two years later, China supplies Pakistan with bomb design. Pakistan becomes a nuclear power in the same year as India, 1998. Looking at this matrix historically, it seems that the US, British and Canadian ruling classes have tried to extend their influence in both India and Pakistan whereas Russia and France have concentrated on India and China has opted for Pakistan. We expect these rivalries to intensify.

Mein Fuhrer,
I can smoke!

Bangladesh: the other side of the coin

If Afghanistan should be perceived as an integral economic part of Pakistan then Bangladesh and Pakistan should be viewed as an integral political entity. This is not to declare the notion of sovereignty passé but to acknowledge basic geopolitical characteristics of the region. For whatever happens in one society has immediate political ramifications for the other. So let us look more closely at Bangladesh.

Natural disasters (e.g. floods) are usually blamed for the economic plight of Bangladesh by a bourgeois media incapable of dealing with history and complexity. But the 90s saw a massive escalation of the class struggle in the country. In 1990 violent riots broke out in the capital, Dacca Two years later several thousand striking proletarians were brutally repressed in Dacca, and a year later striking textile workers were the target. The same year witnessed the shutting down of four universities described by the state as "centres of conspiracy and terrorism" (International Communist Group, 2001). In 1994 despite the union bureaucrats' best efforts to sabotage the struggle of dockers at the port of Chittagong, all traffic was halted. Harvests were burnt as protest against wage cuts in the same year. In 1995 textile workers blocked many roads and railways in protest against their work conditions. Some sections of the garment workers forged links with European anarcho-syndicalists. Direct action, pickets of the bossess' houses, occupations and sabotage are routinely used to win demands. Both police and Islamist-militias were habitually used to attack protestors during this period (Ellis, 1996). Muslim clerics act as arbitrary judges in rural areas punishing 'sinful behaviour,' and solidifying class and gender privileges (Hussain, 2011). But even some sections of the security forces cannot be fully trusted by the state since they too are underpaid and occasionally rebellious. This, for the time being at least, distinguishes their class position from security forces in Pakistan and India. On the flip side, some police officers double up as masked organised criminals (see below for an interesting text by Marriott, 2011). The Pakistani and indeed Indian proletariat observed these events with interest but, as far as we can gather, without active participation.

Garment workers are very harshly exploited in Bangladesh even compared to neighbouring countries. In 2005 an average garment and leather worker in Bangladesh received 6 cents/hour compared to 20 cents in India, 30 in China and 40 in Sri Lanka (cf. Prol-position, 2006). The latest global capitalist crisis has resulted in reduced orders from Western buyers which no doubt will create more unemployment in the garment and leather industries. In case the reader gets the impression these strikes and protests are localised and merely 'economic', we should add that the movement seems capable of organising widespread, general strikes in response to government's manipulation of election results as well. In 2006 garment workers were granted the right to organise trade unions following weeks of pitched battle with the police. It was hoped that unionisation would bring industrial peace and a resumption of exports. However, almost immediately the protests spread to other sectors with water transport workers going on a spontaneous general strike for better wages.

Even irregular electricity supplies can become a source of rioting since garment workers do not receive payment for time lost to interruptions. According to Marriott (2006) "over 1,000 [garment workers] fought with officers as they laid siege to the electricity company offices, setting fire to company vehicles, two transformers and circuit breakers." To say they fought with security forces may not convey the true levels of courage shown by the Bangladeshi proletariat since few regimes are as blasé about restraining their police as the Bangladeshi bourgeoisie.

In a more dramatic incident villagers in the northwest of Bangladesh gave chase to a group of masked robbers who had just robbed the local physician. When cornered by the angry crowd, he robbers revealed themselves as police officers from a local station. They were beaten up and imprisoned which led to further military attacks on the villagers (Marriott, 2011).

Both civilian and military rioters are routinely assassinated by the state *whilst in custody* (Marriott, 2009). The dead are explained away as suicide cases or heart attack victims! The Pakistani bourgeoisie are fully cognizant of how easily these struggles could cross the border and cause havoc with capital accumulation on their patch of land.

Bonaparte come back: all is forgiven!

Bonapartism is a form of capitalist domination characterised by the supremacy of the executive branch over not only the working class but also the judiciary and legislative. One of its by-products is that it frees capitalists from the cares of governance, allowing them to concentrate on the accumulation of capital. In the long term this may allow a more secure class rule to emerge but during Bonapartism, the military, police and state bureaucracy intervene to establish order.

The rise in class struggle as well as increasing tribal conflict within Pakistan and surrounding areas prompted the ruling class to become more aggressive. When there is a great deal of internal and external tension but the working class is not strong enough to impose its collective subjectivity, Bonapartism steps in to establish bourgeois order. General Perviz Musharraf was promoted as the Chairman of the Chief of Staff Committee at the beginning of October 1999 by the civilian government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in the hope of strengthening the state. Merely a week later he had organized a coup against his boss. Well, there's Bonapartist gratitude for you!

The reasons for the take-over were numerous but chief amongst them the following factors stand out: proletarian strikes by cotton growers across the country which blocked roads and organized mass demonstrations was causing anxiety amongst the elite (cotton amounts to 70% of total 'legal' export); the government's attempt to introduce an unpopular tax was successfully defeated by small traders leading to further budgetary pressures; Sharif's highway construction

mentality had overseen the bulldozing of many historical buildings creating resentment amongst the urban population; the IMF's plans for 'privatisation' had met fierce resistance especially in the railway, telecommunication and electricity industries; and, finally, Sharif's attempt to disentangle Pakistan from Afghanistan by blaming the latter for terrorist activities inside Pakistani borders did not go down very well with the 'intelligence community'.

Having suddenly realized that the General was as ambitious as he was ruthless, the government tried in vain to get rid of him almost immediately after promoting him! This was the last straw. The coup was inevitable. The General was careful not to alienate rich landowners who were last taxed heavily under Benazir Bhutto's government (despite Bhutto herself coming from the same background and despite her pursuing neo-liberal policies in other areas which left her increasingly beleaguered!).

Once the cycle of attack on working class living standards was overseen by General Musharref, he was deemed surplus to requirement. Even the Americans did not object too much since by this time Musharref was perceived as a lackey of the US government by vast sections of the population and therefore devoid of credibility. The 2008 elections was interpreted as a humiliating defeat for both the General and Islamist forces. A gracious London exile was arranged for him and the army slowly moved back into the shadows whilst retaining its power over the political elite. The self-allocation of "an extraordinarily high proportion of Pakistan's limited resources" is testimony to this fact (Cockburn, 2010). As Cockburn observes, "Military bases all over the country look spruce and well cared-for, while just outside their razor-wire defences are broken roads and slum housing" (ibid). The tension between military and civilian rulers has reached extraordinary levels with the minister of defence production, Qayyum Jatoi, openly blaming the army for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007 and the Baluchi leader, Nawab Bugti, in 2006. The minister was promptly sacked and accused of high treason. The recent assassination of Salman Taseer, the so-called 'secular' Punjab governor, and the split within the ruling Coalition will exacerbate these tensions and further the calls in favour of Bonapartism.

Another factor undermining the government is the extraordinary attack by David Cameron on Pakistan's duplicity in promoting 'terrorism' in July 2010. This public rebuke (surely choreographed with Washington in advance) was calculated to pressurise the Pakistani state to fulfil a number of tasks in preparation for US-British withdrawal from Afghanistan, including: deliver those Taleban currents ready for negotiating a settlement; encourage the Afghan Taleban to severe links with Al-Qaida (Gregory, 2010). The recent assassination of Bin Laden has already increased the tension and distrust between Washington and Islamabad.

Recent WikiLeaks have confirmed dramatically that Saudi Arabia is the other big player in Pakistan, influencing events through cheap oil and aid. The Saudi elite clearly prefer a 'return' to military rule in Pakistan and despise the current Shi'a president, Asif Ali Zardari (Walsh, 2010b). Fearing the worse, Zardari has arranged for "his family to live in UAE if he is assassinated" (Walsh, 2010a). In an honest assessment of the situation on the ground, Zardari

is quoted as informing US vice-president, Joe Biden, in 2009: "I am sorry to say this but we are not winning the war [against the Pakistani Taleban]." He has also expressed concern that the current Chief of Army Staff, General Kayani, might "take him out" (ibid.). We indulge our taste for gossip-voyeurism, not because of any regard for the political nous of the average US diplomat but to show the intra-classist tensions bedevilling the Pakistani ruling elite and the real possibility of the return of Bonapartism.

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published 8 November 2001
Updated and groovyfied 20 September 2011

Imran Khan: the biggest (but sadly not the sharpest) tool in the shed!

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"Zapping the Zanj" has gone through a number of revisions and it remains a work in progress. We think we first published it around 2001, although frankly after many trips on acid, ecstasy, cocaine and magic cabbage our memory is not what it used to be!

We have made a half-hearted attempt to add more information to the text but to be honest this first book by *Melancholic Troglodytes* is dragging on a bit and we just want to finish editing it, so that we can get on with the rest of our lives! So dear reader, you have no choice but to graciously forgive the shortcomings of the present work. Thankfully Ridley Scott and Hollywood have not discovered this gem of an event yet, otherwise they would have transformed it into something as banal as *Kingdom of Heaven* or worst *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* by now. Mind you, the latter did have its kinky moments!

The Mask of Anarchy

'Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number.
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few.

'What is Freedom?—ye can tell
That which slavery is, too well—
For its very name has grown
To an echo of your own.

'Tis to work and have such pay
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants' use to dwell,

'So that ye for them are made
Loom, and plough, and sword, and spade,
With or without your own will bent
To their defence and nourishment.

'Tis to see your children weak
With their mothers pine and peak,
When the winter winds are bleak,—
They are dying whilst I speak.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1819

Zapping the Zanj: Towards a History of the Zanj Slaves' Rebellion

"Once war is declared, [the skilful soldier] will not waste precious time in waiting for reinforcement ... but crosses the enemy's frontier without delay. This may seem an audacious policy to recommend, but with all great strategists the value of time has counted for more than either numerical superiority or the nicest calculations ..."
- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

زَنْج

It is amazing how many genuine proletarian revolts have begun by us throwing pots, pans and the kitchen sink at the class enemy. Popovic even claims that "one rebel was seen dashing into battle carrying only his plate as a weapon" (Popovic, 1999: 46)!! The Zanj Slaves' Rebellion (869-883 A.D.) began in similar humble circumstances. Armed with sticks, two horses and three swords the wretched of the earth declared war on slavery and the Holy Empire of Islam.

What distinguishes the Zanj from numerous other slave rebellions cannot be measured in terms of numbers or the length of their struggle alone because one needs to bear in mind the aptitude displayed time and again in outmanoeuvring the ruling class. Instinctively they knew what needs to be done. That is not to belittle their numbers for this is one instance when quantitative comparisons are not misleading. The Spartacus Rebellion lasted for 3 years (73-71 BCE) and involved around 120,000 slaves. By contrast, the Zanj were 500,000 strong and maintained a marooned state for 15 years. Perhaps it is a blessing in disguise that their history has not been subjected to the gaze of Hollywood for the latter has an inbuilt tendency for de-memorizing and reifying proletarian resistance to class society. It is, therefore, left to us 21st century proles to re-create the world and times of kindred spirits separated from us by more than a millennium.

There were two Zanj uprisings before the great 9th Century revolt. The first insurrection occurred in 689 A.D. and "involved small gangs engaged in pillage" whilst the second revolt in 694 A.D. was better prepared. The great revolt of 869-883 A.D., however, was far more radical and became generalised rapidly. No sooner had they taken up arms against their exploiters that they became adept at night-raids on enemy territory, liberating weapons, horses, food and fellow slaves, burning the rest to cinders to delay retaliation. The Zanj rose up against their conditions three times between the seventh and ninth centuries. During their most significant uprising (869-883 A.D.) the Zanj acquired what was for its time state of the art technology: siege-laying catapults; flame-throwers; rapid chariots; multi-headed arrows. They trained expert engineers who blocked the enemy's advance by constructing impenetrable fortresses, cocooned inside layers of water canals or conversely built rapid bridges and communication lines for uninvited courtesy calls to the citadels of the gods.

Perhaps taking a leaf out of the Spartacus defeat, the Zanj did not handicap themselves by ignoring the seas. Unusually for slaves' rebellions, they possessed warships and freighters. In one battle alone they overcame the Khalifeh's navy to capture 24 ships, which had been chained together by their captains to enhance their defensive capabilities! Some scholars in what seems to us an exaggeration put the Zanj naval force at 1900 ships!
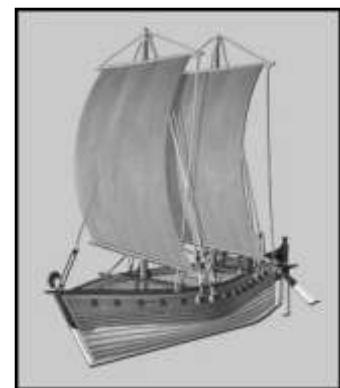
Arab Trade Ship- 9th Century

Nevertheless, as Popovic (1999: 11) has correctly observed, the marshlands around contemporary lower Iraq provided perfect cover for small, flat boats. This 'armada' could engage in hit and run campaigns as well as act as a reliable channel for communication and supplies. In the early years of the rebellion the Abbasi Empire proved too cumbersome and unwieldy to deal with the Zanj on this terrain.

There were serious internal divisions within the Abbasi Empire (750-1258 AD) in the 9th century between Arab clerics, Persian administrators and Turkish military officers. Externally their forces were involved in conflict with various neighbouring dynasties. Nonetheless, this was an ambitious elite with a long term strategy for conquest and 'progress'. The Abbasi Empire understood the concept of a progressive civilization as one constantly increasing its surplus profit. The Tigris-Euphrates delta, which had become abandoned marshland as a result of peasant migration and repeated flooding, could be reclaimed through intensive labour. Wealthy proprietors "had received extensive grants of tidal land on the condition that they would make it arable" (Davis, 1984: 5).

To this end Zanjis, or in this context black slaves of East African origin, were imported. The term Zanj appears on the one hand associated to a certain geographical area and on the other it became a 'free-floating' classificatory label used for stereotyping the zanj-as-enslaveable barbarians. This construct then facilitates the ideological justification for slavery (Willis, 1985: 27). By the end of the rebellion the term had

Abbasi Empire at the beginning of 9th Century

metamorphosed to include 'white' slaves from Europe and Asia. It is s a term that fell out of use for centuries before its re-introduction into political discourse in the 19th century as a result of colonial conquest.

The preponderance of foreign slaves in the Islamic Empire was due to an ironic quirk in the evolution of Islam. The orientalist, Bernard Lewis, is reasonably lucid on this. He starts by noting, "Quran expresses no racist or color prejudice" (Lewis, 1992: 21). In fact it had no conception of race in terms of colour, having already decided on the believer/non-believer criterion for social exclusion. That is not to say early Muslims were colour blind. Quran's lack of prejudice was not a divine invention of Muhammad but merely reflected the attitude of pre-Islamic Arabs who possessed a tribal/ethnic rather than a racial consciousness. Although it is worth remembering that as a reaction against Persian expansionism, the latter were derogatory

referred to as 'the red people.' And more pertinently to our study a common Arab proverb stereotyped the Zanj in terms that are sadly all too familiar from contemporary examples of racism: "The hungry Zanj steals; the sated Zanj rapes" (Popovic, 1999: 20).

Clarence-Smith writes: "It is undeniable that servitude in Islam exhibited distinctive traits, but it still remained recognisably a slave system. As in Roman law, these were people reduced to the status of livestock, who could be freely sold, ceded, inherited and so forth. Their humanity was recognised to a greater degree than in the Roman case, constraining the owners' rights in legal terms. However, this was a difference of degree, not of kind ..." (Clarence-Smith, 2006). The Russian scholar Petrushevsky summarizes the problem in these terms: "The [Quran], it is true, taught the master to be mild in his treatment of the slaves, but this was a counsel of moral perfection which was not reinforced by any legal sanction whatsoever: the master could put the slave to any task, hire him out, or pledge him as guarantee for the payment of a debt to somebody. He could inflict corporal as well as other punishment on his slaves, male or female, and even put them to death" (Petrushevsky, 1985: 155). There was, in fact, a gigantic hypocrisy at the heart of the Islamic attitude to slavery from the outset. For whereas the prophet himself both possessed slaves and permitted slavery as an institution to flourish, the humanitarian tendencies within Islam prohibited actual enslavement (except during war or as tribute). Thus a dialectical loop was established whereby economic productivity required an increase in the importation of slaves leading to the further commodification of humans and a corollary racist ideology to justify subjugation, which in turn fuelled crusades in search of more slaves.
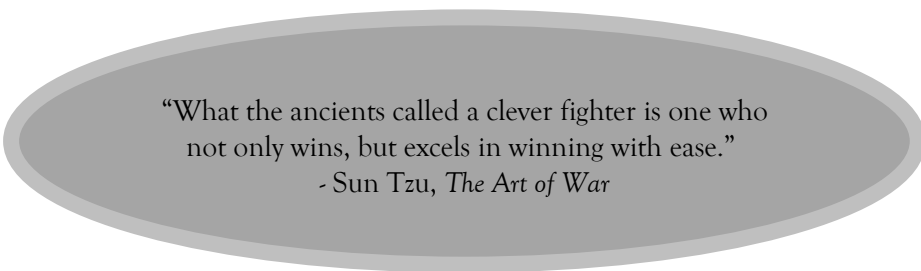
Islamic Humanism preceded its Renaissance counterpart by centuries, finding its negation in the institutions of slavery. It was to the Zanjis credit that they managed to temporarily supercede this dichotomy. Later on, this humanism having failed to connect to a generalized system of commodity production, degenerated into humanitarianism. Paul Mattick (1978: 158) makes a valid generalization for the European arena where humanism did reach impressive levels of achievement and where its fall from grace was even more spectacular than its 'oriental' counterpart: "With the bourgeoisie securely established, humanism degenerated into humanitarianism for the alleviation of the social

15. Darab receiving homage from the defeated Zanjis. Mughal, India, ca. 1580-1585.

misery that accompanied the capital formation process". The reign of the Islamic bourgeoisie has been more halting and uneven, less secure. Some of the battles won by the 'western' bourgeoisie against feudalism are still to be completed by its 'eastern' counterpart.

Consequently, one would expect a more lingering humanist tradition amongst the Islamic intelligentsia. This is precisely why (bourgeois) sufism remains a powerful current within 'Islamic' societies.

Compared to the Roman Empire whose slaves were mostly local, the greater distances involved in the transport of slaves, led to a more sophisticated slave trade in Islam. Lewis reminds us that through conquest, commerce, concubage and pilgrimage to Mecca, Islam created the first truly universal civilization. Here the term 'civilization' is not employed in a moralistic sense but refers to a system, which creates more surplus value than previous ones. Moreover, we would qualify the universalistic claims of Islam by pointing out that its foundation, the *umma* (Islamic community) is an 'imagined community' where class and gender inequalities are systematically covered up. It is significant that this imagined community needed external enemies for its survival and employed divide-and-rule tactics as brazenly as its 'western' equivalent. However, despite the policy of dividing the labourers by nationality, pursued by successive Khalifehs, international solidarity between the slaves reached new heights.

"What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who not only wins, but excels in winning with ease."
- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The Zanj taken as slaves to the Middle East were often used in hard agricultural, plantation crops, mining and intensive labour, which was unusual since prior to this application slaves were generally used in the Islamic Empire as household slaves or soldiers. Although African slaves working the marshlands and salt mines of Mesopotamia, especially those around Basra, sparked the rebellion, they were soon joined by other slaves, serfs, peasants, artisans, tribal Arabs, manumissioned slaves and the usual rent-a-mob-rabble that are forever lurking around the dark and dubious alleyways of history, waiting for an opportunity to do mischief. Significantly, later on in their campaign their forces were augmented by large-scale defections of black soldiers under the employ of the Abbassi Empire.

One such malcontent was a Persian by the name of Ali Razi (aka Zangi-yar, literally translated, friend of the Zanjis) who became the leader of the rebellion. He promised his followers heaven on earth and punished slave-owners severely in public trials. Borrowing ideas from 'radical' Shi'ism (before it was incontrovertibly co-opted) and Khārijite 'heresy' he presented a far more egalitarian version of Islam for slaves to rally around. His knowledge of the occult and expertise with the astrolabe confirmed his supernatural status. According to

Popovic "... he claimed to know what every one of his men was doing and thinking and to have received a message that was written automatically on a wall, in handwriting that was invisible" (Popovic, 1999: 39). This is not as strange as it sounds. Spartacus was credited with similar powers: "According to the credulous Greek historian, Plutarch, serpents curled around [Spartacus] whilst he slept, and his prophetess wife foretold his greatness even when he was still a slave" (Ridley, 1963: 37). Razi appropriated the wealthy and persuaded their slaves through reasoned arguments to join his ranks. In his speeches he repeatedly asks the slaves to execute him unhesitatingly if he should betray their trust.
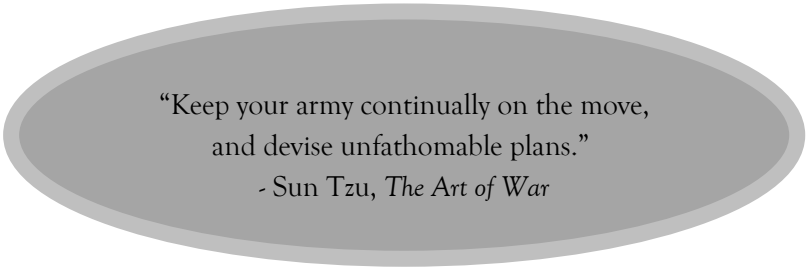
The fact that the success of the rebellion depended on the leadership of Razi is certainly a source of weakness. However, it is pointless to deny that many past struggles suffered from having to rely on charismatic leaders. For example, the First Sicilian Slave-War (134-129 BC) witnessed the rise of the Syrian rebel/king, Eunus, who was credited with magical power. The first widespread uprising of the Zanj in 866 AD was led by an African called Sharih Habash. Three years later the Zanj chose Ali Razi to be their leader. In so far as he stamped his personality on the revolt, we need to consider him.

From their fortress-city of al-Mukhtâra (the Chosen) they attacked and vanquished two Khalifehs, numerous hapless generals, raised mosques to the ground- all the time increasing

their power and prestige. Davis in *Slavery and Human Progress* concedes that the Zanj established what might have been the first maroon community in recorded history, that is, protected, self-sufficient communities of fugitive slaves. Arguably, the Zanj were even more ambitious than this quote suggests and western scholars marginalization of their struggles seems a tad suspicious to paranoids like us. As for al-Mukhtâra, perhaps it should be compared with the intended utopian City of the Sun, Heliopolis. Aristonicus (a disgruntled Royal turned rebel) issued a proclamation freeing all slaves who should come to this city (circa 130 BC). Al-Mukhtâra was Heliopolis incarnate. Slaves from neighbouring countries flocked to their banner, Turks, Slavs, Persians, Arabs, so that by the end of their 15-year reign of revolutionary terror non-Africans outnumbered the original rebels.

It pleases the Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia in us to observe that the Zanj never lost sight of the 'conspiratorial' nature of their adventure. Even in the beginning, although lacking in weapons, they displayed great organizational skills. They were ice-cool. Having devised a secret plan, Ali Razi informed his fellow rebels of the details by code. Accordingly each slave was to assassinate on the hour of the same day his (and most were male) master and thus take over his house, wealth and land. The plan worked so well that in no time at all swathes of present day Iraq, Bahrain and parts of Iran came under their rule.

The arrogance of the ruling class can be turned to their disadvantage. Throughout classical antiquity slaves were referred to as 'talking masks' or 'animated instrument.' The rapid victories of the Abbasi Dynasty had instilled the same sense of haughtiness in the Muslim elite. Their racism, as we will see below, became self-defeating as the slaves were underestimated time and again by their ex-masters. Moreover, it is noteworthy that at the beginning of the rebellion, the Abbasi state was distracted by external foes and internal dissension which undermined its initial military response to the Zanj threat.

The racism of the ruling Muslim elite ran deep and became worse as the empire became ever more dependent on slave labour. For instance, the famous Muslim historian, al-Mas'udi, basing himself on the authority of Galen states the ten qualities of Sudanese, thusly: "Kinky hair, thin eyebrows, broad noses, thick lips, sharp teeth, malodorous skin, dark pupils, clefty hands and feet, elongated penises and excessive merriment." Further on he quotes Galen approvingly: "surely the dark complexion person (*al-aswad*) is overwhelmed by merriment due to the imperfection (*fasad*) of his brain; therefore, his intellect is weak" (Willis, 1986: 68).

Elsewhere, al-Mas'udi relates the cause of blackness to the curse of God based on the Old Testament story of Ham/Canaan, "stricken in his semen because of his sexual relation with his wife in the Ark" (see Ephraim Isaacs in the same book for a discussion of whether it was the curse of Ham or Canaan). Although rabbinical ideologues believed in the idea of moral chosenness as evident in the racialism inherent in so much of their writings, it was left to Islam to turn this notion of desired separateness into outright racism, the belief in the biological/cultural superiority of one's own race over others. After all, Islam, unlike ancient Jewry, had an empire to run, and for the purpose of empire-building racism is a far more useful tool than self-encasing racialism!
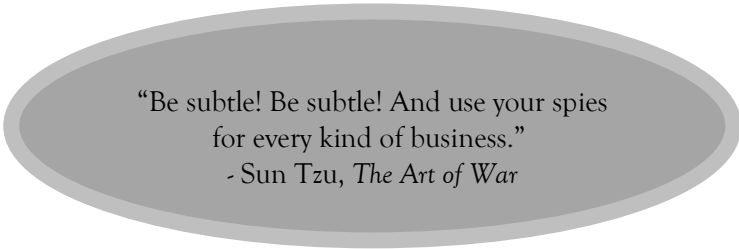
Ibn Qutayba thought blacks were "ugly and misshapen, because they live in a hot country. The heat overcooks them in the womb and curls their hair." Even the genius of Ibn Khaldun was tainted by prejudice against blacks: "Therefore, the Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery because [Negroes] have little [that is essentially] human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals..."

Against such a tirade of bigoted intolerance some black writers began to deliver counter-jabs (the punch falling short of the repertoire of the intelligentsia). Perhaps one of the first expressions of 'Black is beautiful' came in the shape of a treatise written by the satirist Jahiz of Basra (ca. 776-869), entitled *The Boast of Blacks Against Whites*, where he purports to defend the Zanj against their detractors: "Everybody agrees that there is no people on earth in whom generosity is as universally well developed as the Zanj. These people have a natural talent for dancing to the rhythm of the tambourine, without needing to learn it. There are no better singers anywhere in the world, no people more polished and eloquent, and no people less given to insulting language. No other nation can surpass them in bodily strength and physical toughness. They are courageous, energetic, and generous, which are the virtues of nobility, and also good-tempered and with little propensity to evil. They are always cheerful, smiling, and devoid of malice, which is a sign of noble character."

But these intellectual efforts remained woefully limited in scope. For example, the satirist and court jester, Abu Dulama (d. ca. 776), a black Arab poet, was pressurized into self-derogatory comic routines for the amusement of his Abbasi masters. The orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis (1992: 17) even suggests that Jahiz, being a humorist, was not "wholly serious" in his defence of Africans despite being probably of African descent himself. He was certainly more Arab than the Arabs on one occasion when he attacks the Zanj with venom: "We know that the Zanj were the least intelligent and the least discerning of mankind, and the least capable of understanding the consequences of actions..." As ever misconceptions were best fought during the struggles of the slaves themselves.
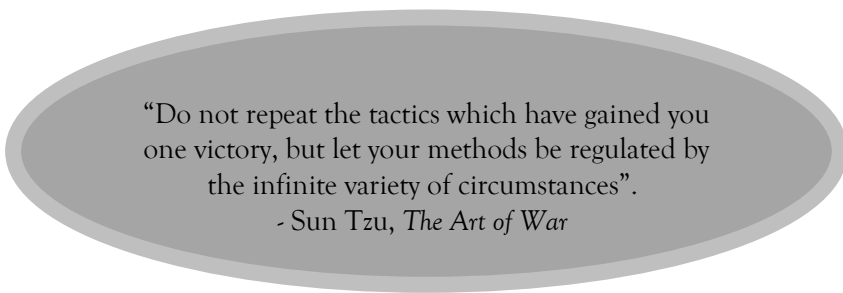
This image was captioned "Slave market in Mascate" (Muscat). It shows Arab traders and onlookers with captured black Africans (19th century)

> "Be subtle! Be subtle! And use your spies
> for every kind of business."
> - Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

It has been estimated that the Zanj fought the forces of the empire on 156 separate occasions during their 15-year campaign. Most of the battles waged in the first six years were won through a mixture of bravery and surprise guerrilla tactics.

In their seventh engagement, for instance, they out-smarted the Khalifeh's generals by attacking two villages simultaneously. They acted ruthlessly when required (executing thousands for siding with the khalifeh) and magnanimously when it made sense (releasing captured soldiers as part of their propaganda war against the Empire). The rebels gained control of southern Iraq by capturing al-Ubullah (June 870), a seaport on the Persian Gulf and cutting communications to Basra, then seized Ahvāz in southwestern Iran (capital of present day province of Khuzistan). The Zanj even managed to temporarily capture Basra in 871 before being driven back.

> "Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you
> one victory, but let your methods be regulated by
> the infinite variety of circumstances".
> - Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Even a movement as non-compromising as the Zanj could not avoid occasional contact with class enemies: merchants who sold them provisions when stocks were low; soldiers who defected to their side only to prove treacherous; and most damaging of all, pseudo-rebels who turned coat at the earliest opportunity.

The prime example of this latter category is Ya'ghub, a Persian who as a (muslim) nationalist fought the invading (muslim) Arab army, 'liberating' vast junks of Iran. However, the egalitarian principles of the Zanj proved anathema to him and when the crunch came he sided with the Khalifeh against the slaves, delivering a body blow from which the Zanj never

recovered. The historical lessons of the Paris Commune (that the bosses are always prepared to suspend faction fights and unite against the proletariat), came as no surprise to the Middle Eastern proletariat. Ya'ghub the cunt taught us that particular lesson long ago!
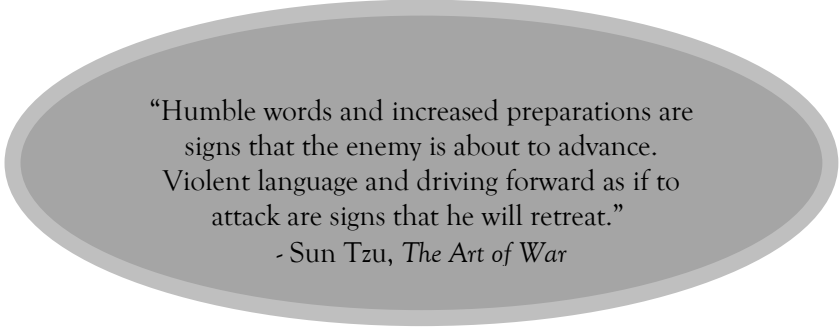
All this forced the Zanj to develop their intelligence-gathering network far and wide. Local and converted spies were employed to discover the enemy plans. Ali Razi would order the snatching of slaves from muslim dominated areas who were then questioned about their masters' intentions, and released unharmed having in most cases become converted rebels. And with these messengers the Zanj preached their egalitarian doctrine to all those who would listen.

In the early phase of the revolt, the different strands in their movement complemented each other to produce an all-pervasive assault against private property. The Africans and the tribal Arabs contributed to the communist trend by attempting to build non-hierarchical communes similar to the tribes they remembered from before slavery and the Persians under the influence of Mazdaki ideology emphasized the possession of all things in common.

The Zanj rebellion is one of the few slave revolts where women took an active part in the struggle. It is worth noting that women and children were particularly in demand in Islamic lands and hence predominated in the slave trade.

Lucy Lawless and her slave girls in *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*

"Humble words and increased preparations are
signs that the enemy is about to advance.
Violent language and driving forward as if to
attack are signs that he will retreat."
- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The Islamic Empire which was born a 'feudal' entity, had after three centuries of growth acquired millions of slaves working in mines, factories, marshlands, agriculture and household duties. This had created a parallel, though subordinate, mode of slave production alongside 'feudalism'. A sign that there was a surplus of slaves can be seen in their use as court entertainers. Eunuchs, virgins and even transvestites were employed for the pleasure of the Muslim elite. In slave markets, known as spectacles, the price of slaves could suddenly fall after a military victory. Anticipating 20th century consumerism, one smart trader decided to give away a free extra slave for every 40 Turkish slaves bought, in order to boost flagging sales!

The first slave traders' manual, which appeared in the 10th century, concentrated on the physiological and physiognomic features of the slaves and could be viewed as a forerunner of the science of phrenology. Later studies analyzed ethnological aspects also. There were even scientific studies of the subject suggesting an elaborate technical division of labour for slaves in order to increase their productivity.

All this knowledge regarding its victim came in handy when the ruling class finally got its act together and began to wear down the Zanj militarily while sowing the seeds of distrust amongst them. In al-Muwaffaq the Empire had found a brilliant military strategist who respected his foe sufficiently to study him. Al-Muwaffaq diverted the Bedouins from the Zanj by opening safe and convenient markets for them elsewhere (Popovic, 1999: 108). He trained his army in siege tactics and bribed the more receptive members of the rebellion. Meanwhile the Empire settled its accounts with troublesome emirate insurgencies (chiefly Tulunid and Saffarid). This was a strategic disaster for the Zanj, for now the Empire could concentrate its might solely against them. Cities controlled by the Zanj began to fall to the superior forces of the Khalifeh. Al-Mukhtâra, their capital and flagship, was besieged for two year by 50,000 Abbasi troops. Severed heads of rebels were catapulted into the city to break down resistance. Undermined by betrayals and the tight economic blockade engineered by the Abbasi army, the Zanj became increasingly desperate. Finally, in a surprise and daring counter-attack, Razi and some of his closest associates fought their way out of the Muslim's stranglehold to fight one last battle. But the game was up and they knew it. When the end came, Razi's severed head was paraded throughout the region to convince the remaining free slaves that resistance was futile. Yet, thousands refused to believe and fought on in small enclaves in the hope of a miracle that never materialized.

A bourgeois once explained the failure of the slaves' revolts in the Roman Empire in these terms: "… the uprisings were unsuccessful because even in the most revolutionary crisis of history the slaves were always the tools of the ruling classes" (Lenin quoted in W Z Rubinsohn, Spartacus' Uprising and Soviet Historical Writing). Thankfully no one bothered to tell Lenin about the Zanj revolt. Ironically Stalin, who had based his reductionist thesis of the division of human history into 5 successive periods on Lenin, came to exactly the opposite conclusion: "… the great slave-uprisings of the declining Roman Republic annihilated the slave-owner class and the slave-owner society" (J. V. Stalin, vol 13, p 239, Speech to the First All Soviet Congress of Kolcholz-peasants). Had Stalin passed the

Spartacus, loincloths and digital abs!

same judgment on the Zanj rebellion he would still be wrong but at least on safer ground! As it is, both he and Lenin delayed any serious analysis of class struggle in the ancient world through their ill-informed and reactionary rhetoric. Middle Eastern scholars are to this day grappling with the adverse repercussions of their rants.

What we can say with a reasonable amount of certainty is that there were certain inherent weaknesses in the Zanj movement which went unnoticed while they were winning battles and attracting new members, but as soon as they stalled on the social and military fronts, the flaws crystallized as insoluble obstacles. The first phase (869-879) was the period of success and expansion and the second phase (879-883) was when the Empire struck back!

Following Hannibal's famous victory at Cannae, Marharbal, his cavalry commander urged him to march on Rome. When Hannibal refused Marharbal retorted: "The gods have taught you how to win victories, Hannibal, but not how to use them." The same criticism can be levelled at the Zanj. Having fought the forces of Islam to a standstill, they failed to take

advantage. They lacked an end-game. Gradually with the new wealth accumulating in their coffers they began to imitate their old masters. A rigid hierarchical structure and an elitist attitude towards the rank and file created disillusionment. Some of the top generals in the Zanj army became indistinguishable from the hated landlords. The minting of their own currency accentuated the divisions between rich and poor amongst them and led to further loss of solidarity. Ali Razi who clearly understood the alienation all this created, seemed powerless to do anything about it. The same problem would resurface again in 17th century maroon communities of the Caribbean. According to Bradley: "The long survival of Palmores, for example, meant that the monarchy of King Ganga Zumba assumed truly dynastic form .... Perhaps the most bizarre development in this respect was the appearance of Indian leaders of resistance in Brazil ... who, under the impact of Portuguese Catholicism, styled themselves popes" (Bradley, 1998: 10-11).

Finally, we can agree with Talhami (1977) who argues that the Zanj Rebellion was not just a slaves' uprising since it also involved workers, peasants, Bedouins, artisans, semi-liberated slaves and even clients of prestigious families. The origins of the term 'zanj' are ultimately not as important as what they achieved and the legacy they left behind. For years they fought against their conditions and for freedom but once they lost their way, the end was inevitable. The heterogeneity of the slaves, which was previously a source of strength, now became a cause of friction. Household slaves and eunuchs began arguing whilst Razi and his generals fell out over tactics. Some would argue that even in defeat the Zanj were victorious, in the sense that they forced the Islamic ruling class to dispense with slavery as an auxiliary mode of production to 'feudalism'. The slaves' workload was lessened and they were gradually transformed into peasants and serfs, some being 'freed' into wage-slavery. There were also improvements for Bedouins and some peasants. Accordingly the Zanj inaugurated *a* social revolution but not *the* social revolution. This much is true but in the end we would do well to remember that the Zanj were also defeated because they ignored the simple wisdom of the ancient axiom:

"In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns."
- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Melancholic Troglodytes
Originally published around 2001
Updated and groovyfied 21 September 2011

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"Carmathians cometh?" takes up the narrative where the previous article left off. It recounts the story of another group of heretics who between 9th-11th centuries imposed themselves on the contours of the Islamic Empire. Now, these were naughty rebels- for they said and did many naughty things! And they certainly deserve their story to be told by filmmakers and troubadours. But for now, they have to settle for a pseudo-dialogue with us!

Some historians have referred to Diggers as the Marxists and Ranters as the Anarchists of the English communist movement in the 17th century. This is obviously far too simplistic. It is even more problematic to draw a strict line between the Zanj and Carmathians in this regard. Did Zanjis resemble Ranters in their desire for absolute and immediate freedom? Were Diggers worthy successors of the Carmathian determination to abolish private property and rationalise religion? These historical analogies are tempting but crude. Perhaps it is wiser to state that all six tendencies (Zanjis, Carmathians, Diggers, Ranters, Marxists and Anarchists) illuminate certain areas of communism. We will need to draw upon their collective achievements *and reject their errors* in future battles against capitalism.

We thought it instructive to juxtapose the Carmathians' story with the current cycle of struggles in Bahrain. The exercise foregrounds many of the strengths and weaknesses that have characterised The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt. And yes, we employ the limited term 'revolt' instead of the more radical 'revolution' quite deliberately since, *from what we have seen so far*, the proletariat's participation in strikes, demonstrations and riots has not reached critical mass nor has it coherently proposed a social rupture with capitalism, state and religion. However, if the process of revolt intensifies, then revolution beckons. *Revolting Middle Easterners, one more effort if you want to be revolutionaries!!!* (Marquis de Sade).

Julius Caesar

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

-Brutus, Julius Caesar, Act 4, Scene 3

Carmathians Cometh? Old and New Struggles in Bahrain

لا تقولوا جننت

جنوني احلامكم

ـ قاسم حداد

Do not say: "you have gone mad"
My madness is your dreams.

- Qāssim Haddād (Bahraini poet)

I

Oh, clever, clever Carmathians! Oh, naughty, naughty Carmathians! More than a millennium has passed and you are still remembered with fondness amongst rebels and revolutionaries. Who is going to light a candle for us in years to come? Will we be discussed as feverishly by future-rebels as you are by today's 'Middle Eastern' rioters? Will our transgressions be prized as much?

There remains a great deal of mystery surrounding your exploits. Even the etymology of your name has moved into that deliciously obscure territory traversed only by train-spotting linguists and historians. Does your name mean "villager" or "short-legged"? Were you really "red-eyed?"[1]

We do know with a modicum of surety that there were secret talks held between individuals who would later play a prominent role in your movement and the Zanj (869-883 CE, See previous article in this collection for an analysis of the Zanj). A proposal for an alliance was offered by you but it came to nothing (Popovic, 1999: 29 and 31). For the most part, however, we are reliant on biased historians and your enemies for information regarding your deeds. We have pieced together to the best of our ability a patchy narrative which we hope will do you justice but you must let us know of any discrepancies and errors as soon as you can.

According to our analysis, the tide of revolt being witnessed in Bahrain today has three interrelated cycles: a long term historical cycle of anti-authoritarian revolts dating back to the Carmathians and similar currents; a medium term cycle focused on the Gulf region shaped by

rapid capital accumulation, proletarian resistance, racism, sexism, corruption and structural deficiencies; and, finally a shorter term crisis tied in with the severe financial crisis of capitalism since 2008 which has hit the poorer regions of North African and the Middle East with particular venom. We will be whizzing in and out of these three currents in order to better understand recent events.

Let's play Revolutionary Middle Eastern Lottoooooooo!!!!

Tonight's jackpot is estimated at *£priceless social rupture* with all that is rotten and ugly in capitalism and religion!!!! Don't forget to check and lubricate your Thunderball!

We're in't to win it!
We're in't to win it!

II

The long term cycle of crisis could conveniently begin with your immediate forerunners: the Zanj. We know how the Zanj rebellion created a favourable reaction amongst the exploited in areas contemporaries would call, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Bahrain. Many Zanji survivors were involved in establishing the Carmathian movement. We can even place your movement roughly between 880 and 1080 CE, perhaps the most radical of a cycle of protests between the 9th and 12th centuries.[2] Some of these protests were mild attempts to reform Islam from within, some were schismatic (refusing to submit to the Khalifa), some heretical (refusing the divinity of Mohammad), some apostatical (rejecting Islam as a faith), some nationalistic (perceiving Islam as a foreign invasion), and some communistic (preaching equality and an end to exploitation and oppression). As far as we can surmise, different generations of Carmathians expressed most of these tendencies at one time or another making a historical judgment fraught with danger. The three largest anti-feudal rebellions you spearheaded occurred "in southern Mesopotamia around 890–906; in Bahrain in 894–99; and in Syria in 900–02" (Petrushevskii, *The Free Dictionary*). But before delving into this history, it is to your political descendants in contemporary Bahrain that we should turn our gaze for an early comparison.

Karma Karma Karma Karma Karma Chameleon
Carmathian Carmathiaaaaannn
Loving would be easy
if your colours were like my dreams
Red, gold and green
Red, gold and green

III

Bahrain has changed immensely since Carmathian times. Around 90% of the population live in urban areas and the country has a relatively high rate of literacy (%86.5), and per capita GDP ($40,400, 2010 estimates- all figures courtesy of the CIA!). It is now a country populated by some 800,000-1,200,000 people from a variety of backgrounds, attached since 1986 to Saudi Arabia through the 26-kilometer King Fahd Causeway. The Causeway was recently used to bring (British trained) Saudi troops to quash Bahraini protests and prop up a weak monarchy. The demonstrations were declared "un-Islamic" by Saudi authorities and a pathetic fig leaf of an excuse known as the Peninsula Shield Security Agreement used to justify intervention.[3] A thousand Bahrainis marched on the Saudi embassy in Manama in protest and at least one Saudi soldier was reported shot and killed by protestors (Cockburn, 2011a). The last time Saudi security was used to quash protests was in 1994. Then, at least 40 people were killed before bourgeois 'order' was restored (Merli, 2011). If the Carmathians were around today, the Causeway would probably be used in the opposite direction for raids on the Stone of Kaaba and King Abdullah's golden dildos.[4]

In GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states, "foreign labor comprises a majority of the total workforce, and in several states (Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar) foreign workers comprise an absolute majority of the population … [In Bahrain] nearly half the population are foreign-born expatriates, including Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Filipinos, Indonesians, Nepalese, South Africans, Egyptians, Britishers (as they are called on the island), Americans, and countless others" (Gardner, 2010: 13 and 25). It is imperative for us to state categorically and vociferously, amidst so much bourgeois hoo-ha about Sunni-Shi'a conflict, that the overwhelming majority of people in Bahrain are neither Sunni nor Shi'a but proletarians.

Protestors in Manama block the financial district.

IV

Bahrain is an archipelago of thirty-three islands, which became an independent country only in 1971. There are plans to supplement the King Fahd Causeway with the Qatar-Bahrain Causeway in the future, which will no doubt further complicate its national identity ('Bahrain', *Wikipedia*). Bahrain's ancient history is as colourful as it is varied. As an entrepôt of ancient civilizations, the islands have been influenced (and at times ruled) by a succession of more powerful forces: Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Portuguese, Arabs, and British.

Today the US Fifth Fleet (consisting usually of around 30,000 crew serving afloat and 3,000 support personnel ashore) has its garrison in Bahrain (Barnes, 2011). This may account for the confused messages coming out of Washington. On the one hand, they have been as reticent as media-protocols allow regarding atrocities perpetrated against demonstrators for fear of losing a valued ally and a crucial naval base. And on the other even they see the dire need for reform. Hence, the US defence secretary, Robert Gates, was dispatched to urge the Khalifa family in a rather patronisingly tone to go beyond "baby steps" and enact substantial economic and political change (*The Guardian*, 14 March 2011). Billions of dollars of Saudi 'aid' poured in soon after, and on 16 March the state declared a state of government. The level of repression has been so intense that hardly anyone noticed martial law was officially lifted on 1 June 2011.

From the 6th-3rd centuries BC it was part of the Achaemenian Persian Empire and once again from the 3rd century AD to the 7th century it was ruled by Persians. Islam arrived around 629-640 AD. Bahrain greatly benefited from Baghdad's commercial success. Both trading commodities and knowledge passed through Bahrain, creating an advanced outpost respected throughout the region for its creative synthesis of rationalism and mysticism. These theological inventions, borrowing from both Sunni and Shi'a sources, had an enduring legacy on future developments of Bahraini Carmathians.

A series of Turkish dynasties ruled Bahrain between 11th-13th centuries AD. The pearl industry provided immense wealth, a phenomenon remarked upon by the famous 14th century geographer Ibn Battuta ('History of Bahrain', *Wikipedia*). The Omanis occupied Bahrain in the 15th century leaving behind a number of forts and the next century belonged to a batch of

imperialists nowadays better known for exporting pampered footballers: the Portuguese. Their reign was remarkable for how little lasting influence on culture, architecture, and artwork it left behind. The native population pushed out the Portuguese in 1602 and appealed to the Persian Empire for protection (Gardner, 2010: 32).

If the Portuguese ruled by *domination* alone, the Persians enjoyed a certain degree of consensual *hegemonic* power (Gramsci, 1971). Whilst the Portuguese favoured Sunni over Shi'a, the Persians reversed the situation and made the Sunnis the persecuted faction. The Bahraini Shi'a ulema who were strengthened by the Persians became very independent in time and even challenged pearl merchants and feudal landlords for the wealth of the islands ('History of Bahrain', *Wikipedia*). Pearl remained the islands' chief source of revenue until two events impelled the collapse of the Bahraini pearl industry: at the beginning of the 20th century Japan patented a process for cultivating pearls and became a serious competitor; and, then in 1929 the US stock market crashed and demand for luxury goods dwindled (Gardner, 2010: 37). Before looking at the post-oil history of Bahrain let us peruse some of the intellectual influences that shaped the Carmathians.

V

Dear Carmathians: hideous scholars and repulsive theologians refer to you derogatorily as a sect or a schismatic branch of the Ismaili variety of Shi'a Islam. But the *Melancholic Troglodytes* know that you were so much more.

Of course, the so-called Islamic *umma* (the fictitious Islamic 'community') was from the outset factious. By the 9th century these tensions had resulted in numerous breaks with the Abbasid Khalifa. One such heresy was the *Ismailis* (Esma'illiyan), who "solved the problem of self-preservation by transforming themselves from an underground sect into [the powerful Fatimid] Empire"[5] (Ridley, 1988; 73). The Ismailis "consciously endeavoured through the blending of Islamite, Zoroastrian, and Christian elements to create a new world religion" (H. F. Helmolt, quoted in Ridley, 1988: 63). To this we must add Mazdaki ideas and its egalitarian principles as well as Mu'tazila currents, with its privileging of rational thought and inquiry.

All this represented an intellectual break with both the dogma of Sunni orthodoxy and the ritualistic Twelver branch of Shi'a Islam.[6] Instead of *zahir* (appearance, literal), the Ismailis put the emphasis on *batin* (hidden, esoteric meaning of religion). The ultimate interpretation of the hidden meaning of the Quran resides with the office of Imamate, paving the way for a static belief system to renew itself in the face of change. In some ways this was a dress rehearsal for the Protestant break with Catholicism. In breaking with the rituals of Islam (prayer, fasting and hajj, etc.), Carmathians exposed the economic and ideological essence of Islamic ceremonies (Mirfetros, 1997). In collecting all copies of the Koran, Torah and the Bible and burning them

to cinders, a marker was put down for future rebels (Mirfetros, 1997: 128). The most devastating critique of religiosity was offered when Carmathians declared that humanity has been led astray by three individuals: a shepherd (Moses), a physician (Jesus) and a camel-driver (Mohammad), before mischievously adding that the latter was the most deceitful and devious of them all (Mirfetros, 1997: 128).

The material basis of these intellectual conflicts has been described by Rodinson as "a system of co-operation among free men", which involved "heavy taxation of the rich in order to finance the state's funds devoted the relief of the poor. Altogether it was a sort of 'welfare state', bearing a distant resemblance, *mutatis mutandis*, to those present-day states with well-developed social services, such as great Britain" (Rodinson, 1980: 26). Written at a time when British social democracy was not yet marginalised by neo-liberalism, this description does not do full justice to the anti-authoritarian streak within the Carmathian movement.

Ridley touches on another crucial aspect of the movement when he describes it as a centrifugal force moving outward from the disintegrating Abbasid Empire: "In Arabia a robber-state was set up by the Carmathians, originally a religious sect and a breakaway from the Ismaili movement of Abdullah-ibn-Maymun. The Carmathians openly defied the authority of the Khalifs, pushed their ravages up to the very gates of the metropolis, Baghdad itself, and, to the horror of all Islam, sacked the caravans of pilgrims, putting to the sword their unfortunate inmates" (Ridley, 1988: 42-43).

Petrushevsky, who avoids the term 'robber-state' has a more panoramic perspective about the origins of Carmathians: "A progressing feudalism [of the Baghdad Khalifa], the strengthened grip of the local barons in Iran, and the increasing burden of taxation combined to excite popular uprisings of the peasantry. Almost always these wore the cloak of sectarianism [because there was no other discourse available to radicals to express themselves yet- M.T.] … These 'religious' movements … were united in … the ambition to establish universal justice and social equality. Sometimes the ideas would be but vaguely conceived … but sometimes (as in the doctrines of the … Carmathians) it would be more concrete and amount to a system of utopian socialism" (Petrushevsky, 1985: 234-35). In a similar vein, Tokarev refers to the Carmathians as a "democratic sect whose members were primarily peasants and Bedouins in Arabia and who established common property rights" (Tokarev, 1989: 376).

You *Carmathians were, therefore, not just a sideshoot of the Ismailis but the better, more radical part of them*. In fact, we know that even the Ismailis turned against the Carmathians killing two of its significant agitators in present day Iraq.

VI

Let us return to our narrative of Bahrain after the discovery of oil in 1931. The 'independence' of Bahrain in these years was a mere masquerade since the country remained strictly under British administration (BBC, 'Timeline: Bahrain'). The British naval forces invaded the Persian Gulf gradually and as soon as they found their bearings, denounced all warring naval forces as 'pirates' and vowed to impose 'order' in the region. Local rulers who sensed the sea-change, clamoured to negotiate favourable treaties with British capitalism, guaranteeing themselves a piece of the action. And the British state reciprocated this grovelling by undermining the role of merchants in Bahrain and strengthening the position of various Royal families (Davidson, 2011b). Prior to 1931 this meant trade and the pearl industry; after 1931 it gradually became trade and the oil industry.

Initially *South Park* protestors demanded the removal of King Hamad's uncle, the long-serving Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa. But now most want 'Uncle Fucker' to follow his uncle into oblivion. "Suck my balls!!!"

Bahrain boomed for the next few decades and set the pace for development in the Gulf region even though it did not possess as much oil and gas as neighbouring countries. Ambitious infrastructural projects such as universities, hospitals, residential blocks, roads and hotels were established, strengthening capitalist social relations (Gardner, 2010: 41). Skilled labor, especially in the oil industry, was performed by 'foreign' workers since in those days most Bahrainis lacked the necessary training. In time, this 'racial' tension will come to play a major role in dividing the proletariat, but for the first few decades after the discovery of oil, most were improving their circumstances and consequently racial and nationalistic quarrels remained marginal.

In 1961 Sheikh Isa Bin-Salman Al Khalifah becomes ruler of Bahrain, thus establishing a monarchist regime still in charge (as we go to press!). A pivotal moment occurs ten years later when Britain withdraws its naval forces from the Gulf, granting Bahrain its independence. With obscene haste "Bahrain and the US sign an agreement which permits the US to rent naval and military facilities" (BBC, 'Timeline: Bahrain'). The ruling elite learn the value of

ideological institutions such as museums, national TV and newspapers in promoting a certain bourgeois and ethnic narrative.

The limited democratic elections enacted in 1972 are as miserly and self-serving as the ones once held in ancient Greece, since only male Bahraini citizens over 20 were allowed to pick from a pre-approved list of capitalists. Women and foreign non-citizens (in other words the overwhelming majority of those creating the wealth of Bahrain) were excluded, as were women, slaves and non-citizen Athenians in ancient times. Eventually the Sheikh found even this hand-picked National Assembly an impediment and dissolved it by decree in 1975. The chamber that has been operating as the lawmaking organ of the state since then is toothless and appointed directly by the King. When 18 'Shia opposition' members resigned to protest government violence against demonstrators, the remaining 22 called upon the King to declare martial law (*The Independent*, 14 March 2011a). This democracy contrasts unfavourably with the real egalitarian power exercised by the 'lower' classes during the times of the Carmathians.

Urgent requirement manpower for Bahrain National Guard (BNG)

The BNG wishes to select from the following categories of manpower at Lahore urgently:

1. Retired Infantry Majors, would be taken as Lieutenants ($1400) per month

2. Drill instructors (must have served as drill instructor in Pakistan Military Academy for at least 3 years)

3. Anti-riot instructors (Height - 5 feet 9 inches, minimum $430 per month)

4. Cooks (Education – 8th Class pass)

5. Mess waiters Retired Armed Forces personnel

Hegh lotlh scum! (Klingon for "Die rebel scum!")

The Klingon bit may be fictive but this is a genuine ad for mercenaries!! Yob, our masters are so stupid (or is it blase?) they advertise for murderers!!!!!!!

VII

The first written reference to Carmathians by Arab historians relates to a contingent of fighting-men who joined the Zanj rebellion in Lower Iraq and Southern Iran (Tabari, cited in Petrushevsky, 1985: 238). But we speculate you were active in north-eastern Iran before this. Were you? We do know for certain that your revolt spread to 'Bahrain' around 894 AD and you captured al-Lahsa (in today's Eastern Saudi Arabia) in 899.

What makes your movement special is that these territorial gains were complemented by intellectual brilliance. The unity of action and theory was a Carmathian characteristic throughout. In going beyond ritualistic prohibitions and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence, i.e., Shari'a law plus interpretation), you prefigured the Movement of the Free Spirit that predominated amongst Christian mystics a few centuries after you were gone (cf. Vaneigem, 1994). This explains the absence of congregational mosques and fanaticism amongst you, especially during the 11th century (Petrushevsky, 1985: 247). When capable of physically defending your gains, you established the only 'communist society' to last for more than a generation. Your regime in Bahrain has also been called the "first secular state in world history" (Schlereth, 2011). As Schlereth has explained: "Religion and state were separated. The leaders and many followers were secular, but religion was not banned (Persians, Jews, Christians and Muslims also lived in Bahrain). Everyone could choose any faith, according to their tastes" (Schlereth, 2011). What they had achieved was "state of equals under a collective leadership, with common ownership of land, one single tax (the tithe), state owned mills where the grain was milled for free, interest free loans for foreign craftsmen for the foundation of enterprises, and the rule of law" (Schlereth, 2011).

You killed Kenny! Kenny was no Shi'a, he was a Carmathian! You bourgeois bastards!!

This was an impressive communal mutual-aid society that lived by plundering caravans and ships and by playing the Arab and Persian empires against each other. In a somewhat dated work Rexroth informs us that, "Within Bahrayn [sic] itself there was a complete absolutist communism. The citizens paid no tribute or tax; their welfare was guaranteed from birth to death, in sickness or health ... The orthodox accused the Carmathians of community of women and all manner of orgies. As a matter of fact they were strictly monogamous, a military caste something like Plato's guardians or the Teutonic Knights, who led a pure, severely regulated life. The use of wine and all minor vices were strictly forbidden. Women were unveiled and circulated freely in public and enjoyed considerable influence, including the right to initiation and immortality. The specific ordinances of Islam, however, were not enforced, not even the

Friday meeting, the daily prayers, or the eating of food that was taboo. The esoteric practices of Mohammedanism were replaced by a cult of Light ..." (Rexroth, 1974, chap. 11). The pilgrimage to Mecca was dismissed as superstition. The assault on Mecca has been described as analogous to the Sacco di Roma by Charles V (1527) which heralded the primacy of state power over the church: "an event that echoed in the ears of contemporaries like an apocalyptic peal of thunder, plunging them into a state of numbness and bewilderment, of disgust and horror" (Priskil, quoted in Schlereth, 2011).

Ah, but there was a catch, a rather big one! Like ancient Greece, the Carmathian 'utopia' was also built on the back of slaves. And what is worse, this slavery contained a racial element. Nasir Khusraw (1004-1088, a Persian Philosopher influenced by the Ismailis and became a renowned traveller) who visited Bahrain in 1051 estimated the number of Ethiopian slaves as 30,000. Instead of liberating inhabitants of cities in Syria and Iraq, Carmathians tended to enslave them (Petrushevsky, 1972: 38). Rexroth again, "All hard, menial, or unpleasant work was performed by Negro slaves, who seem at first to have been the defeated remnants of the Zanj revolt who fled to their quasi-allies and voluntarily chose slavery with the Carmathians rather than extermination with the Sunnites" (ibid.). All this despite the fact that Carmathians made a genuine attempt to make Islam appealing to "all races and all castes" and foreground "reason, equality and tolerance" (Houtsma, 1993: 767). Carmathians came to "encompass Jews, Christians, and other heretics" and their writings "reveal a particular concern with working conditions and a particular emphasis on the dignity of labor" (Segal, 2001: 29). Yet their economic dependence on slave labor is undeniable.

It does not take too much imagination to see in today's wage slaves (mostly foreigners but also Bahraini born non-citizens) an equivalent of the slaves exploited in the 10th and 11th centuries in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Underpinning wage slavery in Bahrain is the continuing *kafala* (sponsor or guardian) system, "a historic arrangement and practice that, while grounded in Islamic Law, was codified through the practice of indentured servitude" (Gardner, 2010: 20). The kafala (sponsorship) system ensures individual foreign workers are tied to a particular job and to a particular citizen-sponsor (kafeel) who in many cases confiscates the worker's passport. So the question we have to pose both to Carmathians and contemporary rebels in the area is this: Why should your gains come at the expense of exploited slaves? Why so many of you seem unwilling to see in the 'Negro slaves' of yesteryears and the Indian, Tamil, Filipino, Egyptian proletarians of today your 'natural' allies? Why do Bahraini proletarians organise separately from non-Bahraini proles?

VIII

Perhaps a closer look at the shortcomings of communism under Carmathians will throw light on the limitations of contemporary rebels.

This was not communism as we know it today. It contained a strong millenarian element, which meant all activities had to be subordinated to the goal of preparing the world for the return of the Mahdi. Of course, this desire for a saviour also encouraged a plethora of charlatans and power-seekers to audition for the role as shamelessly as today's contestants of the X-factor. Some leaders even used magic to recruit members (Nategh, 1978: 242). In a form of 'consumer communism' similar to Mazdaki movements of previous centuries, "all property within the community was distributed evenly among all initiates" (Wikipedia, 'Qarmatians'). However, this focus on circulation and distribution meant production was not reorganised on a communist basis.

A further problem was the Carmathians' cosmological views. Their revolutionary timetable was hostage to the stars. For example, the sack of Mecca followed millenarian fervour over the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 930 AD (Wikipedia, 'Qarmatians'). The world is explained as "a sum total of phenomena which repeats themselves in cycles, playing and replaying the same drama" (Houtsma, 1993: 769). This spectacle is presented to gifted intelligences which are then illuminated through the demystification of the illusionary appearance of things (the analogies with Situationist thinking transcends mere semantics here). Once illumination is complete, the liberated intuitions which are no longer fragmented and individualised but have cohered, find themselves "delivered from the five tyrants": Time, Space, Law, State and (material) Necessity (ibid.). In a very real sense today's communists are still struggling against the dictatorship of the "five tyrants".

The secrecy and initiation rites promoted by Carmathians, which centuries later, are imported to Europe and characterises the guilds and freemasonry, might have been unavoidable at the beginning when they were weak but became counter-productive as time went on. For instance, they employed a secret language called *mogharmat* only decipherable to the top brass (Mirfetros, 1999: 53). This might have avoided detection by authorities but it also impeded debate. The leader of the insurrection in 890 AD was named Hamdan al-Qarmat who established an "entrenched place of retreat" for his partisans (not all that different from today's unions, social centres and squats) but far better organised and far more serious about taking on the forces of authority. The strict discipline demanded of the rank-and-file and the accompanying rites had the unfortunate consequence of cementing hierarchies amongst the adherents (Nategh, 1978: 242).

The ritualistic, secretive, cosmological and hierarchal tendencies within the movement made further militarisation inevitable. As Carmathians became more dependent on military conquest, the social dimension of their practice suffered. The defeat of their campaigns against orthodoxy in Syria and Iraq heralded the long decline, a point worth remembering when

contemporary rebels in Libya and Syria are encouraged by 'western' powers to take on the state by force of arms.

But if we find it difficult to identify with the ritualistic component or the cosmological element of your views, it is easier to appreciate how contemporaries may fall for your focus on rationality, scientific and mathematical constants and intellectual leadership. Many secular rank-and-file activists are still entranced by these qualities embodied in individuals who are then granted undue power and influence.

IX

Pearl roundabout destroyed. Taliban destruction of Buddhas or Haussmann's urban development? Perhaps a bit of both?

If we turn our gaze back to contemporary events we notice many of the weaknesses (and some of the strengths) of the Carmathian movement reanimated.

On the positive side there has been resistance to the monarchy, in both villages and cities, since at least the 1980s. The elites have deliberately starved rural areas from investment in order to turn peasants into (urban) proletarians and additionally because these areas are mostly populated by the despised Shi'a. According to Carlstrom "many of Bahrain's villages lack basic services - connections to the municipal sewage grid, regular garbage collection, etc" (Al Jazeera, 2011f). Rural demands are, echoing urban areas, socio-economic in nature and non-sectarian.

Many villagers have played a prominent role in city protests. There have been recent victories for workers. For example, wildcat strikes by poultry workers in January 2011 signalled a mood change amongst the workforce. An early strike by 750 workers won wage rises from a contacting firm in February, followed by a second strike that combined wage demands with better health care (Libertarian Communism website, 2011c). Oil workers won their fight for a two-month annual bonus in March of this year from the Bahrain Petroleum Company (Libertarian Communism website, 2011a). Some 5,000 construction workers, who were owed backpay, went on strike recently and received their wages immediately (Libertarian Communism website, 2011b). Even foreign construction workers (the most precarious section of the proletariat) have bucked the trend by going on successful strikes.

The solidarity displayed seems genuine and path-breaking. When during February 2011 demonstrators in the Pearl Roundabout (Manama) chant, "No Shia, no Sunni, only Bahraini", this should not be falsely interpreted as cementing a nationalist consciousness. Rather it is a 'pre-emptive strike' by savvy rebels against future attempts to create divisions amongst them-attempts that materialised a couple of months later when the elite began portraying the resistance as a Shi'a conspiracy. In this context, one of the more consistent demands of protestors has been the removal of the long serving prime minister, "Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa – who is regarded as having oppressed the majority shia population for many years and thus enforcing sectarian divisions" (Davidson, 2011a). In a sign that the ruling elite has lost *hegemony* (Gramsci) and is now ruling largely through force and fear, a Sunni activist is quoted by the BBC as saying: "The al-Khalifas are not protecting the country, only themselves. They are criminals. They should go" (BBC, 2011). When one section of the state is busy kidnapping, threatening rape and urinating on journalists and prominent businessmen and another faction is trying to salvage the Formula One Grand Prix season after 28 of its 108 local staff have already been arrested, one is reminded of the Titanic and the rearranging of the deckchairs (Cockburn, 2011c).[7]

The rebels also claimed "We have no leaders" both as an accurate account of the spontaneous nature of resistance and in order to safeguard spokespersons from future arrests. This is a valid account of things as they stand since no group or current has gained supremacy within the opposition movement, with Marxists, Islamists, liberals all presenting a coherent front. Teachers and doctors have led calls for people to strike. This autonomous zone was characterised by collective debate and decision making. It might have been billed as the "day of rage" but what transpired was more akin to carnival at first which quickly turned ugly: "Q: What began to unfold at the Pearl Roundabout after February 14th? A: It was more like a celebration than a protest. It was like a carnival, we even had popcorn vendors. People were chanting, women and children were there and tents were erected. The night before the Pearl Roundabout was attacked we began to see and hear Government broadcasts that said that soldiers were coming" (Socialist Aotearoa, 2011). It is worth remembering that the nascent Bahraini feminist movement has been gaining momentum in recent years. Gains, such as the right to vote and run for office (2002) and 40% employment rate amongst women (2001, est.), may seem insignificant and even bourgeois by the standards of better established feminist

movements around the world but they go some way in explaining the enthusiastic participation of women in the protests. Lately they have become radicalised, taking it upon themselves, for instance, to nullify the state's attempt to orchestrate sectarian strife. A group calling itself "Women for Bahrain" has launched a unity petition and is trying to eliminate sectarian hate messages being texted through Blackberry between youths (Al Jazeera, 2011j).

Whilst using the Pearl Roundabout as a base for organisation and political discussion, the rebels were fully cognizant of the real seat of power in Bahrain- the 'Financial Harbour' banking district- a bourgeois zone intended to continue capital accumulation by-all-means-necessary, now that Bahraini gas and oil are running out. When they blockaded the Financial Harbour on 13 March, they dealt "a severe reputational blow to the ruling family and to Bahrain's economy, causing credit default swaps to rise dramatically" (Davidson, 2011a). The recent $10bn aid package from oil producing Gulf States is intended to upgrade housing and infrastructure and generate jobs as a sop to the marginalised poor. But it was obviously felt that tomorrow's carrot has to be preceded by today's stick. The cancelling of flights to Iran, Iraq and Lebanon by the Bahraini state owned *Gulf Air* was a prelude to a country-wide lock down beckoning the crackdown. On 15 March the Al-Khalifa invited 1000-1200 Saudi troops to Bahrain and on 18 March the Pearl Roundabout was bulldozed in order to protect its "honour" against further "desecration" by "vile" anti-government protestors (Wikipedia, 'Pearl Roundabout').[8] The demolition was carried out in three hours when the movement was busy burying two of its dead elsewhere (Chulov, 2011). It merely acted to further radicalise the protestors' demands who now demanded the abolition of the monarchy.

X

Architectural hooliganism by the regime has been followed by merciless attacks on wounded protestors and medical staff who treat them. The country's largest hospital, Salmaniya, was actually taken over by Bahraini forces on 16th March on the grounds it had been "overrun by political and sectarian activity" (Solomon, 2011). At least nine other health centres have also been targeted (Laurence, 2011b). *The Independent* reports that "One doctor, an intensive care specialist, was held after she was photographed weeping over a dead protester. Another was arrested in the theatre room while operating on a patient" (Laurance, 2011a). One consultant and family physician was sworn at, called a "dirty Shia" and a "whore" and forced into singing the national anthem (Laurence, 2011b). The latest reports indicate 20 doctors, nurses and paramedics have been sentenced to up to 15 years in prison (Cockburn, 2011d).

Other reports suggest a security force as inept as it is brutal. "Anonymous groups" with access to Facebook details have published names, phones, home and work addresses, car registration and ID numbers of civil rights activists (BBC, 2011). The state has attempted to

rally the most reactionary elements of Sunni camp as shock troops against protestors. As Merli reports, "on March 3 Sheik Abdel Aziz Mahmood addressed a crowd of thousands of Sunnis gathered at the al Fatah Mosque to support the monarchy, inciting them to sweep away the mob at the Pearl roundabout" (Merli, 2011). According to *The Independent* some doctors "… were made to confess that they gave treatment only to Shia protesters and not to Sunnis, stole blood from the hospital to splatter on protesters to make the situation seem more dramatic, and that they encouraged others to protest against the regime" (Laurence, 2011b). Daily interrogations, forced confessions and the disappearance of some medics have created an intimidating environment. Understandably, many wounded protestors choose not to go to the hospital.

In our view, there are a number of reasons for the special treatment meted out to medical staff: first, they have born witness to the crimes of the regime and may one day provide evidence in a court of law (not a fanciful notion as Mubarak and wife are currently being prosecuted by Egyptian generals in a pathetic attempt to assuage the anger of Egyptians); second, and more immediately, as technologically savvy members of society, the medical staff can communicate with outsiders and bring further pressure on the regime; third, given the spatially segregated nature of Bahraini proletarians, hospitals have become one of the few places where different sections come together and set up informal networks of solidarity and friendship; fourth, medical staff have protested the regime's continued attempts to prevent ambulances reaching the wounded; fifth, a high percentage of health workers are Bahraini nationals (%82.5 doctors, 63.5% nurses and 87.6% allied health professionals in 2005 came from indigenous population, cf. Maben et al., 2010: 394), who cannot be easily silenced through deportation; sixth, medicine, especially nursing, does not enjoy as high a status as in the rest of the world and is widely perceived as "unclean", making it an easier target (Maben, et al. 2010: 395); and finally, the doctors' trial is beginning to look suspiciously like one of Stalin's last

Bahraini *ER*- Doctors and nurses protest against the treatment of medical staff in February

show trials when he accused a predominantly Jewish group of doctors of trying to assassinate top Soviet officials in 1952. Thankfully, he dies before the end of the trial and the next government dropped the case quietly. The Bahraini ruing class are less governed by Stalin's paranoia than the need to the expediency of divide and rule.

The regime's fear has escalated into heavy handed persecution of young school girls suspected of attending demos. The interrogators have used mock execution tactics and threats of rape to subdue them (Al Jazeera, 2011c). According to the same report at least 70 teachers have also been detained. Demonstrations on the Bahrain University campus have been broken

up by thugs (Al Jazeera, 2011e). There has been a clear attempt to sectarianise the dispute by releasing all Sunni detainees almost immediately and roughing up the Shias. Shops are being black-listed not due to profiteering but because of religious affiliations (Al Jazeera, 2011j). Airline companies, one must suspect under pressure from the state, have sacked "hundreds of mostly Shia workers who went on strike" in solidarity with protestors. Unions called an immediate general strike in support of sacked workers. According to Al Jazeera "more lay-offs are expected at Bahrain Petroleum (Bapco) which has fired the head of its workers' union" (Al Jazeera, 2011a). In order to underscore the strategy so that no one could be in any doubt the Shia are being targeted, "dozens of Shia mosques" have also been destroyed (Fisk, 2011) and Shia owned businesses and supermarkets torched by pro-government vigilantes (The Independent, 2011b). All physical rallying points (be it secular like the Pearl roundabout or religious meeting places like Husseiniyahs) are being systematically razed to the ground (Cockburn, 2011b). These tactics are clearly designed to create fear and division amongst protestors, although so far their impact seems to have been minimal. If in the future migrant workers join the rebellion, the social clubs frequented by them for socialising (e.g., The Indian Club, The Tamil Social and Cultural Association, etc.) will also become targets of state repression.

"We reached a point where we're scared to even write on our laptops because it's the first thing they take when they invade our homes. So, I keep all the stories in my head." Bahraini journalist

Fahrenheit 451: since the uprising began in Bahrain, journalists have been targeted and arrested by the state

The media have been dealt with through a two-pronged approach, "it has locked out the foreign media [with the exception of the occasional friendly BBC reporter- MT], and it has locked down local media outlets through a sustained campaign of censorship and intimidation

[again with the occasional government sponsored death threat sent via Facebook to prominent activists- MT]" (Al Jazeera, 2011b). The editor of Al-Wasat, a non-governmental paper was tortured to death, as was a popular blogger. In both cases medical staff photographed the post-mortem proving the state's fabricated narrative of their death. In the case of female journalists, a whispering campaign undermines their character. Things have become so grim that the usually affable Mr Fisk, in a somewhat frisky tone that *Melancholic Troglodytes* would never stoop to, has castigated Al-Jazeera's silence over these atrocities as "a dollop of shit in the dignity that they have brought to reporting in the Middle East" (Fisk, 2011). Al-Jazeera has now altered its earlier reticence and is playing catch up!

One realises how precarious things are when the political discourse of the ruling elite systematically dehumanises the protesters as "termites", "white ants" and "stray hyenas", and when even wealthy footballers risk all and become political rebels. Al'a Hubail (no Maradona, Messi or even Malouda but a jolly decent Bahraini footballer nonetheless) is amongst hundreds of athletes arrested and sacked for attending anti-government rallies (Al Jazeera, 2011d). As a trained paramedic he had provided his active support to the wounded. Once again the state engineered sectarianism by ensuring that all 200 arrested athletes were card-carrying members of the Shia 'community'.

XI

The negative impact of a vile mix of repression, propaganda and sectarianism has to some extent undermined the radical instincts of the protestors with many deciding to hide behind preordained identity tags and perform reactionary roles according to traditional scripts available to them. In most cases this means protestors are unwilling to link up with migrant workers and in a few cases there is even explicit racism exercised towards migrant workers. "Asian workers" have been attacked by thugs (Merli, 2011). The problem of racism (the one thing that sadly unites both Sunni and Shi'a parts of Bahrain!) has been very persistent. Gardner reports how young Bahraini men employed in a restaurant would refuse to "wait on Indian customers and that they would only wait on Bahrainis" (Gardner, 2010: 152). More worryingly with "roving gangs of Bahrainis burgling their camps" and teenagers repeatedly attacking the workers on their way to the store, it could be argued that many migrant workers are subjected to state-sanctioned structural violence. The problem is related to the "mudir syndrome" (*mudir* means boss or manager), when "even the lowliest citizen holds power over the educated and successful transmigrant" let alone the lowly paid and disrespected manual worker (Gardner, 2010: 80).

In a retrogressive move thousands of self-identifying Shias have more recently marched outside the immigration office in Manama to "decry the political naturalization" of Sunni

newcomers from Arab and South Asian countries (The Independent, 2011b). The clumsy demographic engineering and the consequent electoral gerrymandering by the state, is needless to say, undeniable. It also means the Sunni-Shi'a split could be a great deal more even than people realise. But while discrimination against some Bahraini born individuals who are denied citizenship (and the privileges this label entails in terms of ability to work, buy land, and move around unhindered etc.) needs to be resisted, the targeting of foreign workers only serves to strengthen the state at the expense of all proletarians. It is noteworthy, however, that even during this basically retrograde mobilisation protestors "shouted slogans about Sunni-Shi'a unity, in order to emphasise that the protest was against the government's naturalisation policy, and not against Bahrain's native Sunni population" (Al Jazeera, 2011h). Given the severe restrictions on migrant workers to organise and demonstrate (political protesting is tantamount to losing one's job and that in turn leads to immediate deportation), we feel the onus is on 'citizen-workers' of Bahrain to provide the space for joint activity. Trans-national linkage with organisations in sender countries defending workers' rights could be a useful starting point.

Another ominous example that would no doubt fill the hearts of Bahraini, Saudi and US rulers with joy occurred in March in the town of Sar. After an anti-government protest by mostly Shia pupils, parents from naturalised families (Sunnis mainly from Syria and Pakistan) turned up to complain, armed with wooden sticks and knives! Then Shia parents arrived and clashes begun. This government organised (Sunni) mobilisation was a response to earlier protests by teachers, pupils and parents (of all background) calling for the resignation of the sectarian education minister (Al Jazeera, 2011g).

XII

We have discussed both the long-term and short-term cycles of revolt in Bahrain but now we need to focus our attention on the mid-term cycle of capital accumulation, binding the Gulf countries together. Although not as wealthy as some of its neighbours, Bahrain shares many traits with them. Mike Davis's portrait of Dubai can shed light on our analysis (Davis, 2006). Basing itself on a less grandiose scale, Bahrain too has been turning 'petrodollars' into a huge series of investments in themeparks, hotels and entertainment fantasy environments. A "Singaporean strategy of becoming [a] key commercial, financial and recreational hub of the Gulf" has pushed countries like Bahrain and Dubai to exploit "expensive oil and cheap labour" (Davis, 2006: 55). A series of "specialized free-trade zones and high-tech clusters" have forged ahead alongside the deep poverty in both rural and urban areas discussed above. Citizenship has become hierarchised with the ruling elite at the top of the pyramid, Sunni capitalists come next followed by the richest segment of the ex-pat community, then skilled labourers (usually foreign), unskilled Bahraini proletarians, unskilled foreign proles and perhaps at the bottom female, Asian domestic proletarians who are subjected to a three-tiered matrix of exploitation

based on classism, racism and sexism. The latest wave of "globalisation has given rise to a particular dependency on female labour" who are then criminalised following labour-related disputes (Strobl, 2009). This is especially true of housemaids (*khaddamah*) who were at least 50,000 strong in Bahrain in 2005 and two million in the Gulf countries overall (Strobl, 2009: 167). These khaddamahs occupy a position between wage-slavery and outright slavery with employers abusing them physically and sexually. Many become runaways supporting themselves with illegal work at local hotels (Strobl, 2009: 174). Significantly, due to a lack of child-care provisions, even working class households in Bahrain may have a khaddamah. Following an eight-month old ethnographic study, Strobl discovered that the material interests of Bahraini police are tied in with the criminalisation of these housemaids.

If this is the picture of the 'legal' economy, then the 'semi-legal' treatment of indentured labourers explains the increasing revolt of foreign workers. Davis also suggests that the recent policy of 'labour naturalisation' is related to the resistance put up by foreign workers. In Dubai, for instance, the high rate of deaths at construction sites and low wages led to thousands of Asian workers marching onto the Ministry of labour in 2004 where they were met with a mixture of bureaucratic apathy and police brutality. However, "drawing inspiration from a large uprising of Bangladeshi workers in Kuwait" there were more strikes the following year (Davis, 2006: 67). In fact, the GCC elite prefer an 'ethnically' diverse workforce in order to play groups against each other. When Saudi workers in the 1950s and '60s self-organised in opposition to Aramco and the Saudi monarchy, there was a deliberate move to import more migrant Arab workers and in the 70s, 80s and 90s, when these Palestinian and Egyptian proles began to demand more wages, "there was a shift away from mostly Arab migrant labor towards drawing workers from South Asia–from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh–and the Philippines, further afield" (Hanieh, 2011).

The 'legal' and 'semi-legal' parts of the economy consciously feed off the black economy in smuggling, money laundering, prostitution, gold dealings and piracy. Gold, untaxed cigarettes and liquor are smuggled by the rich community of dual-nationality merchants to more puritanical parts of the Middle East such as Iran (Davis, 2006: 56). Gangsters and terrorists keep great swathes of their wealth in opaque banking labyrinths away from prying eyes. In return Dubai and Bahrain have been largely terrorist-free zones of safety. In fact, Davis suggest that these countries "earn [a portion of their] living from fear"- for instance, the fear that gripped particularly Saudi capitalists immediately after 9/11 and witnessed billions transferred from US banks to the Gulf region (Davis, 2006: 58, brackets added).

XIII

The barriers in front of the Bahraini *proletariat* (that is the overwhelming majority of people creating wealth on the Islands known as Bahrain, regardless of race, gender and nationality) seem insurmountable: internally, they are up against a ruthless and determined ruling class that knows how to create tribal, ethnic, religious, national and gender divisions amongst them; externally, the elite enjoys the full support of Gulf states as well as the USA.

Yet history has provided them with a rather neat solution, a ready-made which they can employ and improve upon: the Carmathians. The strengths of Carmathians flowed from their 'practical utopia,' clarity of purpose and unity of will. They recognised the enemy (private property and religion) and remained tactically creative. Clearly they also had a major flaw: persistence with the slave system they had inherited. When the 'native Bahraini' begins to see in the migrant worker a comrade rather than a rival, the balance will be decidedly tilted against the status quo. Rejecting the chimera of parliamentarianism and trade unionism in favour of autonomous proletarian activity may yet see the accomplishments of Carmathians surpassed.

Melancholic Troglodytes
Written on Sarah Palin Street, Pyongyang ("our ally"), on 30.09.2011

The Formula 1 Bahraini Grand Prix:
We go very fast, so you think very slow!

Endnotes

[1] According to *The Heritage Web Site* "The southern Iraqian term karmitha or karmutha, unknown to Arabic elsewhere, implied an agriculturist or a villager. Later on, it was arabicised into qarmat or qarmatuya which has different meanings. In Arabic the root qarmat means 'to walk' or 'make short steps' and thence 'to write closely' etc. others suggest it was an Aramaic nickname, 'short-legged' or 'red-eyed'" (http://ismaili.net/histoire/history05/history509.html, accessed 15 March 2011). There are at least three slightly different spellings which also causes confusion: Carmathians, Karmathians, Qarmatian.

[2] See 'Karmathians', *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, 6th Edition, (http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Karmathians, accessed 15 March 2011].

[3] This agreement, which dates back to the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, "involves the six Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar), [and] resulted in the creation of a joint military force intended to protect its members against external threats" (Whitaker, *The Guardian*, 17.03.2011). In short, this is an attempt by the GCC to portray what is a combined proletarian and petty-bourgeois uprising against the Bahraini ruling class as an external threat (read an 'Iranian threat'). Whilst the Iranian threat is largely fictitious (Davidson, 2011a), it is true that most of the world's oil is located in Eastern Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, southern Iraq and southern Iran (Chomsky, 2011). If the populations of these regions come to perceive themselves as primarily victimised Shias (rather than citizens of various nation-states or trans-national proletarians) and then rebel against their Sunni masters, the resultant geopolitical shift will greatly undermine US capitalism's ability to sustain its global dominance.

[4] The Carmathians of Bahrain stole the Stone of Kaaba (probably a meteorite or a pseudo-meteorite) in 928 or 930 AD, held it for 25 years (probably to create an alternative route for the Hajj pilgrimage, away from Mecca) and when this manoeuvre failed, they forced the Abbasid dynasty to give them a hefty ransom for its return. "It was wrapped in a sack and thrown into the Friday Mosque of Kufa, accompanied by a note saying 'By command we took it, and by command we have brought it back.' Its abduction and removal caused further damage, breaking the stone into seven pieces" ('Black Stone', *Wikipedia*).

[5] The Fatimid Empire was centred on Tunisia and Egypt and ruled over a vast area including Sicily, Malta and the Levant from 909-1171 A.D.

[6] *Twelver* refers to the largest branch of Shi'a Islam who believe in twelve divinely ordained leaders (Imams), starting with Ali (the prophet's son-in-law) and ending with the Mahdi or the Hidden Imam, who is in a well somewhere just waiting for the opportune moment to reveal himself and his wisdom to us saps!

[7] We apologise for even raising this non-issue but it appears from the latest thinking on the subject that the metaphor of 'rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic' has been inappropriately overused. Experts now suggest it probably could have saved around 1,500 lives!! Maybe Formula One can save Bahraini capitalism afterall!

[8] Davidson has compared the bulldozing of the Pearl Roundabout with the Taliban's dynamiting of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in 2001: "Both were crude and violent attempts by regimes to destroy symbols of a happier past and memories of an alternative national identity. Serving as an anti-regime rallying point for the past month, Pearl roundabout was on its way to becoming Bahrain's equivalent of a Tahrir Square, and thus it literally had to go" (Davidson, 2011a).

Whilst accepting the basic tenants of this analogy we wish to point out three complicating factors: first, all bourgeois elites are capable of horrendous acts of architectural destructiveness. Haussman's renovation of Paris included widening of streets, correctly seen as a strategic manoeuvre towards a more effective military policing of the capital. "It should also be noted that when reports of the outbreak of the Paris Commune insurrection reached Haussmann, he expressed his frustration at not having been able to carry out his reforms quickly enough to make such an insurrection futile" (Wikipedia, 'Haussmann'); secondly, when it is not practical to destroy a site occupied by proletarians, the bourgeoisie settles for re-accentuating its symbolic signifiers. The British state's continuous attempts to reaccentuate both Trafalgar Square and Mayday festivities are neat examples of this phenomenon; finally, the Taliban were directing their xenophobic anger toward a symbolic site of a rival ideology. The Al-Khalifa family were levelling a site that was both symbolic and real- a public refuge for proletarians (and middle class reformers) used as a base and a debating chamber. The aggression is, therefore, commensurately related to the insecurity of the Bahraini ruling class.

As an aside we are now witnessing the guerrilla placement of miniature replicas of the Pearl roundabout in various squares, quickly dismantled by security forces. Every time the regime mobilises its uniformed thugs to viciously 'seek and destroy' a tiny plastic model, the farcical endgame for the elite draws closer (Al Jazeera, 2011i). Over the years architecture has been an indispensible propaganda tool for the "ethnocratic state and its Sunni leadership" to both fuse its interest with the expatriate elite visiting an working in Bahrain and, at the same time, conceal the foreign labourers who construct the buildings (Gardner, 2010: 123). Plastic models destroying years of carefully crafted ideology congealed in billion-dollar skyscrapers is the perfect metaphor for the fragility and flimsiness of Bahraini capitalism.

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"The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt" is our first attempt to grapple with the complexities of this year's momentous events and their ramifications for the class struggle. We could have waited for the dust to settle before initiating a more forensic examination but felt the volatile nature of happenings demanded a more urgent response. Naturally there have been omissions and shortcomings. No doubt readers will point these out, with a modicum of superiority and a measure of cruelty, in due course. Be that as it may, for now capturing the contours and inner dynamics of these movements and establishing a dialogue with Middle Eastern & North African proletarians seems more vital than obsessing over accuracy.

Vala, *or* The Four Zoas

With thunderous noise & dreadful shakings rocking to & fro
The heavens are shaken & the Earth removed from its place
The foundations of the Eternal hills discoverd
The thrones of Kings are shaken, they have lost their robes & crowns
The poor smite their oppressors, they awake up to the harvest
The naked warriors rush together down to the sea shore
Trembling before the multitudes of slaves now set at liberty
They are become like wintry flocks, like forests strip'd of leaves:
The oppressed pursue like the wind; there is no room for escape.

-William Blake, written between 1797-1807

The Great 2011 'Middle Eastern & North African' Revolt

First Paradox

The bourgeoisie is informed of (almost) everything and understands (next to) nothing! It does not understand since it does not come across us at our best: with Spartacus crashing our way toward freedom, with Zarathustra at the rebirth of humanity, with Mazdak sharing earth's bounty, with the Zanj suspending slavery, with Carmathians limping our way toward heresy, with the Diggers making holes in enclosures, with the Ranters howling our enemies deaf, with the Communards turning the world upside-down, with the rebels of Kronstadt going to an early grave, with the Wobblies repairing ourselves, with the Friends of Durruti pushing the social struggle as far as it goes, and with the rebels of Tahrir Square withstanding flying camels!

At our worst though, we must be a pitiful sight! And that is precisely the moment the bourgeoisie chooses to fix its condescending gaze on our spectacularised image: as when the most insecure amongst us are humiliated then broken on the Jerry Springer Show, our weakest are bribed to become informers, the youngest of us acting irresponsibly at a demonstration, and the most sadistic of us recruited for prison-guard duty. And yet all the while, the more information the bourgeoisie amasses, the less it comprehends.

Flying camels on a mission to assault Egyptian proletarians

Second Paradox

The Great 2011 Revolt has changed (almost) nothing! The Great 2011 Revolt has changed (just about) everything! Nothing has changed since, at the time of writing, capitalism continues to dominate the working classes everywhere. Old tyrants have given way to a reconfigured constellation of ruling cliques but the social relations cementing wage slavery and alienation remain intact. Everything has changed since the courage and general intellect of our class has prized open a window of opportunity after decades characterised (mostly) by headless-chicken running and ostrich head-burying. These are the paradoxes we attempt to fathom in this article.

Since analysing all the countries of North Africa and the Middle East would require a Herculean patience wrapped in an encyclopaedic mindset, we elect instead to focus on those

regions that have had the greatest impact. This is neither a simple descriptive account nor a timeline masquerading as investigation. Admittedly, key countries such as Turkey and Iran have been left out whilst we refer the reader to our earlier chapters for the evaluation of Syria, Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The two regions we will be looking at here share commonalities in terms of level of social development, economic portfolio, dynamics of capital accumulation and class struggle, namely: North African and the Gulf States.

North African (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya)

The American satirist Ambrose Bierce (1842-1913) once remarked that "war is god's way of teaching Americans geography." Whilst Bierce was being mischievously unfair to his own countrymen, we readily confess that recent events have taught *Melancholic Troglodytes* oodles of geography and a surfeit of newly discovered political insight. We begin with Tunisia, not as homage to temporal causality, but in recognition of Tunisians' taboo-breaking proclivities.

Tunisia

An earlier wave of globalisation had familiarised Tunisians with the wonders of financial enslavement. The mid-Victorian expansion of 1838-73 was associated with a dramatic rise in Middle Eastern agricultural products to Britain and British export and investment in the opposite direction (Beinin, 2001: 46). As boom gave way to bust, agricultural prices collapsed, weaker states went bankrupt and the regions with the highest concentration and centralisation of capital (Europe) imposed their financial domination over the 'less developed.' When Tunisia declared itself bankrupt in 1869, an International Financial Commission with representatives from Britain, France and Italy "took control of the economy" (Wikipedia, 'Beylik of Tunis'). Financial dominance was sealed militarily when "in 1881 an incursion into French-controlled

Algeria by Tunisian tribesmen gave France the excuse to invade" (Your Archives, 'International Financial Commission- Tunisia'). Tunisia remained a French 'protectorate' until 1956 when it gained 'independence,' with a brief change of 'masters' during 1942-43 when Connie Francis's French rendering of *Lili Marlene* was trumped by Lale Anderson's German version (the chequered history of this song is narrated in Leibovitz and Miller, 2009).

Throughout their occupation of Tunisia, French capitalists "purchased large plots of state land to plant olive trees," displacing peasant farmers less violently than neighbouring Algeria (Beinin, 2001: 57). Consequently, the Tunisian peasant uprisings that ensued were characterised less by 'anti-colonialist' sentiments and more by class antagonism directed against both French and Tunisian masters. Whilst peasant uprisings were defeated through state violence, urban proletarian resistance required more subtle recuperation. The Tunisian trade union confederation (UGTT- The Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail) was established in 1946 with a view to regulate strikes and accumulate sufficient capital formations for 'independent' development. Its bureaucracy was "closely linked to the nationalist movement and marked by the subordination of the class struggle to the struggle for national independence, a condition which determined its dependence on the new national state apparatus" (North Africa Working Group of the CGT International Secretariat, 2011a).

From the outset it contained two tendencies. The early years were dominated by a social democratic faction under the leadership of the minister of economy, Ahmad Ben Salah, who used the UGTT to impose austerity as a mechanism for capital accumulation. Ben Salah pushed through his strategy by creating divisions within the proletariat between 'white collar' (teachers and civil servants) and 'blue collar' (miners, transport workers), and privileging the former. When in the late of 1960s a wave of 'blue collar' wildcat strikes brought this strategy of accumulation into disrepute, Ben Salah's social democratic experiment was abandoned in favour of a corporatist alternative. President Bourguiba consolidated his power and in 1974 declared himself "president for life" (Beinin, 2001: 137). The UGTT leadership was crucial in executing a neoliberal programme for disciplining: "From its support for Ben Ali's candidacy in the elections of 2004 and 2009 to social welfare reform, from the implementation of neoliberal economic measures to their abandoning of the Gafsa UGTT activists, jailed during the 2008 uprising…" (North Africa Working Group of the CGT International Secretariat, 2011a). The union committed a huge strategic error when "after Ben Ali had fled, the leadership agreed to participate in Mohamed Ghannouchi's provisional government of national unity with 3 ministers, before withdrawing their representatives under pressure from the people on the streets and the UGTT's more radical wing" (North Africa Working Group of the CGT International Secretariat, 2011a).

There were repeated attempts throughout the 1970s to establish a corporatist agreement between the UGTT and the state but the increase in frequency and intensity of strikes made this strategy untenable. In 1983 the dreaded visit from the IMF resulted in the standard package of pain and humiliation for Tunisians: currency devaluation, privatisation of 'public' sectors, cuts in subsidies, price rises, wage freezes, and further loss of 'sovereignty'. The almost

inevitable rioting began in southern cities, engulfed Tunis and ended with the state rescinding price rises but the victory was achieved at the cost of a hundred lives killed during the riots by security forces (Beinin, 2001: 155). The IMF measures were finally pushed through in 1987 after Zayn al-Abidin Ben Ali became leader following a coup d'état, backed by the Italian security services. As a response the number of strikes rose considerably during the1980s.

Ben Ali cemented his position by portraying himself as a bulwark against Islamism and by improving relations with Washington. Based on naive positivist criteria the economy was performing adequately but underlying tensions resurface in recent times. According to Anderson, "While the GDP grew in recent years at annual rates of 4-5%, unemployment skyrocketed as well, reaching 14% by 2010, with the youth rate much, much higher ... the mass strikes of 2008 in Gafsa were one indicator of the underlying social tensions in Tunisia. This phosphate-mining region, long a center of labor unrest, has in recent decades been wracked by mass unemployment due to mechanization..." (Anderson, 2011). And when the end came it was as dramatic as his ascendency to power: "On 14 January 2011, following the Tunisian Revolution, he was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia along with his wife Leila Ben Ali and their three children. The interim Tunisian government asked for Interpol to issue an arrest warrant, charging him for money laundering and drug trafficking. He and his wife were sentenced *in absentia* to 35 years in prison on 20 June 2011" (Wikipedia, 'Zine El Abidine Ben Ali').

The preceding paragraphs may help contextualise Ben Ali's unpopularity but we still have work to do in understanding the incredible pace of events which led him to escape with tail tucked firmly between his chubby butt-ocks. After all, Tunisian capitalism seemed secure: a relatively high growth rate over the last decade; a diverse economy including service industries, manufacturing, agriculture and tourism sectors; high expenditure on education; and a relatively high GDP per capita (estimated $9,400). The only downbeat statistics were related to unemployment rates and public debt.

When the riots came, they were akin to flash floods- fast, furious and unpredictable. But significantly every time the authorities forced the rioters to disperse, they would reappear in the same place a few hours later. And this semi-autonomous space was defended and reinvigorated with each wave of young proletarians from the countryside and other cities joining the Kasbah.

Moreover, as if to underline the carnival atmosphere of some of the riots, "the girls and boys of the Tunis *banlieue* proudly show off the commissariats and the RCD party's [Constitutional Democratic Party was the ruling party under Ben Ali] offices that they have torched" (Corcio and Roggero, 2011). They fought alongside precarious workers and the 'over-educated' unemployed tired of empty promises and corrupt officials. Even some sectors of the impoverished petty bourgeoisie united behind these proletarian groups in a common cause to overthrow Ben Ali. Many were victims of the regime's attempt to tax the informal sector of the economy in order to increase revenues. Women appeared as both individuals and feminist organisations alongside men in all demonstrations.

The encapsulating central slogan seems to have been a fusion of political and economic dimensions of the struggle: "Bread, water and no Ben Ali!" It appears, the protestors spoke for most Tunisians and the regime knew it. The other demands related to free elections, free association, free media were either fully or partially granted in a short space of time. Even a commentator as bird-brained as Alan Badiou has fathomed that recent riots in "Greece, Iceland, England, Thailand, the hunger riots in Africa, the considerable workers' riots in China", may indicate "we are in a time of riots" (Badiou, 2011). However, by positing an unwarranted epistemological break between riots and revolution he mistakenly argues only the latter can "prefigure a change in the state." Clearly, zones of rioting that become autonomous (i.e., those that challenge exchange value, dualism and the dictatorship of time and space through co-operation and collective problem solving) are also capable of prefiguring communism.

It is a pity these street protests were not reinforced by more workplace strikes since the two forms of resistance would have fed off each other's dynamism. The state's use of lockouts could have been a major contributing factor in this regard. The few strikes that accompanied the protests were sometimes UGTT led and even organised jointly with management in order to defend the "tools of production" (Mouvement Communiste, 2011). It is noteworthy that UGTT recognised the winds of change early in January and gave its distant and qualified blessing to the protestors, in order not to 'lose touch.' Consequently, it is now the only effective apparatus capable of recuperating the revolt. Far more out of touch with the social movement have been the Islamists whose base amongst the Tunisian proletariat is shrinking rapidly.

But perhaps even more removed from reality is that other doyen of postmodernist Leninism, Signor Antonio Negri whose first response to the Tunisian uprising was to see in it

confirmation of his agenda to reform capitalism: "We've got to purge the old branches of power (legislative, executive, judiciary) and forcibly restore permanent control to a strengthened legislature, then we must add at least two other government agencies, one which will work in the media sector and one which will work on the banks and in finance" (Negri, 2011). As if to underline his sobriquet as the 'Sightless Nostradamus' of our times, Saint Toni of Rebibbia, privileges humanity with further visions: "And so here's our prediction: today it is not possible to imagine a democratic revolution that does not fulfil (above all else) a nationalization of the banks and rent reappropriation, which will follow, step by step, the establishment of the law of the common. This is the only way the multitude can establish its power" (Negri, 2011). Reforming the state and nationalising the means of production, communication and finance become the way, *nay the only way*, toward emancipation! Oh, well done Saint Toni- you brain-dead atavistic shit-head! You fucking stupid wanker!!

There have been attempts to create bottom-up organisations in order to defend the gains of the uprising and push things further. They vary greatly in function and degree of radicalism. Two such organisations are the 'Union of Unemployed Graduates' and the 'Committee to Safeguard the Revolution.' In some places they have become the *de facto* local government. Local branches are even more active. For example in Thala, "The committee to safeguard the revolution runs the town and has 'justice for our dead' as its prime demand. They have submitted a list of people involved in the killings, complete with names, and for 17 days in March they organised demonstrations to demand the imprisonment and trial of the murderers" (North Africa Working Group of the CGT International Secretariat, 2011b).

Melancholic Troglodytes may not know much but we know this much: when all sections of the proletariat are intermingling and co-developing (as they are in Tunisia), when the dead-labor of museums is reanimated by the living labor of anti-capitalist graffiti, when parents join their children's demonstrations, when both weddings and funerals become vehicles of resistance to the state and tradition, when bourgeois law and order is under practical assault by revolutionaries, and when entire towns such as Thala (Northwest of Tunisia) become police-free zones controlled by proletarians, to then turn around and promote 'nationalising the banks' and 'reforming the state,' as Saint Toni of Rebibbia does, is to open the door to counter-revolution. Negri you are a FUCKING ANTI-WORKING CLASS CUNT- don't let anyone tell you differently!

Egypt

The Egyptian proletariat understood the message emanating from Tunisia loud and clear. But then this section of the world proletariat has always been attuned to the slightest shift in the dynamics of class struggle.

For decades Egyptian proletarians have been subject to *direct* taxation and *absolute* surplus value extraction with working hours increasing as a way of compensating for the bourgeoisie's inability to modernise the economy (Lakhdar, 1978: 65). Children employed in the tourist, textile, shoe and leather industries still receive a derisory wage, which explains the relatively healthy profit margins in these areas. The 'Free Officers' who organised a coup d'état in 1952 were mainly modernising republican patriots with a few Islamic fundamentalists and Stalinists amongst them (Aulas, 1988: 134). With Nasser's rise to power a number of infrastructural and agrarian projects were initiated and the High Dam became Egypt's main energy source. The reactionary practice of official trade unions established under the Republic has meant a strong and vibrant wildcat strike culture amongst Egyptians.

One seminal moment occurred in 1971 when 10,000 steelworkers started a wildcat strike at Hilwan steel factory that soon became an occupation. Every delegate sent to appease the strikers was arrested. Thus the management, representatives of ministry of industry and governing party, and finally trade union bosses (sent as Sadat's special envoy) were treated with the same contempt. The solidarity strikes by workers in other industries convinced

Typical fucking men: tank duty turned into coffee break. Counter-revolutionaries are reorganising, you lazy pillocks! Get off your fat arses and do something!!!

the government to beat a hasty (and temporary) retreat. All demands were met. However, a few weeks later, when the dust had settled, the state hit back with a campaign of repression against militants. A year later, striking airport workers at Alexandria took the minister of transport hostage until all demands were met (Lakhdar, 1978: 67-68).

When the bourgeoisie decides the internal terrain is in need of major restructuring, an external threat is engineered. The 1973 war with Israel was (as with all wars before and after it) a useful diversion from the incessant waves of class struggle. Nationalists, Islamists, Stalinists and Trotskyites all performed their role in stoking up the fires of national rivalry in a bid to regain control over the real enemy- the proletariat. The appearance of victory also created an opportunity to restore relationship with Washington (Aulas, 1988: 149) and open up the economy (the policy of *infitah*). Of course Egypt's rulers saw infitah as a gradual transitory period of modernisation and foreign investment, whereas the IMF and World Bank preferred to see it as a no-holds barred adoption of Milton Friedman's injunctions (Aulas, 1988: 151). Even today "the military controls between 33% and 45% of the Egyptian economy. The army which made Hosni Mubarak … is the uncontested political protagonist" (Stacher, cited in Mouvement Communiste et al., 2011). The U.S. economic linkage to Egypt is mediated through the military. As Hanieh observes, "the broader goal has been the creation of a single economic zone from Israel to the Gulf states, linked under the dominance of the USA … so-

called Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZ). These QIZ provide duty-free access to the U.S. market for Egyptian exports. But they contain the remarkable provision that a certain proportion of imports (around 12 per cent) must be Israeli in order to qualify for duty-free status. The Egyptian QIZ are concentrated in the textile sector, with 770 companies operating in the zones at the end of 2009 ... It is noteworthy that Egyptian activists have raised the demand during the recent uprising to shut down these QIZ" (Hanieh, 2011).

The *infitah* 'worked' temporarily in terms of achieving compound growth rates but in 1975 another occupation at Hilwan factory led to autonomous assemblies. Unemployed workers and (proletarianised) students joined the strikers- this rapid generalisation of conflict is another healthy feature of Egyptian class struggle. When in 1976 public transport workers went on a wildcat strike, their most prominent demand was the dissolution of the trade union (Lakhdar, 1978: 71).

In the same year, Nasr Automobile factory workers not only occupied their workplace but initiated a basic degree of "workers' control" when they demanded an end to directors' bonuses. Since the management had lost control of the situation, the police had to become creative. According to Lakhdar, "The police intervened and asked the workers to form a committee to meet the prime minister, with assurances of safe conduct ... The workers formed this committee, but all its members

Once they see me in the buff on Facebook, they will beg me to come back!

were arrested inside the prime minister's office ... [meanwhile] the police penetrated the plant disguised as workers and arrested dozens of them" (Lakhdar, 1978: 70).

The 1977 uprising has features similar to the 2011 revolt. Nine major cities were affected. Bourgeois areas in Cairo were attacked by proletarians who, having subdued the security forces, turned their riot into a carnival in scenes reminiscent of the Tahrir Square carnival of 2011. The unemployed and the precarious workers living on survival wages acted as allies of industrial workers, and this too is a characteristic of Egyptian class struggle. Lakhdar reports that during the riots some proles gained the opportunity to drink whiskey for the first time! We can only hope it was (Black Label) Johnny Walker (and not Hanah Mashi as Gaddafi used to call it!!) since one's first time must be a memorable occasion! However, the riots were not generalised and key installations such as army barracks and the TV and radio stations were not occupied by protestors. This allowed the state to gradually gain control from the rebels and restore (bourgeois) order. *Infitah* was banished from official discourse although it remained the long term strategy for capital accumulation. As Hanieh reports, "In 1992, Law 96 of the Egyptian Peoples' Assembly liberalized agricultural rents and allowed for the eviction of tenants by landowners after a five-year transitional period" (Hanieh, 2011).

Meanwhile, urban regions were 'liberalised' when "state employment began to be cut back dramatically with the privatization (wholly or in part) of 209 public sector companies (out of a total of 314) by 2005" (Hanieh, 2011). Egyptian capitalism began to rely more heavily on rents from a variety of sources: oil strikes in the Red Sea; shipping through the Suez Canal; the SUMED oil pipeline, tourism; remittance from workers employed abroad; and aid from Gulf States as well as the West. All economic shortcomings came to be blamed on Islam and feudalism and their propensity to halt progress.

Sadat's assassination in 1981 was received with apathy by most Egyptians- little public show of mourning and affection for a ruler who had alienated most strata of society by the time of his death (Aulas, 1988: 162). Soon after, the Egyptian left collapsed, leaving the scene open for the emergence of Islamic forces as the main 'opposition' to Mubarak's regime (Duboc, 2011: 70). The fact that the left, Mubarak and Muslim Brotherhood all represent different versions of capitalism must not go unmentioned. This balance of forces remained unaltered until the formation of *Kifaya* (literally, 'enough') in 2001, representing a resurgent left wing of capital. However, this movement should not be dismissed as an intellectuals' debating club but a mixture of activity-based human rights' groups, NGOs and *autonomous* working class resistance- autonomous since it remained consciously apart from political parties and the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which is correctly perceived as an arm of the state (Beinin, 2011a: 183). The 'economic demands' of workers in the1980s became peppered with 'political' signification "nearly a decade before the mobilizations of the urban middle class around foreign policy" (Beinin, 2011a: 186).

"I prefer to think that God is not dead, just drunk."

~John Marcellus Huston

"I feel sorry for people who don't drink. When they wake up in the morning, that's as good as they're going to feel all day."
~Frank Sinatra

Workers' protests escalated in the 21st century. In 2006 "there were 220 major strikes involving tens of thousands of workers in the largest strike wave that Egypt had seen in decades. These strikes linked up with peasant movements, which aimed at resisting the loss of land" (Hanieh, 2011). The largest strike in this period was the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company strike of 2007. Thousands resigned from the ETUF but the union "did not recognize these resignations and continued to deduct dues from their paychecks" (Beinin, 2011a: 194)!! In response the workers demanded the impeachment of union officials and the resignation of the entire government including Mubarak himself. Women workers, comprising around 22% (5.11 million) in 2006, played a radicalising role in the strike, in the same way that in 2008 the April 6 Youth Movement, an internet based group, was organized to support the mass strikes in the textile centre of Mahalla al-Kobra.

This cycle of strikes reached a peak after the global capitalist crisis resulted in uncontrollable food price rises. The escalation was both numeric and geographic with collective action moving outward from the textile industry to encompass virtually every industrial sector (Beinin, 2011a: 187). "In 2010, the price of wheat in Egypt, which is the world's biggest importer, went up by 73% and maize jumped by 88%. Meat, fruit and vegetables became unaffordable for a large number of Egyptians" (Mouvement Communiste et al., 2011). The recently won minimum wage of about $70 per month, which would have been considered a real victory for the proletariat, proved wholly inadequate in compensating for this food price hike. Subsequently there were "brawls before the Cairo bakeries that led to the death of many" (Kadri, 2011). This was another indication that income inequality was growing at a faster rate than the growth in incomes.

Others problems soon aggravated the fundamental weaknesses of Egyptian economy. For example, following investment slow down in many parts of the globe, Egyptian worker remittance was also curtailed. As Hanieh (2011) makes clear, "in the case of Egypt, workers tend to migrate to the Gulf countries, Libya and Jordan. For the rest of North Africa, this labour migration tends to be toward Europe. Egypt is the largest recipient of remittances in the Middle East, representing approximately 5 per cent of national GDP."

As proles were encouraged to tighten their belts, they could see the widening gap between their living standards and the ruling elite. Corruption in both its objective manifestation (as the mis-use of public office for private gain- Max Weber) or its subjective dimension (as perceived nepotism and favouritism) created a sense of deep-seated injustice. That is why "the word *fasad*, corruption, has been chanted like a mantra in Egypt ... Ever since Hosni Mubarak 'stepped aside' as head of the Egyptian state, 'mini-Mubaraks' have been discovered to pop up in every corner of the administrative apparatus and private sector with surprisingly constancy" (Michael, 2011). It also explains a relatively novel phenomenon in Egyptian politics- that of the protesting police officer- the same ruthless thugs whose routine abuse of even law-abiding citizens led to protests in the summer of 2010! Michael explains striking police officers succinctly, "While claims that they sought to re-establish their legitimacy by promoting a new image ... contain a grain of truth, these police officers were mostly interested in demanding a liveable minimum wage ... Clearly, the officers were surviving primarily on an additional source of income, *rashawy* [sic], or small bribes, which they were now, in post-revolution Egypt, unable to extract from the population, for fear of mob reprisals. In pre-revolution Egypt, they would obtain these bribes by voiding a ticket for speeding or for not wearing a belt while driving; in less innocuous cases, they would extort a *rashwa* in exchange for turning a blind eye to drug trafficking or prostitution" (Michael, 2011). If the police were vacillating, the army, that bastion of oppression under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak was also displaying private signs of displeasure at Mubarak's plans to groom his son, Gamal Mubarak, for presidency. The rank-and-file were disgruntled.

It is true that a higher percentage of protestors seemed middle class compared to Tunisia but the majority of demonstrators and victims of state brutality were clearly proletarian

(Anderson, 2011). Beinin recounts how "tens of thousands of workers -in textiles, military production, transportation, petroleum, cement, iron and steel, hospitals, universities, telecommunications and the Suez Canal- participated in strikes or protests in the three days before Mubarak's departure" (Beinin, 2011b). And three days *after* Mubarak's resignation, when the generals had banned demonstrations, "thousands of public sector workers, including ambulance drivers, airport and public transport workers and even police, took to the streets, demanding higher pay" (Beinin, 2011b). There were attempts at setting up various committees for "workers' control" and "workers' management". They largely confined themselves to monitoring "production, prices, distribution and wages" (Anderson, 2011). Although very limiting in the sense they never put forward the demand for "workers' power", these committees represent a tangible break with decades of proletarian pessimism and united the so-called 'blue' and 'white-collar' sections of the proletariat. This trend was reaffirmed in September when thousands of workers went on strike and demonstrated for back-payments and promised bonuses. They clearly see the interim authorities as the enemy and have threatened them with a fresh revolt.

Things are getting personal at Tahrir Square!

The generals showed their true colours shortly after when a Military Court sentenced blogger Maikel Nabil to a three year sentence for his blog post entitled 'The army and the people wasn't ever one hand' (Nabil, 2011). Elections were expedited to favour the regime and their new allies the Muslim Brotherhood. Not the first time capitalists have used elections to end an uprising. De Gaulle used an election to end the uprising of 1968 in France in exactly

the same way (Rees, 2011). Another heinous tactic employed to divide the protestors has been the tried and tested church-burning anti-cop campaign. Christians predate Muslims in the land of Egypt but by the 10th century A.D. they were outnumbered and Coptic lost out to Arabic as the official language. The 19th century Hamayouni Decree was intended to end discrimination against the Copts but in practice they remained at the mercy of the state (which nationalised their assets under Nasser) and Muslim clerics (who organised pogroms at opportune historical moments against them). One such pogrom occurred in 1978 when, "in the upper Egyptian towns of Menya and Assiut, priests were attacked and churches were set on fire, while officials renewed their threat to implement apostasy laws in an attempt to silence the church" (Bayat, 2011). Bayat goes on to explain how 'ordinary' Muslims and Christians live harmoniously side-by-side but tension is instigated by the elite, usually salafi leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. The stalemate we are witnessing in Egypt cannot hold out much longer: either the military will consolidate its power with the aid of reactionaries like the Muslim Brotherhood and Liberal technocrats or the people will extend and expand the social struggle.

Libya

Meanwhile the situation in Libya is both simpler and more complicated. Simpler because (for the time being) there is no appreciable class struggle to speak of. There were some strikes in Tripoli and demonstrations in working class quarters at the beginning of the uprising. We estimate tens of thousands were involved before rapid militarisation altered the dynamics and class nature of the struggle. And more complicated because there are a number of external actors meddling at the military, economic and diplomatic levels in pursuit of (semi-) hidden agendas which makes prediction risky. All we know at this stage is that Gaddafi's regime is finished and opportunists have begun playing musical chairs in order to choose the ultimate winner. Furthermore, despite its obvious geographical proximity to Tunisia and Egypt, it could be argued Libya has more commonalities with the Gulf States than a typical North African society (its oil wealth, its high percentage of foreign workers and its tribalism are three factors that mark the Libyan situation as akin to the Gulf States).

Here is a land fought over by empires for centuries, partitioned and colonised by all manner of warmongers. The Romans were the first outsiders who tried to impose their rule over the region we today call Libya. But when their rule split in the 3rd century, the same Tripoli (Tripolitania)-Benghazi (Cyrenaica) divide that we witness today occurred. Tripolitania went to the Roman empire and Cyrenaica was given to the Byzantium empire (Robinson, 2011). In the 7th century and 16th centuries first the Islamic empire and then the Ottoman empire took control of both Tripoli and Benghazi. The Italian empire of Mr Mussolini attempted to bring Tripoli into its orbit in the 20th century, and after Italy's defeat in W/WII the country was split into three spheres of influence under the Allies. The tribal division is of contemporary

relevance since as Fisk has observed, "Gaddafi's own tribe, the Guedaffi, come from the desert between Sirte and Sebha; hence the western region of Libya remain[ed] under his control" (Fisk, 2011). The British and Americans left behind a "legacy of millions of landmines around Tobruk and Benghazi" which still blows up hapless Libyan shepherds from time to time (Fisk, 2011). The history of Libya, therefore, suggests waves of integrationist colonisation from the East punctuated by periods of fragmentation instigated by western colonisation. Ominously some voices in NATO were once again calling for a 'permanent' geo-political split in Libya, with the oil-rich Eastern region becoming a 'Western' protectorate. As (the not-always-reliable) Alexander Cockburn has correctly stated, "A hundred years from now this UN/NATO intervention will be seen as an old-fashioned colonial smash-and-grab affair, tricked out with trumpery nonsense about a mission 'to protect civilians and civilian populated areas' as hollow as the old imperialists' claims that the conquest of India was primarily about saving widows from suttee" (Cockburn, 2011).

Over the years, the Libyan ruling class has proven itself to be one of the most pernicious, anti-working class elites in the region- a serious accolade when one bears in mind the rival candidates for the award! Since this is basic knowledge to most students of the region one example should suffice: "The 1996 massacre [took] place after the prisoners at Abu Salim had gone on strike and occupied part of the prison in order to demand medical care, better conditions, family visits, and the reopening of their cases. Abdallah Senussi, chief of security to this day, promised to meet all of the demands except new trials, which he said was not in his power to grant. The prisoners accepted this and returned to their cells. The next day, some 400 were taken to another prison, after which soldiers started firing from the roof at the remaining prisoners, killing 1270 men" (Nicolas Bourcier, 'Le massacre d'Abou Salim,' *Le Monde*, March 22, 2011, quoted in Anderson, 2011). The families of the dead were still demonstrating in a public square when the fighting began.

In his unintentionally comical *Green Book*, Gaddafi-the-stupid dismisses the class struggle as 'futile.' The party manifesto even talks glowingly about "non-exploiting capitalists" (First, 1980: 135)!!! His 'anti-imperialist' rants, tailor-made for brain-dead leftist middle class intellectuals, had become far and few in-between recently, since it militated against the policy of rapprochement with the 'West'! In retrospect, none of his attempted pan-Arab mergers (e.g., with Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, etc.) were preceded by clear thinking (Oguine, 2004: 5). When they were rebuffed, he threw a tantrum like a little boy refused candy, and turned pan-Africanist instead! A more serious side to these shenanigans was his support for reactionary, murderous scum such as Charles Taylor (Liberia) and Foday Sankoh (Sierra Leone)- both products of his

training camps. When he decided to alter course he had to be purified by PR gurus before 'Western' politicians could be seen out with him. The likes of orientalist Bernard Lewis were recruited for the task by "the *Monitor Group*, a Boston-based consulting firm advised by Neoconservative luminary and former defence department official Richard Perle" (Abdurrahman, 2011). In the UK, the responsibility was carried out by another fawning reactionary prick, Professor Anthony Giddens, who was granted an audience with the Brother-Leader in his tent (Giddens, 2007).
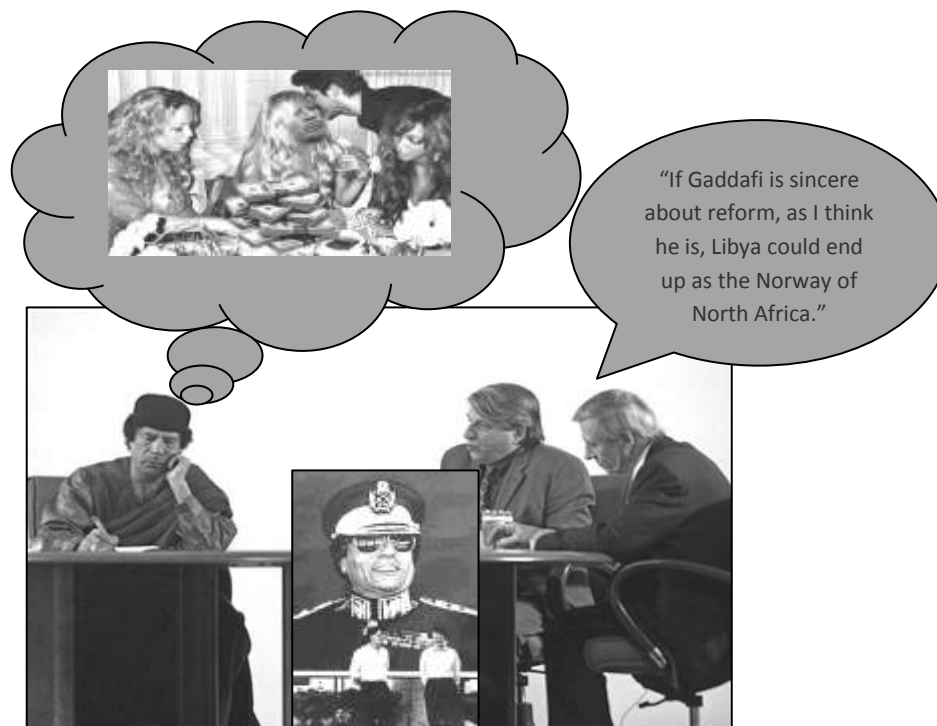
Third-Way chums: Anthony Giddens comapring Libya to Norway! Inset shows Nick Griffin and Derek Holland (National Front) on a 1986 fundraising tour of Libya!! Gaddafi can't wait for Beyonce and Mariah Carey to perform for him, which apparently they did!!!

Fred Halliday's description of the Gaddafi regime as a 'kleptocracy' (a regime in which those in power exploit national resources and steal) could, of course, be applied to any ruling class but somehow the term seems to fit perfectly the inner dynamics of excessive corruption, nepotism and incompetence that characterised the Libyan elite. Besides Berlusconi, the regime could also call the country's former chief political fixer (and mafia collaborator) Giulio Andreotti a true friend. Apparently Andreotti "gave the Libyans advance warning of the American air-assault of 1986" (Halliday, 2009/2011). Halliday writes, "Libya, with a per capita oil output roughly equal to that of Saudi Arabia, boasts few of the advances - the urban and

transport development, educational and health facilities - that the oil-endowed Gulf states can claim" (Halliday, 2009/2011).

With the rest of the Middle East succumbing to 'instability,' the closer oil-fields of Libya have acquired additional value for the European bourgeoisie. The recent setbacks for British Petroleum and Shell have only made them more aggressive. Additionally, Italy (or at least its most xenophobic bourgeois faction) seemed genuinely concerned about dealing with the 'refugee problem' a long drawn-out war might have created. The less xenophobic faction (those with cordial relationships to the deposed Gaddafi) are concerned with retaining Libyan investment in Unicredit, Fiat and Finmeccanica (Conway, 2011). That is why the Italian oil company Eni switched from doing business with Gaddafi to the 'rebels' as soon as the latter gained military momentum. In the USA, Hilary Clinton and a group of 'humanitarian imperialists' around her including Samantha Power, a National Security Council aide and Susan Rice, the US ambassador to the UN, advocated intervention. As usual there was a mixture of black, grey and white propaganda. Susan Rice is the diplomat who "claimed that pro-Gaddafi forces have been issued with Viagra to encourage them to rape women in rebel areas of Libya," a claim that does not seem to be corroborated by other US military

40 virgin female bodygaurds- now that's leadership!

Our masters are bourgeois titans! Phoney-baloney Berlusconi and niffy-daffy Gaddafi celebrate the 10th anniversary of Viagra!

and intelligence officers (Sefton, 2011). Amnesty International goes further and accuses 'rebels' in Benghazi of fabricating evidence (Cockburn, 2011b). Likewise, it may turn out that the often reported 'pro-Gaddafi foreign mercenary' was a case of white propaganda. Many captured Gaddafi soldiers are Libyan born 'blacks' with roots in Sabha (southern Libya) or Mali and Niger and not foreign soldiers (Smith, 2011). The UN resolution 1973 (initially a no-fly zone policy, very rapidly used as an excuse for 'regime change') was only supported wholeheartedly by the US, UK and France. Others (Qatar, Italy, Russia and China) are reluctant partners. For vastly differing reasons, South Africa and Zimbabwe in Africa and Syria in the Middle supported Gaddafi until the end. 'Humanitarian imperialism', however, has now clearly won the day. This 'humanitarian imperialism' is better contextualised when we note "... the vast territory of Libya is mostly unexplored, and oil specialists believe it may have rich untapped resources, which a more dependable government might open to Western exploitation" (Chomsky, 2011).

If 'kleptocracy' (cf. Halliday, 2009/11) captures some elements of the Libyan narrative, the 'rentier principle' (cf. Mahdavy, 1970; First, 1980; L. S., 2011) accounts for its other dimensions (although we should underline that both these concepts are inadequate -and at

times misleading- for comprehending Libyan capitalism in its entirety). According to advocates of the rentier state theory, the external rent Libya collects from its oil can achieve rises in *per capita* income "but without going through the social and organisational changes usually associated with the process of economic growth" (First, 1980: 120). It is alleged the state becomes 'autonomous' and loses touch with civil society (Ahmad, 1986: 49), since it does not have to have a tax base. The service sector grows, whilst industry and agriculture stagnate. Workers and raw material are imported rather than trained and manufactured. Native workers are shunned into bloated administrative bureaucracies where the "jobs created by the state are often disguised unemployment and the salaries disguised handouts" (First, 1980; 132). The fact that most of Libya is desert exacerbates the agricultural problems as does urban migration of serfs and peasants, leaving the labour-intensive process of rural production without sufficient manpower. Additionally, British and French rulers decided to bolster the tribal nobles of the Sanusi order as a bulwark against Arab nationalism (First, 1980: 126).

Oil was discovered relatively late in 1955 but the industry that grew around oil production and distribution expanded at an unprecedented rate. Oil rents as a share of government revenues increased from zero in 1950 to 83.1% in 1970 (Sandbakken, 2006: 144). Libya's oil law "ensured rapid turnover of concessions and maximum competition between oil companies … [and] the heavy presence of the independent companies [gave] Libya its leverage over the [majors]" (First, 1980: 128). Gaddafi's economic ideology was a confused mixture of social democracy, Arab nationalism and Islam. In the last few years, social democracy was replaced by neo-liberal policies and Arab nationalism gave way to pan-African delusions. Despite the ostentatious expenditure in later years, the regime conserved resources and sought "increased revenues rather than increased production" (First, 1980: 130). In the 1970s education, medical care and transportation became heavily subsidized (Sandbakken, 2006: 145). In fact, in the late 1970s Libya experienced a surplus absorption problem perhaps due to overambitious projects creating too many bottlenecks. These were capital-intensive enterprises which because of the way rentier society develop, "tend to lack backward inter-sectoral linkages, relying on constant imports for their upkeep" (Yates, 1996: 25).

The 1990s witnessed drop in revenues leading to fiscal constraints. Public sector wages were frozen leading to resentment. The extremely high defence budget became a drain on resources. Sandbakken claims that Libya's social structure differs from other rentier states in that it has "no rentier class of technocrats and military officers" due to periodic purges (Sandbakken, 2006: 145). The growth that was observed in terms of GDP in spits and spurts was an indicator of quantitative increase and not qualitative development (i.e., labor productivity, innovation in management techniques, high-tech machinery, etc) (Losman, 2010). As we have been reminded lately GDP is a notoriously distorted criteria for evaluating economic performance. A category created by economists in the 1930s, it soon became a gauge of national virility for the right wing of capital (populism, liberalism and neoliberalism) and a mechanism for wealth distribution by the left wing of capital (social democracy) (see Meadway, 2011). GDP is "one measure of the total value of the work we do- but only the work we do for money" (Stanford,

2008: 25). GDP greatly underestimates our productivity by failing to acknowledge unpaid work. Furthermore, increases in GDP could be due to increase in the market value of a commodity (e.g., oil) or simply a reflection of population growth. It may have no correlation with incomes, wellbeing or prosperity.

In the early 2000s Libyan foreign policy underwent a number of 'U' and 'W' turns, all sanctioned by the appropriate *Green Book* quote and overseen by Gaddafi and Musa Koussa (ex-head of secret services turned foreign minister, turned-turn-coat defector in March 2011). The nuclear-weapons programme and the policy of assassinating dissidents abroad were shelved and cheeks of Blair, Sarkozy and Berlusconi adorned with the Brother-Leader's smooch! In 2006 the US removed Libya from its list of terrorist states, paving the way for American firms to compete with European rivals for Libyan oil and gas. Gaddafi announced plans for liberalisation of the economy, reform of the financial sector, reducing subsidies and applying for WTO membership. Energy, manufacturing and construction sectors expanded at the expense of the agricultural sector with "Libya importing 75% of its food" (CIA Factbook, 'Libya', 2011). The GDP real growth was around 4.2% in 2010 representing GDP-per capita of $14,000. And yet uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 had a sufficiently radicalising impact on some sections of the population to encourage them to resist the regime. The rapid militarisation of the social movement de-politicised the rebels and turned them into foot-soldiers. NATO's air campaign and western special forces on the ground gradually turned the military tide against Gaddafi and the rest is daytime television spectacle, as they say.

The next ruling elite will inherit a chaotic country and a long list of to-do things. A faltering, oil-dependent economy will need to develop profitably by establishing a more 'normal' relationship of exploitation vis-à-vis the proletariat and new areas of economic activity such as a viable tourist industry. Billions of Libya's foreign assets (estimated at $150bn by the IMF) will need to be invested in the energy sector and infrastructural enterprises rather than handed out willy-nilly as backhanders for services rendered. With 3% of the world's oil and 5.6% of the world's gold reserves and a population of only 6.5 million, one imagines that every group would be accommodated in a post-Gaddafi regime. Long suppressed ethnical, tribal and religious divisions will need to be managed more adroitly. The Islamists will demand more power, commensurate with their influence and the (relative) competence displayed by a few of their military commanders such as Abdel Hakim Belhaj, leader of the newly formed Tripoli Military Council. They will be accommodated since the politicians will temporarily have more power over a battered military and security apparatus. Some 8,500 NATO bombing raids saw to that. They may use this space to grant rights to the Berber minority whilst Islamic law might gain more prominence within the judiciary. The National Transitional Council will need to rapidly evolve into a ruling class that other Africans, especially South African, can recognise and the USA and Europe can do (lucrative) business with. After all, a bunch of businessmen, diplomats, ex-military, ex-secret service and Islamist cut-throats did not win legitimacy from the people, rather they had it conferred upon them by NATO and 'Western' politicians.

Before starting to analyse Saudi Arabia it is prudent to list some provisional problems with the rentier state theory, since it will complete our analysis of Libya and clarify the ways in which Gulf States transgress from the model. Obviously the rentier state theory has some *descriptive* validity otherwise it would have been dispensed with a long time ago but we believe its *explanatory* powers are rather limited. Here are some of the issues with this theory:

1. In adhering to a structuralist epistemology, it lays itself open to charges of denying agency, process and history. Indeed the class struggle is almost entirely absent from analysis. At its worse, oil wealth is operationalised as an independent variable in a positivist model unworthy of serious consideration.

2. By putting so much emphasis on the role of the state, the theory ignores other aspects of capitalist development, for example, private banking, finance, and the internationalisation of the economy through being plugged into the oil industry.

3. Ironically the theory somehow manages to downplay the *productive* activities of the state and how it diversifies the economy in a relatively short timeframe in order to catch up with older forms of capitalism. 'Rentier states' can be extremely innovative and a far cry from the conservative cliché they are made out by some economists.

4. There is a very nasty whiff of eurocentrism about advocates of a theory who normalise 'western' capitalist development (with its move from agriculture to industry; its privileging of the Protestant Work Ethic; its culturally specific notion of rights and social contract) which are then universalised. In many accounts, the theory is posited as a transgression from 'western' norms, as a loss of perfection. In fact, apart from Malthus, none of the classical economists had anything nice to say about rents and rentiers. The (mostly) spurious dichotomy between 'earned' and 'unearned' incomes (not the same as 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour) is then used unjustifiably to argue that earned incomes support 'democracy' and 'accountability' whilst 'unearned incomes' in rentier economies become complicit in creating 'autocracy' and 'secret governance'.

5. A corollary of the above argument suggests that 'normal western' states formulate their aims and objectives under the scrutiny of citizens whilst rentier states ride roughshod over their subjects' wishes. This is the case, it is argued, because 'western' states collect taxes (that can be withheld by irate citizens) whereas rentier states do not have a tax basis. The similar claim that rentier states 'bribe' their subjects to conform can obviously be applied to any welfare measure ever taken by 'western' states! Some versions of the theory criticise the rentier state for severing links with 'civil society'. It would, however, be more accurate to say that 'civil society' is defined differently in rentier states and linkage is very rarely severed.

6. Likewise we find the claims for the inherent instability associated with rentier states unsustainable given that capitalism in all its forms develops through a dialectic of crisis and stability.

7. Finally, the most dangerous aspect of rentier theory is when it becomes tangled up with 'dependency theory'- an openly anti-working class strategy by 'native' capitalists and intellectuals to support indigenous capitalism against foreign forms of exploitation.

Gulf States (focus on Saudi Arabia)

Thank god class struggle in this region is limited- it means we can wrap up this article sooner rather than later and get on with the rest of our lives! 'Arab States of the Gulf' is a loose collection of countries that share a border with the Persian Gulf: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. These countries came together in 1981 as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Bizarrly in May of this year the GCC offerred memebership to Jordan (which is not on the Persian Gulf) and Morocco (situated at the north-western tip of Africa). Halliday (2005: 97) is quite right in claiming the GCC was established in order to counter the growing threat of Iraq (through bribery) and later Iran (through a diplomatic and military shield). And he is quite wrong when he says the reason they joined forces had nothing to do with promoting integration. A close look at their economies shows their business cycles are synchronised and their labor markets, technology transfer policy and trading very much interdependent. Now we know that class struggle has also been synchronised in the region in so far as one proletarian uprising impacts the tempo and substance of the next. So we concur with Ayoob's summing up that the GCC's main purpose is to "[control and suppress] the populations of member states in order to provide security to the autocratic monarchies of the Persian Gulf" (Ayoob quoted in Black, 2011). We looked at Bahrain in a previous article. Here we have chosen to focus on Saudi Arabia, since its immense wealth has a decisive influence in regional and, some would say, global affairs.

Ibn Saud, a Wahabi bedouine leader, and British imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century were a perfect partnership. Ibn Saud ruthlessly conquered tribes and Britain egged him on with offers of money and supplies. At a time when one could rely on politicians' openness "Lord Crewe, a minister in the Liberal government in Britain, summed up the real colonial aim: 'What we want is not a united Arabia, but a disunited Arabia split into principalities

under our suzerainty'" (Fermont, 2001). Ibn Saud finally declared himself King in 1932, with a tyrannical religious police and British military providing 'stability'. Once their man was securely in power, British colonial policy shifted toward unifying 'Arabia' (Halliday, 2005: 103).

For decades the Saudi Arabian ruling elite was described as a 'bulwark', an 'oasis of calm and stability', and a 'stalwart ally of the West'. Rhetoric was at odds with reality, however, as in 1953 the Saudis had to deal with their first real labour unrest. As Spritzler (2007) has described, "it started out with native Saudi employees of ARAMCO (the Arabian American Oil Co., biggest enterprise in the land) demanding justice for all the company's 15,000 native workers." When the leaders were jailed by authorities an organised general strike took place which was ruthlessly put down.

Regionally the Saudis "formed an alliance with monarchies in Jordan and Iraq in 1956" to counter Nasserism (Manuel, 2003). The ensuing Pan-Islamism was as much the creation of Wahabism as the US state, both concerned with the rise of Pan-Arabism. The Salafi opposition that emerged in the 1960s in Islamic universities, was a minor nuisance at the beginning. They had to bide their time for a few decades before offering a serious challenge to the Saudi Royal family. When "in 1962 … rebels influenced by Egypt's example overthrew the Imam in Yemen and declared a republic there, the Saudi and Jordanian kings sent troops to aid the Yemeni royalist forces" (Manuel, 2003). The same pattern is re-enacted today when Saudi forces send in elite security forces to put down protests in neighbouring Bahrain.

In recent years, however, the certitude that military domination and extraordinary wealth bestowed upon the Saudi Royal family has turned into doubt and uncertainty. For the first time since the discovery of oil in 1938 (some estimates claim late 1920s), even the immense wealth of Saudi Arabia is

Al Ardha is a traditional Bedouin sword dance

failing to paper over the cracks. What Mr Trotsky described as 'combined and uneven development' has created fissures and contradictions that prove impervious to clumsy top-down management. Relations with the US bourgeoisie remain cordial but one does not need to be a Wikileak warrior to sense the growing strains between them. The cheap oil once guaranteed by Saudi domination of Opec is becoming dearer and the revenue is no longer returned automatically to Western banks as 'petro-dollars'. The fact that 15 of the 19 Twin Tower hijackers were well-off, educated men of Saudi origin; the loss of life in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing (when 19 US marines died); and the 2003 Riyadh suicide bombings (8 US citizens died), had already soured the relationship. When Saudi authorities refused the FBI

investigators carte blanche, some senior US politicians called for an organised coup against the monarchy. The anti-Israeli and anti-US articles routinely paraded in Saudi newspapers may be amateurish attempts at propaganda for a domestic audience but it creates a whirlwind of animosity amongst bird-brained US hawks and Wahabi hotheads alike. The US finally moved its military base from Saudi Arabia to Qatar in 2003. As we will attempt to show below, the problems faced by the Saudi ruling class are just as much political and cultural, as they are economic.

Most Saudi citizens are socialised from birth to despise labour, especially manual labour which is considered boorishly undignified. This is part elitism and part the product of a nomadic desert existence which nurtures a distaste for factory or office discipline. With abundant surplus capital this was a pose that could be maintained for most Saudis throughout their lives. In a very real sense there was no need for a Saudi working class until the 1980s. There were many in the energy industry, of course, but in general Korean workers could be hired to run the oil fields, Indians to construct buildings, Bangladeshis to clean the streets, Egyptians to work as technicians, Nepalese to run factories, and Philippines to reproduce labour power at home. Slavery was legal and practised until 1962 and today's wage-slaves are sometimes treated no better than slaves. And as with the case of Bahrain, which we looked at previously, the sponsorship system is used to control and enslave the worker. Things are so bad that "Some embassies of countries with large domestic servants population maintain 'safehouses' to which their citizens may flee to escape work situations. Despite these safehouses, it is common knowledge that runaways are almost always returned to their sponsors" (International Federation of Human Rights et al., 2003).

Hell-bound: Osama arrives in Hell dazed and confused!

Today the fully subsidised educational system and guaranteed permanent jobs at the end of what counted for a university degree are a thing of the past and citizens are gradually transformed into proletarians in a bid to *Saudify* the workforce. The process is bureaucratic and poorly planned (as are most things in Saudi Arabia) which means that the aim of 25% of every company being Saudi has not been achieved (MacFarquhar, 2011). Saudi bosses complain of lack of labour discipline, "If I hire, on an annual basis, 200 Saudis, I find at least 150 will leave," (GM of the National Biscuits & Confectionery plant, quoted in MacFarquhar, 2011). However, it is hoped that the plummeting per capita income from around $28,000 in the 1980s to $23,000 (some estimate say much less!) today will create the right motivation in workers, and US vocational training will instil the correct work-ethics in 'work-shy' Saudis.

As the population has grown beyond the system's ability to train and return productively to the job market and as the government has pushed through with its policy of restricting migration, the smaller surplus capital is finding it increasingly difficult to fuse with the right kind of surplus labor. Unemployment is officially put at around 18% and rising which is grist to the mill of traditionalist who wish to confine women to housework duties. Only a very small percentage of women are employed, usually in medicine or education. Relations of production, atavistic labor management techniques, inability to repair and improve technology, and traditions mired in feudal obstinacy have truly become fetters on the further development of forces of production. Even basics, once taken for granted, have become scarce. As MacFarquhar (2011) explains the kingdom "needs to refurbish its once awe-inspiring infrastructure of soaring airport terminals, freeways and phone booths pitched in the middle of the desert. It needs power and water to reduce rolling blackouts and water rationing." Outsiders familiar with images of opulence and excessive comfort in Saudi Arabia will be shocked at levels of toxic pollution seeping into the aquifers in Jeddah, a creaking telephone network that is inadequate to the task and visible poverty in some working class quarters.

Saudi Arabia has not been an absolute monarchy for decades. This is partly due to the commodification of life under capitalism and partly due to the break-up of the monarchy into some 10 fiefdoms/ministries run independently by the most powerful princes within the elite. The ministry of interior alone is reputed to employ around 800,000 people (Al-Rasheed, 2011). This group of rivals are maximising their wealth and influence in the hope of becoming the ultimate ruler of the Kingdom after King Abdullah's death. Some bourgeois-minded members of the monarchy, such as Prince Abdullah, have been at pains to modernise the system in order to avert the (near) inevitable explosion. Attempts at seducing foreign investment, lowering of tariffs, ownership property rights for foreigners (outside the 'holy' cities of Mecca and Medina), and new tax and commercial laws amount to a top-down bourgeois reform programme for Saudi Arabia. However, in the words of MacFarquhar (2011): "To the Saudi business community, the best opening for change is the possibility of joining the World Trade Organization, nudging the kingdom toward the kind of financial transparency it has long avoided." Here is a bourgeoisie (merchants, financiers, technocrats) that has (by and large) remained the middle class. Unlike its counterparts elsewhere in the world, it has failed to

become the ruling class. And the tension between this educated, business savvy, worldly bourgeois class and the isolated, uber-conservative royals (and its 7,000 entourage of princes) is becoming more acute every day. The traditional monopoly-breaker role played by Saudi Arabia within OPEC was strategically encouraged by OECD countries (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, established in 1960). The conduct of the uber-conservative faction contradicts the interests of the emergent faction and arguably it also undermines wages and social benefits (see Nore & Turner, 1980: 60-62 for a dated but solid analysis).

The 'economic crisis' in Saudi Arabia must not be exaggerated. We are not pleading for aid and charity to be sent to what is still an extremely affluent society. The rate of growth and urbanisation has been dramatic by any standard. As Kronemer (1997) points out, "Riyadh developed in less than 50 years from a village of 3 dusty square miles into an urban centre of about 600 square miles with a modern skyline at its centre and a population of over 2 million. In all of Saudi Arabia, where less than 80 miles of paved roads had existed, over 80,000 miles were built. Where once there were almost no medical or educational facilities, nearly 4,000 hospitals, health centres, and dispensaries, hundreds of schools, and several universities were created." Incidentally the fact that the state invested in welfare reforms explains why Islamists in Saudi Arabia (unlike Egypt and Iraq) cannot win the people over through

A man is as young as the woman he feels.
- Groucho Marx.

**Philosopy is to the real world as masturbation is to sex.
- Karl Marx on Amy Pond.**

charity and 'civil society' organisations. The 1990s saw developments in native manufacturing with firms recruiting for all types of occupations from a Saudi workforce. A Bedouin population had been turned into urban dwellers with three-quarters living in cities by 1990 (Spark, 1996/2003). As with other oil-producing countries developmental criteria all looked to be heading in the right direction. Life expectancy rose dramatically from 35 years in 1950 to 66 years in 1993 and 74 years in 2011. Literacy rates rose from 71% for men and 48% for women in 1992 to 85% for men and 71% for women in 2011 (CIA Factbook, 'Saudi Arabia'). These are impressive stats especially when we remember that "rioting occurred when [women] were first admitted to state schools in the 1960s" (Spark, 1996/2003).

However, the absolute rise in living standards for most Saudis in the 1990s concealed that in relative terms the ruling elite were getting richer at the expense of all. Accordingly, "the royal share of the national income [was] at between 10 and 15 per cent, more than the share of the budget going for health, education, labor and social affairs combined" (Spark, 1996/2003). Corruption which is the cost of doing business in most 'normal' capitalist environments was

biting a disproportionately huge chunk out of the national budget. Ibn Saud allegedly built 40 palaces for his four wives and 30 or so mansions for his numerous concubines (Spark, 1886/2003). By acting as middlemen for huge multi-national companies, Saudi royals turn a fixed and guaranteed million dollar government-stipend into billion dollar incomes. The rhetoric of the ruling elite aims to assuage a sense of injustice at this very obvious class difference by employing kindergarten arguments. In a recent visit to the Prophet's Mosque at Madina, Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz patronised the audience by claiming that "there are no social classes in Saudi Arabia because everyone is equal in terms of the Qur'an and the Sunnah" (The Saudi, 2011).

The sermon would have come as a great surprise to an unidentified 65-year-old man who died after setting himself on fire in the town of Samtah, Jizan, on January 21. This was the first known case of self-immolation in the country. This was followed by stranded Filipino contract workers protesting in Riyadh against deceptive employers and the confiscation of their passports (Santolan, 2011). Then "hundreds of workers at the King Abdullah Financial District (KAFD) and extension projects at the King Saud University (KSU), in the capital, stopped work due to non payment of their regular wages and overtime pay" (Thompson, 2011). Soon after the Saudi Telecom Company workers went on strike in March 2011 with the objective of "an increment in wages, bonuses, overtime pay and other economic demands" (In Defence of Marxism, 2011). The protestors launched a Facebook campaign which demanded the resignation of the company's CEO, prompting the King to appear on national TV and attack the protestors vigorously. But he also "announced a 15% increment in government employees' wages, the creation of many new jobs in the security forces (a clear indication of their fear)," as well as billions of dollars in interest-free loans for Saudis to buy or build homes (In Defence of Marxism, 2011).

The measures failed to prevent women teachers protesting for full time employment in front of the Ministry of Civil Services in April 2011. And it may even have catalysed the call for Day of Rage in March. According to Manzoor and Bhatti (2011), "In the city of Qatif, a protest march was held. It was the second of its kind in less than 24 hours, involving about 200 youths. The participants chanted slogans [such as] *No Sunni-Shiite ... We all call for freedom*". The same source reports, "Nearly 300 people protested in Port city Jeddah against the local authorities for providing poor services. This protest came after the worst flooding in the city in which many buildings, houses and shops were inundated in floodwaters which caused widespread destruction. The police attacked the protest and arrested many people". Even academics jumped on the protest bandwagon. Some 70 Saudi academics wrote an open letter to the King demanding political and economic reforms and an end to corruption. Three days of anti-government protest in the eastern city of al-Qatif have seen injuries on both sides with police using live rounds (Cockburn, 2011c). As we write these lines, there is little sign of the ruling elite succumbing to pressure for reforms, other than promising some vague electoral reform in favour of women. In fact, they are likely to use the recent spat with Iran over an alleged plot to assassinate their ambassador at Washington to stifle dissent at home.

So freakin' what?

In this final section we attempt to answer a number of key questions. What precisely was this event that nerd-meteorologists insist on calling the 'Arab Spring'? Whatever it was, is it now done and dusted? The Bastard in *The Life and Death of King John* would have complained, "Mad world! Mad kings! Mad composition!" (Shakespeare, *King John*, Act II, Scene i). But has there been an inter-class 'composition (agreement)'? Or are we stuck in the eye of the storm awaiting further tumults? We offer our *tentative* conclusions below:

1. Are the uprisings working class in substance?

It seems to us that whilst the majority of protestors involved in 'Middle Eastern and North African' uprisings are working class, a sizeable minority are middle class, with a few rogue ruling class elements siding with the masses hither and thither. There is a continuum with one pole (Tunisia and Algeria) representing the most clear-sighted proletarian class demands and the other pole (Libya and Saudi Arabia) displaying the least class-conscious struggles. Egypt, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen would therefore fall somewhere in-between. Numbers alone do not tell the whole story, however. In no case has the working class obtained a *hegemonic* position or clearly linked the immediate (survival) needs of the class with the long-term (utopian) aspects of the struggle. We cannot even claim that the cumulative impact of the uprisings will roll back decades of capitalist assault on our living standards and freedoms, or that the strategic impact of the events is in anyway comparable to 1848. No section of the region's proletariat has reached the organisational brilliance of the Polish workers in 1980-81 or the unity of Iranian workers in 1978-79 or even the tactical imagination of the British winter of discontent in 1978 or the miners' strike of 1984-85. Yet the aggressive reaction that gained prominence both in the 'West' and the 'East' from the 1980s onward is today feeling decidedly nervy. This is partly thanks to the 'Great 2011 Middle Eastern and North African' uprisings.

2. Were the revolts connected to wider anti-capitalist trends?

Since there were groups of proletarians communicating directly with their trans-regional comrades, using a (mostly) working class discourse (and many similar slogans), we can safely assume there was a subjective linkage between those directly involved and 'outsiders'. Significantly, the achievements of the rioters/protestors/strikers seem to have provided a new generation of proletarians with the confidence to debate with 'outsiders' on an equal footing. Patronising 'Western leftists' still sermonising about their roadmap to 'socialism' were given short shrift. Now that at long last the religious fundamentalist demiurge has been exposed as (mostly) bluster and the collective 'inferiority complex' that many 'Easterners' laboured under purged, a healthier dialogue should ensue based on common proletarian interests. It also means we can look forward to a more polyphonic voice emerging from these regions with those traditionally suppressed (women, 'youth', gays, lesbians, and ethnic minorities) adding strength to the recognisable discourse of the manual (male) workers. The conscious tactical borrowings by 'western' anti-capitalists during recent Wall Street protests from their 'eastern' comrades is a healthy sign of synthesis.

Objectively the revolts were connected with the 2007-08 global capitalist crisis reaching the region with a time lag. Once there it infused with existing regional capitalist crises to create unprecedented contradictions within regimes already weakened by bouts of 'neo-liberal' reform. Exports to Europe have fallen drastically since 2008, as has workers' remittance from both Europe and Gulf States. As wages for the employed have also taken a nose-dive, social wage in the form of subsidised food and energy products have also dwindled. Both unemployment and inflation have added to the mix of misery. Gulf States may be able to shield their workers from some of the harshest affects of these changes, but most North African workers were abandoned by their rulers.

To the two regional cycles of revolt (North African and Middle Eastern), we should add the recent protests in Greece, Spain, Ireland and Britain. This is a crucial moment. The 'decoupled' class struggle of the region is once more explicitly integrated into the global contradictions of capitalism. Furthermore, the Islamic and to a lesser extent nationalist discourses available to counter-revolution have been (mostly) by-passed, without proletarians falling into the trap of leftist ideology. In this sense we agree with Roy Oliver who calls these revolts 'post-Islamist' and with Kevin Anderson who refers to them as 'post-authoritarian nationalist'. Thankfully they seem also to be post-Leninist and post-syndicalism.

There's a gullible side to the American people. They can be easily misled. Religion is the best device used to mislead them.

I think the lesson here is, it really doesn't matter where you are from, as long as we're all the same religion.

Michael Moore   TotallyLooksLike.com   Peter Griffin

3. What are the common characteristics of these revolts?

In most cases, proletarians (and petty-bourgeois affiliates) usurped bourgeois time and space, turning nodes of traffic into autonomous zones for protesting. Tahrir Square has a counterpart in most of the major urban centres involved. From there, debate and discussion ensued leading in some cases to 'work-committees', strikes and riots. However, even the riots seem *carnivalesque-* an important mode of maintaining proletarian control over the unfolding events, whilst breaking feudal and capitalist taboos.

Although the proletariat has not acquired *hegemony* (in the Gramscian sense of the term), it has been crucial to the overthrow of part of the ancient regime. Trade union leaders in Tunisia and Egypt have resigned or been consigned to oblivion paving the way for autonomous proletarian organising. Religious as well as internal and external capitalism(s) are being challenged, with varying degrees of success.

4. In what ways are they unique?

The Libyan case seems to us an oddity. Although Gaddafi's unpopularity amongst most Libyans (with the exception of his immediate tribal supporters) seems evident, the uprising seems to lack proletarian autonomy. The early militarisation of the struggle and the regime's fierce response allowed the social dimension to be marginalised and the proletarian voice drowned by both internal and external reactionaries in pursuit of capitalist agendas. The not-so-bright Sami Ramadani is on this occasion perfectly correct, "this early rush to arms was one

of the main factors preventing the uprising from gathering momentum across Libya, particularly in the capital Tripoli where more than a quarter of the population lives" (Ramadani, 2011). By militarising the conflict, reactionaries made the struggle reliant on outside 'support' and 'experts.' This manoeuvre provided US, British, French and Italian rulers the opportunity to use NATO as their calling card. Whilst we cannot be certain on this, there seems to be a disproportionately high number of scumbags (ex-regime stalwarts, ex-military butchers, former trained Al-Qaida wankers) amongst the 'rebels' which gives pause for concern.

Let us be clear. We are not fetishizing this thing idiots hold up as 'peace.' As Constance says in *King John*, "War! War! No peace! Peace is to me a war." One's standpoint shapes whether one sees 'war' or 'peace' and if you are blessed (as most proletarians are) with a shifting standpoint, then you see war and peace as two sides of bourgeois domination. But it is abundantly clear maintaining the social dimension of anti-capitalist struggle for as long as we can is to our advantage. No doubt this social dimension will be constituted by the political, economic, cultural, sexual *and* the military aspects of overcoming capitalism. But if at some stage we are forced to (momentarily) privilege the military dimension, the deed must be done under the leadership of the proletariat, and not nationalist or religious wankers!

5. How will things pan out after the momentous events of 2011?

A trick question only of use to imbeciles, insurance companies, security experts and middle class academics! Our task is not to *explain* capitalism or to predict its future. Our task is to understand the class struggle (a wider, deeper, more complex set of dynamics than capitalism). Crucially we desire to understand not as an exercise in 'consciousness-raising' or as a lame attempt to 'circulate interesting material' but as a step on the path toward escalating the social struggle. The concrete problem for us becomes uniting the protests across Greece, Europe, USA, with 'the Middle East' and 'Africa'.

Melancholic Troglodytes
Written somewhere in the Kingdom of Yorkshire on 15th October 2011

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By way of a postscript

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: Ok, *now* do you understand the class struggle? If you have read this book carefully, you should by now possess a mind keener than reactionary anti-working class wankers like Lenin, Trotsky, Mao Zedong, Mikhail Bakunin, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Alex Callinicos, John Rees, Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, Giovanni Arrighi, Slavoj Žižek, Samir Amin and Edward Said? Not too hard, was it? And you feel better for it, don't you? Perhaps even a little superior? Good! Glad we could be of assistance.

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: As the recently deceased post-Stalinist-Stalinist-turned-neo-liberal Fred Halliday made clear, 'Middle East' and 'Africa' are geo-political constructs. Various conceptual tools could be used to put them under erasure. However, if we choose them as our site of analysis, then we must foreground both the many commonalities they share with the rest of the world and the few elements that set them apart. This is what *Melancholic Troglodytes* have attempted in the preceding pages. And this is precisely what the 'masses' have practically demonstrated in their recent social struggles. Thanks to our genius, and yes, ok, fair enough, thanks also to the gains of the Middle Eastern/African proletariat, the entire political landscape has been transformed. Both capitalism and religion have taken a battering. Now things are gonna get interesting.

Comrade Not-so-brights & People of the Ugliness: If you enjoyed this book, you will love our next book which focuses entirely on the class struggle in Iran (due out in 2012, hopefully just two-weeks before the monkey-mullahs have been overthrown, so that we can turn around and say: TOLD YOU SO, UNCLE - FUCKERS!!! THE CLASS STRUGGLE IS BACK!!).

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(By way of an) Index

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Have recent events in the 'Middle East and North Africa' confused your pretty little brains? Do you want to understand the class struggle better? Fear not, dear reader, for help is now at hand. This is the first edition of a planned trilogy of texts by *Melancholic Troglodytes* aiming to bring revolutionary clarity to tired minds. The current volume contains topics both familiar and obscure:

- Iraq war and class struggle
- A proletarian critique of the *Nation of Islam*
- Conflict between Syria and Lebanon
- Afghanistan and the problems of capitalism
- Water commodification and the social struggle
- Similarities between Palestinians and Native Americans
- The Zanj slaves' rebellion
- The Carmathians of Bahrain

Mommy, Fatman, they're ... commie-copulating!
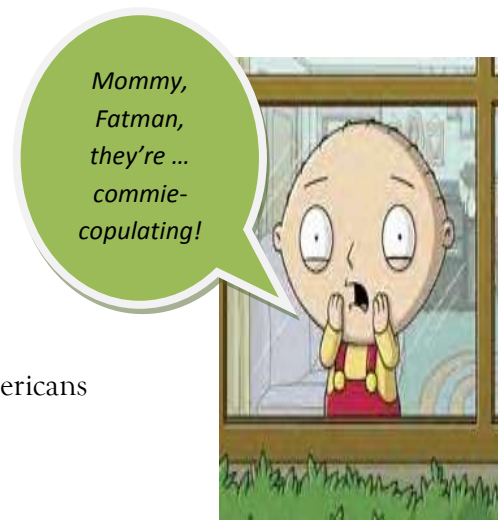
Melancholic Troglodytes is a collective of trans-cultural proletarians, involved in catering, education and painting & decorating industries (this may explain our predilection for **kitsch**)! We came to accept our inability to change the world a long time ago. Our literature is read by few and understood by fewer still. Nowadays we perform our 'revolutionary role' without much conviction. But we do have a *bucket-list* (a list of things we plan to do before kicking the bucket). The bucket-list keeps us going! You may contact us at: meltrogs-books@hotmail.com