On the Ruins of Civilizations:

The Regimes of Terror

By

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I. Boredom and Terror

When the breakup of the Republic of Yugoslavia began to unfold in 1991 under democidal circumstances and when Rwanda turned in 1994 into a massive ‘killing field’ Francis Fukuyama’s initially uplifting predictions about an “end of history” (summer 1989) after the disintegration of the state socialist formation in Eastern Europe lost their symbolic appeal. Samuel Huntington’s tentative suggestion (“The Clash of Civilizations?” and “If not Civilizations, what?” 1993) that the world was entering a stage of major confrontations between armed civilizations became immediately accepted by Western media, pundits of all persuasions and politicians as the new interpretive slogan for conflicts they didn’t understand. The growing tensions with Islamic societies like Iran and societies with Islamic majorities in the Middle East, the never-ending conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the emerging concerns about Muslim minorities in European countries contributed to the overall acceptance of Huntington’s explanatory frame. Huntington’s essay and, later, book title (1995) became the handy explanation for everything that was wrong with the ‘Others’. These ‘Others’ were in the 1990s mostly connected with Islam but became in the beginning 21st century joined by the Chinese, which were threatening to take over the center position in the world economic system that the U.S. had occupied since the end of World War II.

How tempting but nevertheless misleading the use of Huntington’s civilizational framework is can be illustrated with the case of the young Muslim man, Mohammed Bouyeri, who openly shot and killed the prominent Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh on November 2, 2004 in a street in Amsterdam. Bouyeri murdered van Gogh because of a film (Submission) he had made with the Somali born Dutch politician, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The movie had been shown on Dutch television and highlighted Ali’s perspective on the abuse of women in strict Islamic societies. The “open letter” that he had stuck with a small knife to the body of van Gogh was actually addressed to Hirsi Ali. She had become a prominent figure in the Netherlands. Ian Buruma, who has written a book about the killing of van Gogh, captures her place in Dutch society at that time well when he writes:
“A delicate African beauty, Hirsi Ali had caught the public imagination by the eloquence and conviction of her public warnings against a religion which had already a sinister reputation. Here was a Muslim, or ex-Muslim, from Africa, telling Europeans that Islam was a serious threat.”¹ She wrote her own story with her autobiography, Infidel, and sums up the film project with van Gogh: “We called it Submission, Part 1. I intended one day to make Part 2. …Part 1 was about defiance – about Muslim women who shift from total submission to God to a dialogue with their deity. They pray, but instead of casting down their eyes, these women look up to Allah, with the words of the Quran tattooed on their skin. They tell Him honestly that if submission to Him brings them so much misery, and He remains silent, they may stop submitting.”²

Hirsi Ali takes Bouyeri’s justification for his action as a believing Muslim for granted, though her indictment of Islam lists primarily patriarchal prejudices against gender equality. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with pointing out patriarchy as a major feature of Islamic political and social teaching. However, it doesn’t exhaust Islam since patriarchy is not particularly Islamic; and, in addition, there is nothing wrong attacking the inhumane codes of punishment for female non-compliance with their decreed submission. However, the Catholic Church is at its organizational, priestly and theological core patriarchal and demands of women to accept an equally submissive station by denying them the possibility of becoming priests and administering the holy sacraments. In this respect, there is no difference between Islamic and Catholic teaching, even if Catholics have become used to different means of enforcing the teaching of female submission to a code that is anchored in an equally obsolete philosophical anthropology.

These patriarchal prejudices against gender equality are culture bound and not specifically connected with religion. Religions may carry these prejudices with them from their origins in specific civilizational contexts. Yet, looking at Bouyeri’s case, neither culture nor religion is the predominant force that helped to shape his self, even if it may appear that way. He comes across as the true believer and demonstrated that with amazing arrogance at his trial as Buruma describes it: “He explained to the court that he was ‘obligated to cut off the heads of all those who insult Allah and his prophet’ by the same divine law that didn’t allow him ‘to live in this country, or in any country where
free speech is allowed.’ Alas, there was no country where people like him could seek refuge, so he had had no choice but to live in the Netherlands. To the policemen who arrested him, he said that he had shot at them ‘fully intending to kill them, and to be killed.’ This statement unleashed an extraordinary outburst of emotion among the policemen. Tears ran down their cheeks as they fell into each other’s arms. Heads were stroked and backs patted. They were traumatized, so it was reported, kept awake by nightmares, and had frequent fits of crying. The idea of a suicidal killer in the middle of Amsterdam was just too much to bear.” This fear of the threatening ‘Other’ in the middle of European Amsterdam became reinforced by the end of Bouyeri’s speech: “You can send all your psychologists and all your psychiatrists, and all your experts, but I’m telling you, you will never understand. You cannot understand. And I’m telling you, if I had the chance to be freed and the chance to repeat what I did on the second of November, wallahi (by Allah) I’m telling you, I would do exactly the same.” Buruma adds the final statement that the “judge had no choice but to sentence Mohammed Bouyeri to a lifetime in prison”.3

Buruma asks an obvious question: “Why did a young man, who was neither poor nor oppressed, who had received a decent education, a man who had never trouble making friends, who enjoyed smoking dope and drinking beer, why would such a man turn into a holy warrior whose only wish was to kill, and perhaps more mysteriously, to die? It was the same question people asked after the bombings in the London underground, set off by similar young men, who played cricket, had girlfriends, went to the pub. All we know is that they murdered in the name of Allah and his prophet. Quite why they did it is harder to explain.”4 It his hard to explain because Bouyeri, contrary to his expressive allegiance to Allah, hardly made an appearance at a mosque while he was at school5 and used without any reservations all the benefits of Dutch political freedom and the welfare state6 for which he had, as becomes clear in his contorted rhetoric, nothing but contempt. Buruma makes the point that Bouyeri is defined by his religious zeal and not the culture of his Moroccan background.

I think that both cultures are of marginal importance for the creation of Bouyeri’s self. He lives in a vacuum of meaning and can, like so many other people without qualities in this and the century before, be picked up by any movement or cause that
promises them some semblance of spiritual substance to fill the emptiness of their existence. To Bouyeri the killing of Theo van Gogh was meaning created through violence. The act of killing transforms a person who thinks of himself as nobody into somebody. Most suicide bombers are taught that they will become immortalized or at least remembered by blowing up other people. The teachers of this mode of righteous thinking believe in the remaking of the world through the destruction of a contemporary order that is perceived as being corrupt. 7

This terminal therapy of creative destruction is not the privilege of people who think of themselves as being religious. To be sure, the killer crews of the September/11, 2001 planes claimed like Bouyeri to be the saviors of Islam or whatever they thought was covered by that religion. Their social background didn’t single them out as being oppressed either in their native societies or in the countries where they were getting a university education. They all resembled in their social make-up the not particularly religious members of the West German Baader-Meinhoff group, which has been brilliantly portrayed in the German movie The Baader-Meinhoff Complex (2008). What comes across in this group portrait of terrorists is the utter disconnectedness with major issues in German society at that time. The visit of the Shah of Persia in June 1967 to West Berlin and the repressive behavior of Persian security personnel and supportive German police, resulting in the death of one student, provided the only direct contact with German reality. All the other issues that they began to embrace over the next 25 years had nothing to do with their experiential environment or were the results of their own violent and murderous behavior. The larger issues were the pretexts for confrontations with German power that created the excitement of being engaged in the transformation of reality. In terms of the existential quality of these German political engagements, they were as abstract and empty as those of Bouyeri and the September/11 highjackers.

The best analysis for the mindset of these German, Moroccan and Middle Eastern agents of terror one finds in Blaise Pascal’s Pensées when he writes in the 1650s about boredom (ennui): “Man finds nothing so intolerable as to be in a state of complete rest, without passions, without occupation, without diversion, without effort. Then he faces the nullity, loneliness, inadequacy, dependence, helplessness, emptiness. And at once there
II. The Terror of Revolutions

The terror phase of the French Revolution from July 1793 to July 1794 is well documented and doesn’t need further elaboration. Still, this bloody interlude in the most prominent of the modern revolutions overshadowed French history and the memory of the Revolution for the next two hundred years. Hegel negatively immortalized this period in his lectures on Rechtsphilosophie when he said in 1820 (in # 5 of his introduction):

“… it is only one side of the will which is described, namely this unrestricted possibility of abstraction from every determinate state of mind which I may find in myself or which I may set up in myself, my flight from every content as from a restriction. When the will’s self-determination consists in this alone, or when representative thinking regards this side by itself as freedom and clings fast to it, then we have negative freedom, or freedom as the Understanding conceives it. This is the freedom of the void which rises to a passion and takes shape in the world; while still remaining theoretical, it takes shape in religion as Hindu fanaticism of pure contemplation, but when it turns to actual practice, it takes shape in religion and politics alike as the fanaticism of destruction – the destruction of the whole subsisting social order – as the elimination of individuals who are objects of suspicion to any social order, and the annihilation of any organization which tries to arise anew from the ruins. Only in destroying something does this negative will possess the feeling of itself existent. Of course it imagines that it is willing some positive state of affairs, such as universal equality or universal religious life, but in fact it does not will that this shall be positively actualized, and for this reason: such actuality leads at once to some sort of order, to a particularization of organization and individuals alike; while it is precisely out of the annihilation of particularity and objective characterization that the self-consciousness of this negative freedom proceeds. Consequently, what negative
freedom intends to will can never be anything in itself but an abstract idea, and giving
effect to this idea can only be the fury of destruction.”

Hegel wasn’t interested in the American Revolution and the new political
formation that had come into historical being with the Declaration of Independence in
1776 and the ratification of the Constitution in 1789. Hegel reflects the general European
dismissal of America that Thomas Jefferson tried to refute in his Notes on the State of
Virginia (1785) and Alexander Hamilton in essay XI of the Federalist Papers (1788).
Jefferson encountered the European dismissal of the New World when he was
Ambassador of the Confederation at the French Court in Paris and tried to counter the
pervasive views of American inferiority in all realms of being, from nature to culture and
politics. Hamilton was resentful of the European rhetoric but nevertheless reproduced the
American inferiority complex when he wrote: “The world may politically, as well as
geographically, be divided in four parts, each having a distinct set of interests. Unhappily
for the other three, Europe, by her arms and by her negotiations, by force and by fraud,
has in different degrees extended her dominion over them all. Africa, Asia, and America
have successively felt her domination. The superiority she has long maintained has
tempted her to plume herself as the mistress of the world, and to consider the rest of
mankind for her benefit.” He then expressed a sense of American self-assertion when he
continued: “It belongs to us to vindicate the honor of the human race, and to teach that
assuming brother moderation. Union will enable us to do it. Disunion will add another
victim to his triumphs. Let Americans disdain to be the instruments of European
greatness! Let the thirteen States, bound together in a strict and indissoluble Union,
concur in erecting one great American system superior to the control of all transatlantic
force of influence and able to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and the
new world!”

Hegel was not impressed, not even in 1820 when he gave his lectures at the
University in Berlin. He generously conceded he wouldn’t deny the New World “…the
honour of also having risen from the sea at the time of the world’s creation (or however
we wish to describe it).” But he wasn’t impressed by the information about pre-
Columbian cultures nor the domesticated animals of his time: “And although America
has huge herds of cattle, European beef is still regarded as a delicacy.” His views of the
new political culture were not characterized by knowledge or great interest: “As to the politics of North America, the universal purpose of the state is not yet firmly established, and there is as yet no need for a closely knit alliance; for a real state and real government only arise when class distinctions are already present, when wealth and poverty are far advanced, and when a situation has arisen in which a large number of people can no longer satisfy their needs in the way to which they have been accustomed. But America has a long way to go before it experiences tensions of this kind; for the outlet of colonization is fully adequate and permanently open, and masses of people are constantly streaming into the plains of the Mississippi. By this means, the principal source of discontent has been removed, and the continued existence of the present state of civil society is guaranteed.” Whatever misperceptions of the U.S. in the 1820s may show in this topographical description, Hegel was absolutely clear about the political formation: “…North America cannot yet be regarded as a fully developed and mature state, but merely as one which is still in the process of becoming; it has not yet progressed far enough to feel the need for a monarchy.”

Hegel’s imagined America at the beginning of the 19th century may look strange if juxtaposed with the actual constitutional process of the Republic at that time. Yet the American Left at the end of that same century was equally blinded by a perspective that was formed by European theoretical anticipations and became regularly affirmed at radical socialist and anarchist meetings by the singing of the *Marseillaise*. They were all, however, unwilling to recognize the genuine American beginning that had provided the “dregs of European society”, as Hegel called the immigrants, with a *tabula rasa* on which to establish a new society. This beginning was anchored as in all other societies in history in an economy of terror and violence.

All American societies are built on the ruins of pre-Columbian civilizations, the mass graves of natives who became the victims of European germs and guns, and the exploitation of the labor of enslaved Africans. This original record of terror and violence is absent from most accounts of American history, though Las Casas had already provided in 1552 with his “Brief Account” of *The Devastation of the Indies* a chilling report that could have set the tone for the coverage in the following centuries. The Spanish authorities, however, made sure that Las Casas’ perspective and similar critical
accounts from that century were banished from public viewing until the 19th century. This censure of the reporting about the destruction of a world and its people was certainly not lifted by the other European powers that were fighting for hegemonic positions in the Americas. Whatever knowledge had slipped through the controlling censure was used by, for example, the English who moved across the Atlantic to prepare themselves for the conquest of wilderness and the wars against the obvious savages which either had to accept European civilization or death. All of the European powers that took possession of parts of the newly discovered Western hemisphere participated in the macro-criminal economy of violence.

The quality of this violence is not different from the genocidal phenomena in the 20th century, though the intellectual coverage of the destruction of the pre-Columbian world is not allowed to be compared with the Holocaust. The German expression Zivilisationsbruch (breach of civilization) is reserved by the intellectuals who coined and frequently use it for the German mega-crime against Jews because it targeted European victims which belonged to the same civilizational environment. As savages dwelling in nature, Indians had no civilization and could therefore not become physically and culturally destroyed by a Zivilisationsbruch. The arrogance of European power becomes perpetuated by the arrogance of European consciousness. When one reads Las Casas one finds oneself transported into the 1940s when German Einsatzgruppen marched through Poland and the Soviet Union. This is Las Casas in 1552: “And the Christians, with their horses and swords and pikes began to carry out massacres and strange cruelties against them. They attacked the towns and spared neither the children nor the aged nor pregnant women nor women in childbed, not only stabbing them and dismembering them but cutting them to pieces as if dealing with sheep in a slaughterhouse. They laid bets as to who, with one stroke of the sword, could split a man in two or could cut off his head or spill out his entrails with a single stroke of the pike. They took infants from their mothers’ breasts, snatching by the legs and pitching them headfirst against the crags or snatched them by the arms and threw them into the rivers, roaring with laughter and saying as the babies fell into the water, ‘Boil there, you offspring of the devil!’ Other infants they put to the sword along with their mothers and anyone else who happened to be nearby. They made some low wide gallows on which the hanged victim’s feet almost
touched the ground, stringing up their victims in lots of thirteen, in memory of Our Redeemer and his twelve Apostles, then set burning wood at their feet and thus burned them alive. …They usually dealt with the chieftains and nobles in the following way: they made a grid of rods which they placed on forged sticks, then lashed the victims to the grid and lighted a smoldering fire underneath, so that little by little, as those captives screamed in despair and torment, their souls would leave them.” If by chance some of the Indians would succeed in fleeing, the Spanish would pursue them with dogs which would tear them apart and devour them, and if occasionally Indians would actually kill a Spaniard, the Spaniards, Las Casas writes, “made a rule among themselves that for every Christian slain by the Indians, they would slay a hundred Indians.”

At one point Las Casas comes to a summary of the violence and the American translator captures the equivalence of the violence, even if Las Casas didn’t use the expression that one finds now in the printed English language text: “This butchery lasted for close to seven years, from the year twenty-four to the year thirty or thirty-one. You can judge what would be the number of victims that were swallowed up in the holocaust.”

The English attitude was not as openly terroristic but was informed by the same mentality of civilizational non-recognition and dismissal. Cotton Mather, a member of a prominent preacher family in Boston, published a history of New England in 1702 from the perspective of victorious Christianity. His *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England, From Its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1693 in Seven Books* is full of the language of the genocidal removal of Indians that permeates the American narratives of meaning from the *Mayflower* landing in 1620 to the *Wounded Knee* massacre in 1890. The lack of immunity against the germs and diseases the English had brought to the American shores becomes interpreted by him as part of divine punishment for the Indian refusal to accept Christianity: “Those infidels… replied, God could not kill them; which blasphemous mistake was confuted by an horrible and unusual plague, whereby they were consumed in such vast multitude, that our first planters found the land almost covered with their unburied carcases; and they that were left alive, were smitten into awful and humble regards of the English…” Divine providence helped the Puritans also with small pox against the feared enemies: “But this fear was wonderfully prevented, not only by
intestine wars happening then to fall out among those barbarians, but chiefly by the small
pox, which proved a great plague unto them, and particularly to one of the Princes in the
Massachusetts-Bay, who yet seemed hopefully to be christianized before he dyed. This
distemper getting in, I know not how, among them, swept them away with a most
prodigious desolation, insomuch that although the English gave them all the assistance of
humanity in their calamities, yet there was, it may be, not one in ten among them left
alive; of those few who lived, many also fled from the infection, leaving the country a
meer Golgotha of unburied carcases…”

The incompatibility of the American Republic with Indians becomes articulated
by George Washington before he becomes President. In a letter he wrote in 1783 he
clarified his position: “I am clear in my opinion, that policy and oeconomy point very
strongly to the expediency of being upon good terms with the Indians, and the propriety
of purchasing their Lands in preference to attempting to drive them by force of arms out
of their Country; which as we have already experienced is like driving the Wild Beasts of
the Forest which will return as soon as the pursuit is at an end and fall perhaps on those
that are left there; when the gradual extension of our Settlements will as certainly cause
the Savage as the Wolf to retire; both being beasts of prey tho’ they differ in shape. In a
word there is nothing to be obtained by an Indian War but the Soil they live on and this
can be had by purchase at less expense, and without bloodshed, and those distresses
which helpless Women and Children are made partakers of in all disputes with
them…..”

The rhetoric of American *Manifest Destiny* is in the making when Indians
become cast as “aggressors” since they resist accepting their guaranteed rights being
vacated because “the faith of the United States stands pledged to grant portions of the
uncultivated lands as a bounty to their army” and because “it is become necessary, by the
increase of the domestic population and emigration from abroad, to make speedy
provision for extending the settlement of the territories of the United States…”

Chief Justice John Marshall spelled out the justification for the take-over of the continent in the
Supreme Court Decision *Johnson vs. McIntosh* (1823) when he wrote: “But the tribes of
Indians inhabiting this country were fierce savages, whose occupation was war, and
whose subsistence was drawn chiefly from the forest. To leave them in possession of
their country, was to leave the country a wilderness; to govern them as a distinct people,
was impossible, because they were as brave and as high spirited as they were fierce, and were ready to repel by arms every attempt on their independence. What was the inevitable consequence of this state of things? The Europeans were under the necessity either of abandoning the country, and relinquishing their pompous claims to it, or of enforcing those claims by the sword, and by the adoption of principles adapted to the condition of a people with whom it was impossible to mix, and who could not be governed as a distinct society, or of remaining in their neighborhood, and exposing themselves and their families to the perpetual hazard of being massacred.”

The acceptance of this civilizational incompatibility principle comes to a culminating conclusion two years after Wounded Knee when Richard Pratt, who was the superintendent of an industrial training school for Indian students from 1879 to 1904 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, expressed the new philosophy: “…A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.”

The genocidal spirit of the founding that manifests itself in the removal strategy toward Indians becomes reinforced by the acceptance of the race-based institution of slavery. The institution of slavery in the ancient world was multi-ethnic. Since the Spanish and Portuguese began in 1519 to replenish the demographic vacuum with Africans, slavery in the Western world became color-coded. The acceptance of this race-based form of slavery by the Founders became, next to Indian removal, the curse that overshadowed from 1789 to 2008 (the election of the first Black President), the symbolic record of the Republic. The mythical narratives of self-interpretation paid no attention to this dual evil. Neither Eric Voegelin nor Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy emphasizes this legacy of the Founding. Voegelin doesn’t touch the subject at all and Rosenstock-Huessy beautifies an ugly reality when he writes: “All the races of the world populated America under the protection of due process of law granted by the Fathers of the Constitution, and upheld by the Spirit vested in their representatives.”

The Canadian historian Michael Fellman gets it right when he opens his book on terrorism in America with the observation: “Americans want their creation legends to be
beautiful and uncontaminated – ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’, the ‘city upon a hill’. They do not want to view the United States as grounded in organized political violence against alien ‘others’ – people whose social and religious practices may not fit the white Christian norms – and rarely acknowledge the lengths to which individuals and government alike have been willing to go in order to repress such peoples when they appeared to be threatening. Americans prefer to see terrorism as external to the ‘American way’, as exceptional.”

Thomas Jefferson who drafted the Declaration of Independence (1776) with the memorable phrase about “truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” suggested in one of the two chapters of his book Notes on the State of Virginia (1785) that discussed the then prevailing notions on race with regard to American slaves a suspicion: “I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications.” In Paris two years later, Jefferson started a marriage like relationship with a young slave of his, Sally Hemings. Hemings was the daughter of Jefferson’s father-in-law with Sally’s slave mother -- which therefore makes Hemings Jefferson’s late wife’s half-sister. Jefferson demonstrates with his ‘suspicion’ and his existential decision to take Sally as a concubine and have children with her the honest dishonesty of the founding rhetoric. The author of the Declaration to whose language Abraham Lincoln pays homage in his Gettysburg Address in 1863 in order to prepare for the re-visioning of the meaning of the Republic while the war is still going on cannot bring himself to recognize that his life with Sally falsifies his intellectual ‘suspicion’ about Africans belonging to a different species. This honest dishonesty of Jefferson kept the ideological discourse alive that Africans may after all belong to a pre-Adamic creation that preceded the beginning of humanity which is symbolized in the narrative of the book Genesis. This pre-Adamic discourse has been feeding Eurocentric racism since the 16th and 17th century when Europeans had to make sense of the phenotypical variety of humanity and refused to submit to the mono-regional origin that was especially defended by the Catholic Church. Jefferson’s ‘suspicion’ is in line with the unwillingness of Enlightenment
intellectuals like Voltaire, to accept a common origin of humanity that included Africans and other non-European people.

Jefferson’s ‘suspicion’ may have been shared by the rest of the Founders even if they did not express these views about a separate origin. The U.S. Supreme Court, however, did exactly interpret the mind of the Founders in the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) decision with the question “Can a negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, guarantied by that instrument to the citizen?” Their answer was unequivocal: “We think they are not, and that they are not included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them.”

Four years after this decision the Civil War broke out that cost the life of 620,000 Americans, more than 30,000 black soldiers among them. The Machiavellian bargain of the Founding, namely to continue slavery as the basis of the political economy and thereby violating the symbolic promise of the *Declaration* with the enslavement of 18% of the people in the Republic extracted a heavy price in lives and in the postponement of the realization of the vision that Lincoln enunciated in the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural in 1865, a few weeks before his assassination. The price for the Machiavellian bargain was paid for by Blacks not only through their existence under slavery but also by the violence of the semi-genocidal Jim Crow regime that emerged in the South after the withdrawal of the Federal troops in 1877. The enforcement of White supremacy after the defeat of the slavery regime was not only accomplished by the disenfranchisement of black male citizens in the South. The racial cleansing of communities, the introduction of forced labor camps as slavery by another name and the raw terror of the lynching of close to 5,000 black people under the open participation of white communities achieved, without the establishment of a totalitarian regime,
comparable results of terror. These cleansing events were not limited, as Jaspin makes clear, to the South.

III. The Regimes of Terror

The regimes of terror that came into historical being in the 20th century and turned it into the most murderous century in history were not manifestations of the civilizations in whose geographical range they emerged. Apart from the fact that these civilizations were already dead or slowly withering away, the manipulative intentions of the ideological elites of the regimes of terror were quite obvious. As much as they tried to invoke connections with meaning narratives that didn’t belong to their own imaginaries, the purpose of locating the specific regime’s legitimacy on a different map became clear. Huntington’s claim that the civilizations, which he discussed in his two essays and the book, were positioning themselves for potential violent confrontations was obviously not supported by the evidence that the regimes of terror had left behind.

The regimes of terror that have given the 20th century its murderous reputation came into being under circumstances that Carl Schmitt called in his famous essay from 1932, *The Concept of the Political*, the “state of exemption”. This exceptional condition indicates that the ordinary circumstances of a transfer of power within a constitutional order have been suspended and enabled revolutionary elites to take advantage of the situation. The suspension may have been facilitated by a war as happened in the cases of Russia (1917), China (1949) and Cambodia (1975) or been caused by protracted political crises as in Italy (1922) and Germany (1933), to name a few of the most prominent cases. Although all five societies had long histories that were known to the world and connected them with larger civilizational contexts in Europe and Asia, these histories do not explain the emergence of the regimes, though some historians and social scientists often engage in this type of cultural reductionism. The histories are partly relevant for the understanding of some elements of the regimes, but not for the emergence of the regimes themselves. My argument concerning the regimes of terror is that neither the
civilizational nor the national histories are essential for their understanding. The regimes of terror that emerge as the result of revolutionary conditions are phenomena *sui generis* and should be treated as a political class of their own.

In the case of Italian Fascism, for example, Benito Mussolini added the historical façade of the Roman Empire to the nationalist and socialist rhetoric when Italy invaded Libya in 1923. His Fascist imaginary didn’t suffice to justify the invasion. The mimetic appeal to the *Imperium Romanum* became even more pronounced in time and culminated in the attack on Ethiopia in 1935. Between 350,000 and 760,000 Ethiopians lost their lives in this experiment of imperial aggrandizement. Mussolini’s Roman vision for Fascist Italy had cost already 100,000 Libyans their lives in the 1920s. His megalomania culminated in the understanding that he would become remembered as the conqueror of Ethiopia. The arbitrariness of his Roman identity experiment revealed itself when Mussolini surrendered in the late 1930s completely to the programmatic agenda of Nazi Germany.

Adolf Hitler and his ideological cohorts exploited all kinds of civilizational connections in order to repackage and cover up the core project of the Nazi imaginary, namely to literally purify the German body politic and to “cleanse” it of all alien elements, especially the Jews. The Nazis invented ancient Aryan relationships and borrowed Asian symbols like the Buddhist Swastika and Hindu Mandala (and combined them in the Nazi flag) in order to enhance the Indo-Germanic relations. Some Indians fell for this extravagant cultural genealogy and volunteered for the SS. Prominent Indian nationalists exploited the ideological obsession by Hitler, Himmler and other members of the Nazi elite in their resistance against the British during WWII (e.g., Chandra Bose and Radhabinod Pal). The Nazis cultivated Germanic communal rituals and Icelandic Sagas to emphasize indigeneity. They promoted archaic Germanic theatre and dance and Richard Wagner’s operas. They developed, as Peter Cohen has shown in his remarkable documentary, *The Architecture of Doom* (1989), an aesthetics of terror that ran the whole civilizational gamut from scientists indulging in Eugenics through cityscapes, art and movies to the distortion of Greek philosophy. They raided museums and art galleries in Nazi occupied Europe and used the cultural loot to enlarge the art collections in museums or to beautify the homes of members of the Nazi elite in Germany. Hitler’s plans for the
rebuilding of Berlin as “Germania” was driven by the idea of transcending Greek and Roman architecture in a grandiose way. This eclectic assemblage of cultural features that once carried symbolic meaning represents in its arbitrariness the mentality of people who have no culture but find it necessary to show that they recognize its importance. Culture is for them nothing but an instrument of power.

This instrumentalization of culture by the Fascists becomes reproduced by the regimes on the Left. Lenin who presided over a massive exodus of intellectuals in the early years of the Revolution was succeeded by Stalin who initially continued the campaign of expulsion before resorting to arrests, Gulag imprisonment and large scale killings. During World War II he discovered the value of Russian history for the defense of the Fatherland against the Nazi invaders in the “Great Patriotic War” and demanded that the movie director Eisenstein create grand historical movie epics like the one on Ivan the Terrible. Russian history became a tool of power. The Orthodox Russian Church was initially treated like the Catholic Church in the French Revolution. Churches and monasteries were closed, property confiscated, theological instruction for priests controlled and restricted. During the War the usefulness of the Russian Church was recognized, though only in a very limited way freed of the controls by the regime.

Mao’s use of Chinese culture was even more power centered. He looked to the Ch’in Emperor and his unification of the Warring States in 221 BCE as a model for destructive politics. He boasted frequently that the Communists had outdone the Ch’in dynasty. At the VIII Congress of the Communist Party of China in May 1958 he said: “What does the first Emperor of Ch’in mean anyway? He buried only 460 Confucian sages alive, we buried 46,000. Have we not, during the ‘Repression of Reaction’ period, made some counterrevolutionary intellectuals a head shorter? … We have surpassed the first Emperor of Ch’in hundred times. If you insult us as first Emperor of Ch’in, as dictator, we completely admit it but you haven’t emphasized that enough.”36 Nothing in this speech indicates anything but the cynicism of power that characterizes Mao’s career as a revolutionary from beginning to end. All the cultural cleansing campaigns, up to the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 and the suicide of 100,000 intellectuals in the first months of that particular campaign, affirm Mao’s total disregard for the traditional dimension of Chinese civilization. Revolutionary China buried the remnants of Chinese
culture that had survived the 1911 Revolution, the political struggles in the 1920s and 1930s, Civil War, Japanese occupation and finally the Revolution of 1949. Nothing illustrates the contrast between traditional China and Mao’s China more than the architectural functionalism of the Great Hall of the People on one side of Tiananmen Square and the elaborate aesthetics of the imperial Forbidden City on the other side. Huntington’s Chinese civilization does not sustain contemporary China.

If Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge regime was originally inspired by the huge temple structures of medieval Angkor Wat and wanted to reconnect with that past, the autogenocidal policies of the regime seemed to accomplish just the opposite. Wiping out the culture of learning in all its contemporary manifestations, these regime policies pointed in the direction of all the other killing regimes of the 20th century. Pol Pot’s Cambodia was in that respect one of the worst examples of macro-criminal terror and cultural destruction. Killing the intellectual elite of Cambodia meant to destroy civilizational memory.

Contrary to social scientists and historians, who attempt to find all kind of causal connections between the histories of the five mentioned societies and the regimes of terror that they produced in the 20th century, I have problems with this approach to the comprehension of macro-criminal politics in the 20th century. For me, these five terror scenarios have one thing in common, namely that in all five societies a political regime comes to power that has the political will to carry out projects of intentional social transformation on a scale unheard of and never initiated in those societies before.

Germany may be the best known example for this type of argumentation. The macro-violence of the Jewish Holocaust and other killing theaters, it seems, can only be explained for most by arguments like the one Liah Greenfeld makes: “In combination with the exaltation of violence and death, an equally fundamental element of German nationalism, racial anti-Semitism paved the way to the Holocaust. The possibility of the Final Solution was inherent in German national consciousness. While not inevitable, it was no accident and no aberration of German history; it was not a natural response to a historically immediate structural situation, and, given an identical situation, could not have happened elsewhere. A madman like Hitler was needed to hold a match, and certain immediate structural conditions were necessary to stimulate him and his audience, but the
combination of racism, identification of a particular race as the incarnation of evil, and glorification of violence and brutality was highly combustible, and only Germany could produce Hitler and give this form to the response to structural conditions. Germany was ready for the Holocaust from the moment German national identity existed.”\textsuperscript{37} I do not want to discuss the historical details of her reductionist argumentation but to simply point out that for her, the Holocaust seems to belong in the DNA of German culture. It could have happened only in Germany because only people who were exposed to German culture were able of perpetrating this type of event. The self-fulfilling prophesy that inheres this reasoning supports certainly the uniqueness argument concerning the Holocaust but it does nothing to help us understand the Holocaust itself or the genocidal terror that followed after WW II in Asia, Africa or Europe. The fallacy of her cultural reductionism becomes obvious when Germans weren’t any longer the perpetrators and Jews the victims.

Culturally reductionist arguments of this kind are almost the norm in the literature on the Holocaust. But this type of reasoning can be found also in the discussion of other regimes of terror. In a less biased language than Greenfeld uses, the anthropologist Alexander Hinton attempts to make us understand the Pol Pot regime of terror in terms of Cambodian culture when he writes: “Their conviction that they had discovered the key to ending oppression and revitalizing Cambodian society seems to have given Pol Pot and his associates a sense of omnipotence and grandeur… Like Buddhists who had achieved enlightenment, they had attained secret knowledge that would transform Cambodia and enable its inhabitants to reach a higher state of being. In fact, the Khmer Rouge ideology often played upon the theme of enlightenment when it depicted Angkar using metaphors of clairvoyance and omniscience. Yet another strand in this sense of grandeur was the French reconstruction of Cambodian history, which provided a narrative of decline from the magnificence of the Angkorean era, when Khmer kings built impressive stone monuments and were a dominant military presence in the region, to the contemporary period, when Cambodia had become a weak country dominated by others. Driven by feeling of inferiority and inflation about what was possible, the Khmer Rouge proclaimed that their revolutionary society would surpass even Angkor in greatness, moving more rapidly and successfully toward a communist utopia than had any other communist
Hinton goes so far to parallel Buddhist and Khmer Rouge thinking when he writes: “One could certainly push the arguments further, contending that the Khmer Rouge attempted to assume the monk’s traditional role as moral instructor … and that the DK regime’s glorification of asceticism, detachment, the elimination of attachment and desire, renunciation …, and purity paralleled prominent Buddhist themes that were geared helping a person attain greater mindfulness. For the Khmer Rouge, the construction of such traits was essential to building a proper revolutionary consciousness – just as monks sought to cultivate a mindfulness that would enable them to reach nirvana.”

Let me finish my discussion by returning to the American story that I explored in Part II. What distinguishes the American case from the five scenarios of revolutionary terror in Europe and Asia is the fact that the propensities for genocidal violence, which were part of the American cultural formation, never became actualized in the full sense of its potential possibilities. The political regimes that carried out in the other five societies the large scale killing projects was never duplicated by an equivalent regime of terror in the U.S. There were signs of terror before, during and after the Founding. But even after the Civil War and the failure of Reconstruction in the South, the reign of Jim Crow never reached the dimension of a full blown regime of terror covering the whole South or the rest of the U.S. For all kinds of reasons, American politics succeeded to avoid the descent into the institutionalization of terror. The primacy of politics prevailed in the United States in the good sense of the word, even if cultural tendencies pointed in the South in a different direction.

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3 Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*, p. 189f.
4 Ibid., p. 192f.
5 Ibid., p. 199.
6 Ibid., p. 203.
11 *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,* p. 162f.
12 Ibid., p. 169.
13 Ibid., p. 166.
16 Ibid., p. 70.
18 Ibid., p. 72.
20 Report of the Committee on Indian Affairs, October 15, 1783, in: *Documents of United States Indian Policy,* p. 4.
21 Ibid., p. 36.
29 Ibid., p. 404f.
34 Ibid., p. 65.

39 Ibid., p. 197.