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## End of Innocence

We are sometimes blessed with unexpected moments of truth. ‘The fish rots from the head’, declared French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal as he pounced on the latest fabrication of the unconditional support camp – he was lambasting the alleged moral corruption of student activism against the war in Gaza at ‘elite’ Institut d’études politiques de Paris. A miraculously accurate statement from a mouth typically full of untruths. That the fish rots from the head is even doubly true. For the head can be understood in a metaphorical sense: as representing the rulers and, more generally, the dominators. In this sense, yes, the rot is now everywhere. And it can also be understood in a metonymic sense: as the operations of thought, and in the case at hand, the decay of those operations. More than that even: the collapse of the norms supposed to govern them.

Such collapse is not attributable to mere stupidity (which rarely makes a good hypothesis), but rather to self-interested stupidity. For even if via extensive mediation, material interests are ultimately determining of the inclination to think one way, and to prohibit thinking another way. This is where the rotten head of the fish articulates its dual meaning: the violence of the bourgeois bloc (metaphor) unleashed in the imposition of its forms of thought (metonymy).

Why has it been unleashed with a ferocity that it would not, say, on matters of taxation or working hours? What is it about this international event that has such a powerful resonance in national class conjunctures? One answer is that the Western bourgeoisies consider Israel’s situation as intimately linked to their own. This is an imaginary, semi-conscious connection which – far more than simple sociological affinities – is driven by a subterranean affinity which cannot but be denied. Sympathy for domination, sympathy for racism, perhaps the purest form of domination, and therefore most exciting for the dominators. This affinity is

heightened when domination enters a crisis: an organic crisis in capitalism, a colonial crisis in Palestine, as when those dominated revolt against all odds, and their antagonists are ready to crush them in order to reassert domination.

But there is also a deeper fascination for the Western bourgeoisie. It was Sandra Lucbert who saw this with penetrating insight, positing a word that I believe to be decisive: innocence. The fascination is with the image of Israel as a figure of domination *in innocence*. To dominate without bearing the stain of evil: this is perhaps the ultimate fantasy of the dominant. During his trial, the left militant Pierre Goldman yells at the judge: 'I am innocent, I am ontologically innocent and there is nothing you can do about it'. As different as the circumstances are, his words resonate: after the Holocaust, Israel established itself in ontological innocence. And indeed, the Jews were first victims, victims at the summit of the history of human violence. But victim, even on this scale, does not mean 'innocent forever'. The only way to move from one to the other is by means of a fraudulent deduction.

The Western bourgeoisie retains of all this only what suits it. It would so much like to indulge in domination *in innocence* itself. This is obviously more difficult, but the example is right in front of their eyes, and they are hypnotised by it, and immediately caught up in reflexive solidarity.

Humans have various ways of not facing the violence they perpetrate. The first consists in degrading the oppressed: they are not truly human. Consequently, the harm done to them is not really evil and innocence is preserved. Undoubtedly the most powerful and most common is denial. This is what the term 'terrorism' is used for. It is a category designed to prevent thought, in particular the thought that *ex nihilo nihil*: that nothing comes from nothing. That events do not fall from the sky. That there is an economy of violence, which functions on the basis of a negative reciprocity. And that it could be summed-up by a paraphrase of Lavoisier's principle: nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything returns. The countless acts of violence inflicted on the Palestinian people were bound to return. Only those whose sole intellectual operation is condemnation were guaranteed not to see anything coming beforehand or understand anything afterwards. Sometimes incomprehension is not a weakness of the intellect but a trick of the psyche: its categorical imperative. You have to fail to understand to fail to see: to fail to see a causality you are part of – and therefore not so innocent.

To claim it all began on 7 October is a vicious and characteristic intellectual corruption of this kind, one that only an ontologically innocent nation could subscribe to, along with all those who envy them, and who love to believe with them in effects without cause. We

shouldn't even be surprised that some of them, as is the case in France, continue to use the word 'terrorism' against climate activists – labelling them 'ecoterrorists' – without batting an eyelid when they should be in hiding, consumed by shame. They do not even respect the dead, whose memory they pretend to honour and whose cause they support. But 'terrorism' is the shield of Western innocence.

The misuse of the term 'anti-Semitism' can be analysed in similar terms. In its present deviations (which obviously does not exhaust all cases, since there is plenty of genuine anti-Semitism) the accusation is intended to delegitimise all those who wish to recognise causality, and therefore call into question innocence.

Rotting of the head is first and foremost this: the self-interested corruption of the categories and operations of thought, because what there is to protect is too precious. The consequence is the lowering – one might even say the debasement – of public debate. It is no coincidence that the rotten fish spoke through Attal's mouth, since this debasement is typical of the process of fascisation in which Macronism, supported by the radicalised bourgeoisie, has embroiled the country. A process that we can recognise by the growing empire of lies, systematic misrepresentation, even outright fabrication. With – as is only right and proper, and always the case – the collaboration of the bourgeois media.

Yet all the denials and symbolic compromises, all the intimidation and censorship, will do nothing to stem the relentless surge of reality from Gaza. What the camp of unconditional support for Israel is supporting, and at what cost, is something that it is evidently no longer capable of seeing. For everyone who has not completely lost their senses, and looks on in horror, the ideological perdition – between biological racialism and messianic eschatology – into which the Israel government is sinking is bottomless. What we can see, and what we knew already, is that eschatological political projects are necessarily mass-murdering ones.

As Ilan Pappé has argued, the hallmark of colonisation when it is settlement-based is the wish to eliminate the presence of the occupied – in the case of the Palestinians either by expulsion-deportation or, as we now see, by genocide. Here, as on other such occasions recorded by history, dehumanisation is once again the justifying trope *par excellence*. There are now countless examples of it, both from official Israeli mouthpieces and in the muddy stream of social networks, staggering in their gleeful monstrosity and sadistic exultation. This is what happens when the veil of innocence is lifted, and as always, it's not a pretty sight.

One feature in this landscape of annihilation that catches our attention is the destruction of cemeteries. This is how we recognise projects of eradication: domination carried to the point of symbolic annihilation which, if it's a paradox, is reminiscent of the terms of Spinoza's

herem: 'May his name be erased from this world and forever'. In this case, it was no great success. Nor will it be here.

What we are witnessing is moral suicide. Never before has there been such a colossal squandering of symbolic capital that was thought to be unassailable, which had been built up in the wake of the Holocaust. It turns out that the time for symbolic reckoning is coming for everyone, especially for this colonial project which calls itself the West and claims a monopoly on civilisation, yet wages violence in the name of its principles. If indeed they ever floated, its moral credentials are now sunk. It takes the arrogance of the soon-to-be-fallen rulers, who don't yet know it, to believe that they can pursue this course without cost. Those who remain passive, who participate as accomplices, even acting as deniers of such an enormous crime being committed before their eyes and before the eyes of everyone else – people of this kind can no longer lay claim to anything. The whole world is watching Gaza die, and the whole world is watching the West watching Gaza. And nothing escapes them.

At this point, we inevitably think of Germany, whose unconditional support has reached astonishing levels of delirium, and of which one darkly humorous Internet user was able to say: 'When it comes to genocide, they are always on the wrong side of History'. It's not certain that 'we' – France – are much better off, but it is certain that History is waiting for everyone around the corner. History: this is what the West meets in Gaza. If, as there is reason to believe, this is a rendezvous with decline and fall, then the time will come when we will be able to say that the world was upturned in Gaza.

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