

Editor's Page

Alan Johnson

'My anti-Americanism has become almost uncontrollable. It has possessed me, like a disease,' wailed the British novelist Margaret Drabble in 2003. Jean Baudrillard, the late French postmodernist philosopher, writing in *Le Monde*, also settled on the image of possession to capture his response to 9/11. 'How we have dreamt of this event ... How all the world without exception dreamt of this event, for no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of a power that has become hegemonic ... It is they (the terrorists) who acted, but we who wanted the deed.' The political right, of course, can also be anti-American. As Timothy Garton Ash has observed, 'To the [French] Gaullists, America is a culture so self-evidently moronic that only stump-toothed inbred Appalachian lardbutts could possibly fall for it.' Sophistication is no barrier to the prejudice. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant thought Americans 'had no passion, hardly speak at all, never caress one another, care about nothing, and are lazy.'

Andrei Markovits has written a landmark book about European anti-Americanism, *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America*, and we are pleased to reproduce some extracts with the kind permission of Princeton University Press. **Thomas Cushman** reviews *Uncouth Nation*, and explores the idea that anti-Americanism is nothing less than a totem, a symbolic emblem of the European tribe: 'what Markovits wants us to know is that [US] actions do less to produce anti-Americanism than to mobilise a deep-seated and obdurate cultural discourse which is latent within European culture and which functions to forge the very cultural dispositions of Europeans themselves.'

Sanjukta Ghosh reviews *Feminism In India*, an anthology of feminist essays edited by Maitrayee Chaudhur which traces the history of feminism from colonial times to contemporary India and explores the variety of Indian feminisms and their theoretical trajectories. Ghosh has a warning: 'a return to "tradition" paradoxically might also limit efforts at liberation because it re-inscribes an essentialist, absolute and fixed notion of culture and tradition,' while 'goddess-inspired Hindu feminism ... has not only marginalised and alienated women in minority communities, but has also opened by possibilities of further exploitation of these very communities by the Hindu Right and the demarcation of more restrictive and repressive cultural lines.'

JOHNSON | Editor's Page

Democratiya advisory editor **Peter Tatchell** was assaulted in Moscow recently as he supported the city's Gay Pride March. We publish his keynote address to the Moscow Pride conference on 26 May 2007 and wish him a speedy recovery.

David Zarnett examines the late Edward Said's influential analysis of the Iranian Revolution as 'a locus of some key errors – of denial, evasion, and abstract categorial thinking immune to the facts – that led to such a gross miscalculation on the part of so many American Leftists.' Zarnett critiques the Saidian approach to Middle East politics as unable to comprehend 'the primary motives of these actors or to grant them an autonomy outside the categories of "orientalism" or "blowback"' and he concludes, with Kanan Makiya, that 'in the face of immense cruelty directed towards actual Arabs and Muslims, the Saidian intellectual can be curiously silent.'

Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has attracted worldwide attention. **Irfan Khawaja** offers a brilliant and iconoclastic reading that challenges those reviewers who 'seem to have read it in remarkably similar ways – as a "cautionary" tale about how "we" create "their" rage.' Khawaja, suggests that it be read differently: 'as an exploration of how "they" produce their own rage, often out of the commonplace disappointments of ordinary life.' Khawaja also argues that the novel can be read 'for how mindless attachments to such confected identities as "Muslim sensibility," "Pakistani nation" and "People of the Indus River Basin" serve to distort history, deny agency, and produce self-deception, envy, and self-contempt. On this reading, the novel is less a mirror than it is a window, and what it shows the reader is depressing, but decidedly not the reader's problem.'

'The outstanding example of the dissident intellectual who preferred above all other allegiances the loyalty to truth,' was Christopher Hitchens' verdict on George Orwell. Who keeps Orwell's flame alive in Britain today? Hitchens, of course, is now an American. He introduces himself to US audiences with the words 'My Fellow Americans,' having attended his citizenship ceremony on Jefferson's birthday with Ayaan Hirsi Ali as his guest. (We should note that she has been driven from Europe to take refuge in the uncouth nation.) Observer columnist (and Democratiya advisory editor) **Nick Cohen** reviews *Orwell in Tribune: 'As I Please' and Other Writings 1943-7*, an 'intelligently edited and beautifully presented collection' of Orwell's Tribune columns, put together by ex-Tribune editor Paul Anderson.

This issue contains four pieces that explore ongoing debates about genocide, humanitarian intervention conflict resolution and transitional justice.

Brian Brivati examines Martin Shaw's new book *What is Genocide?*, reading Shaw's suggested new definition critically in the light cast by Raphael Lemkin's pioneering work in the 1930s and 1940s (which Brivati reconstructs to great effect) and by the lessons of the enormities of the recent past.

Norman Geras in a talk to the conference 'Solidarity and Rights: The Euston Manifesto one year on,' held on 30 May 2007, argued that 'although peace is an opposite of war, war is not the only opposite of peace. Today more than ever, a just international juridical system, and a peace movement supporting it, need to integrate this insight, by aiming to place the prohibition on aggressive war within an effective set of restraints and remedies against states that do violence to their own peoples.' In this regard, he considers four deficits of international law.

Peter Ryley reviews Hugh Miall's *Emergent Conflict and Peaceful Change* which studies the dynamics of peaceful conflict resolution as a necessary part of social change using game theory and systems theory to identify the factors that inhibit the incidence of war. Ryley argues the book is valuable but flirts with what he calls – in a striking phrase redolent of C. Wright Mills notion of 'crackpot realism' – that 'crackpot pacifism' of our times that ignores oppression, excuses violence, and seeks to rationalise away genuine threats through wishful thinking.

Oren Ipp, an organiser in the Kabul office of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, reviews *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy*, a collection of essays on the role of transitional justice in democratic transitions, edited by Jon Elster. The book explores 'how and why democratising countries, from the post-World War II era to the present, have chosen to deal with their respective pasts.' Ipp discusses how we might choose a path to provide justice without destabilising or undermining the transition to democracy. He helpfully draws out some general principles of transitional justice from Elster's case studies.

By returning again and again to the lessons of the Balkan wars of the 1990s **Marko Attila Hoare's** Democratiya essays have mapped with precision and style several of the tropes of a liberal-left that has 'lost its way.' *Flag on the Mountain: A Political Anthropology of War in Croatia and Bosnia* by Ivo Zanic is 'a brilliant study of how motifs drawn from the common post-Ottoman cultural heritage of Serbs, Croats, and Muslim were manipulated in an often contradictory manner by politicians and warlords from all three nationalities for the purposes of self-legitimation and

nationalist mobilisation during the 1990s.' But Hoare argues that the political misuse of symbols and signifiers was not the preserve of the warring nationalists of the region. It was during those wars that the Western Left honed the technique of evoking 'elements of a beloved ideological heritage' in order to sell 'anti-imperialism.' Fascist dictatorships become 'regimes independent of the West'; their domestic opponents become 'stooges of imperialism'; genocide becomes simply 'atrocities'; supporting international action against fascism or genocide is 'imperialism'; even denouncing fascism or genocide is 'media demonisation' or 'diverting attention from Iraq/Israel.' Insistence on supposedly 'correct' terminology slips easily into moral relativism.

Jules Townshend reviews Ronald Dworkin's essay *Is Democracy Possible Here?* Dworkin thinks a 'yahboo' discourse has polarised US politics and contends that Republicans and Democrats, and their respective supporters, would stop talking past each other if only they both realised that they shared a common ground: the two principles of human dignity. That every human life is intrinsically and equally valuable, and that each person has an inalienable personal responsibility for identifying and realising the value of their own life – the former principle often associated with the Left, the latter with the Right – is offered as a kind of 'Third Way' in political philosophy. Townshend is unpersuaded that this is a useful way to do political philosophy. Besides, he argues, 'the kind of egalitarianism [Dworkin] advocates is limited to offsetting the luck of the genes or the vagaries of the market, rather than the systemic biases of class and imbalances of bargaining strength that even Adam Smith recognised.'

We learn from Carole Angier's biography of Primo Levi of the fragile stability (or 'metastability' as the Chemist has it) of all living things. Levi stretched the idea, as was his wont, to the social world, writing, 'All of mankind today [is] condemned and accustomed to living in a world which seems stable and is not, in which awesome energies (and I am not speaking only of nuclear arsenals) sleep a light sleep.' **Dick Howard's** essay contains much of this temper as he considers the living thing that is the American Republic. If we are to follow Franklin's instruction and 'keep it,' Howard argues, we need the kind of grown-up political thinking and wary appreciation of the intractability of the specific 'problems of our age' that Hannah Arendt demonstrated in *On Revolution*. By returning to her reading of the American Revolution, and of the founding of the Republic, Howard believes we might come to understand that 'The problem is not the goals of the neo-conservatives; the problem is their political naiveté which forgets the interconnectedness of thought

and event, authority and action, politics and possibility. Neo-conservatism is an anti-political politics that lives in an eternal present – which is one reason that the Americans were so unprepared once their victorious arms fell silent.’

In autumn 1963, a public meeting sponsored by Dissent took place at what Irving Howe later described as ‘the seedy Hotel Diplomat’ in midtown Manhattan. The topic was Hannah Arendt’s controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The passions that raged that night formed part of what Anson Rabinbach has called ‘the most bitter public dispute among intellectuals and scholars concerning the Holocaust that has ever taken place.’ In a detailed piece of historical scholarship **Michael Ezra** reconstructs the dispute and assesses ‘the Eichmann polemics.’

We are delighted to publish ‘What is totalitarianism?’ by the French social and political theorist **Claude Lefort**, as well as a critical response, ‘Three comments on Lefort,’ by **Robert Fine**. Lefort once summed up his own project as ‘interpreting or reinterpreting the political with a view to addressing the questions that arise from our time.’ It is this quality that Fine identifies as the ‘crucial contribution of theorists of totalitarianism to contemporary social theory ... they confront what Hannah Arendt called “the burden of events” in history.’ In short, the antitotalitarian writers stared into the abyss and, as Arendt put it, neither denied its existence nor submitted meekly to its weight. Not coming back empty-handed from hell, the antitotalitarians offer us – to borrow a phrase from Lionel Trilling that I picked up from Gertrude Himmelfarb – ‘the elements that are wanted’ in so much political theory, if we can only learn how to look.

A student of Claude Lefort, **Ladan Boroumand**, is the subject of the Democratiya interview. She is research director at The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran. Boroumand discusses her upbringing in Iran in a prominent family of the liberal opposition to the Shah, her experience in Paris as a student where she met and tried to question Khomeini, and as a witness to the revolution in Tehran. She talks movingly about her disillusionment with the Islamic Revolution, and about the ‘encounter with evil’ when her father, Abdorrahman Boroumand, a leader of the National Movement of the Iranian Resistance, was assassinated in Paris on April 18 1991. She discusses her political ideas, which have been developed in studies of both the French and the Iranian Revolutions. *La Guerre des principes* (1999) is an important study of the tensions between the ‘rights of man’ and the ‘sovereignty of the nation’ during the French Revolution (a theme also central to Dick Howard’s essay in this issue).

JOHNSON | Editor's Page

In a series of influential articles Boroumand has identified a lineage running 'from the guillotine, and the Cheka to the suicide bomber' and the interview explores this controversial idea. Prospects for both the Iranian reform movement and for a reformation of Islam are discussed, as is the work of Omid, a human rights and memory project of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation.