



Phantom Towers: Feminist Reflections on the Battle between Global Capitalism and Fundamentalist Terrorism

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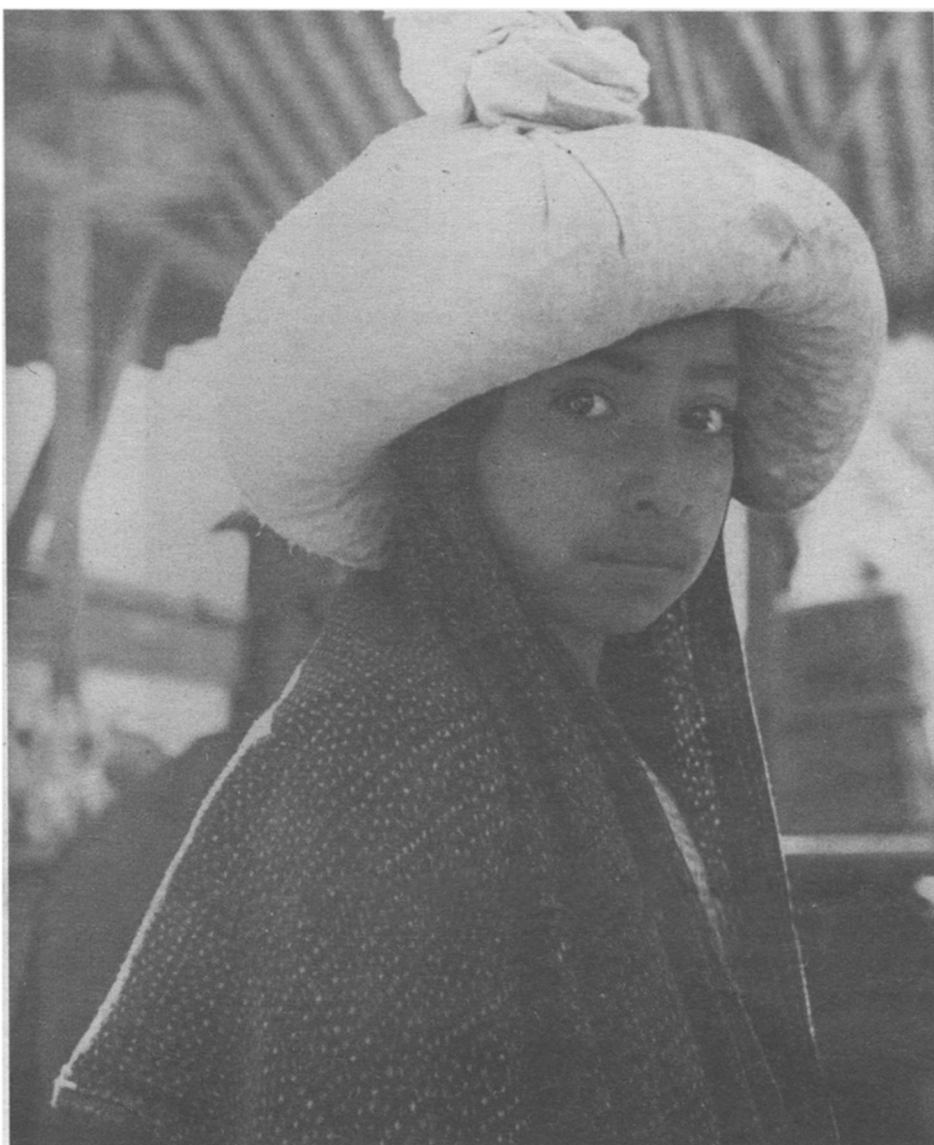
✧ How does a biographer deal with the life of a fascinating but second-rate writer? asks Nancy Mairs in a reading of Nancy Schoenberger's *Dangerous Muse: The Life of Lady Caroline Blackwood*, p. 10.

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Bean Girl, San Cristóbal, 1962. From *The Burden of Time: Photographs from the Highlands of Chiapas*.

Phantom towers

by Rosalind P. Petchesky

Feminist reflections on the battle between global capitalism
and fundamentalist terrorism

These are trying times, hard times to know where we are from one day to the next. The attack on the World Trade Center has left many kinds of damage in its wake, not the least of which is a gaping ethical and political confusion in the minds of many Americans who identify in some way as "progressive"—meaning anti-racist, feminist, democratic (small d), anti-war. While we have a responsibility to those who died in the disaster and their loved ones, and to ourselves, to mourn, it is urgent that we

also begin the work of thinking through what kind of world we are now living in and what it demands of us. And we have to do this, even while we know our understanding at this time can only be very tentative and may well be invalidated a year or even a month or a week from now by events we can't foresee or information now hidden from us.

So, at the risk of being completely wrong, I want to try to draw a picture or a kind of mapping of the global power

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dynamics as I see them at this moment, including their gendered and racialized dimensions. I want to ask whether there is some alternative, more humane and peaceable, way out of the two unacceptable polarities now being presented to us: the permanent war machine (or permanent security state) and the regime of holy terror.

Let me make very clear that, when I ask whether we are facing a confrontation between global capitalism and an Islamist-fundamentalist brand of fascism, I do not mean to imply their equivalence. If, in fact, the attacks of September 11 were the work of Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network or something related and even larger—and for the moment I think we can assume this as a real possibility—then most of us here are structurally positioned in a way that gives us little choice about our identities. (For the Muslim Americans and Arab Americans among us, who are both opposed to terrorism and terrified to walk in our streets, the moral dilemma must be, I imagine, much more agonizing.) As an American, a woman, a feminist and a Jew, I have to recognize that the Bin Ladens of the world hate me and would like me dead; if they had power over me, they would make my life a living hell. I have to wish them—these “perpetrators,” “terrorists,” whatever they are—apprehended, annulled, so I can breathe in some kind of peace. This is quite different from living at the very center of global capitalism—which is more like living in a very dysfunctional family that fills you with shame and anger for its arrogance, greed and insensitivity but is, like it or not, your home and gives you both immense privileges and immense responsibilities.

Nor, however, do I succumb to the temptation of casting our current dilemma in the simplistic, Manichean terms of cosmic Good vs. Evil. Currently this comes in two opposed but mirror-image versions: the narrative, advanced not only by the terrorists and their sympathizers but also by many on the Left in the US and around the globe, that blames US cultural imperialism and economic hegemony for the “chickens coming home to roost”; and the patriotic, right-wing version that casts US democracy and freedom as the innocent target of Islamist madness. Both these stories erase all the complexities that we must try to factor into a different, more inclusive ethical and political vision. The Manichean, apocalyptic rhetorics that echoed back and forth between Bush and Bin Laden in the aftermath of the attacks—the pseudo-Islamic and the pseudo-Christian, the jihad and the crusade—both lie.

While I do not see terrorist networks and global capitalism as equivalents or the same, I do see some striking and disturbing parallels between them. I picture them as the phantom Twin Towers arising in the smoke clouds of the old—fraternal twins, not identical, locked in a battle over wealth, imperial aggrandizement and the meanings of masculinity. It is a battle that could well end in a stalemate, an interminable cycle of violence that neither can win because of their failure to see the Other clearly. Feminist analysts and activists from many countries—whose voices have been inaudible thus far in the present crisis—have a lot of experience to draw from in making this double critique. Whether in the UN

or national settings, we have been challenging the gender-biased and racialized dimensions of *both* neoliberal capitalism and various fundamentalisms for years, trying to steer a path between their double menace. The difference now is that they parade onto the world stage in their most extreme and violent forms.

I see six areas where their posturing overlaps.

Wealth: Little needs to be said about the US as the world's wealthiest country nor the ways in which wealth accumulation is the holy grail not only of our political system (think of the difficulty we have even in reforming campaign finance laws) but of our national ethos. We are the headquarters of the corporate and financial mega-empires that dominate global capitalism and influence the policies of the international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO) that are its main governing bodies. This reality resonates around the globe in the symbolic pantheon of what the US stands for—from the McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken ads sported by protesters in Genoa and Rawalpindi to the World Trade Center towers themselves. Acquisitiveness, whether individual or corporate, also lurks very closely behind the values that Bush and Rumsfeld have in mind when they say our “freedoms” and our “way of life” are being attacked and must be defended fiercely. (Why, as I'm writing this, do unsolicited messages about Wall Street investment opportunities or low fares to the Bahamas come spewing out of my fax machine?)

Wealth is also a driving force behind the Al-Qaeda network, whose principals are mainly the beneficiaries of upper-middle-class or elite financing and education. Bin Laden himself derives much of his power and influence from his family's vast fortune, and the cells of Arab-Afghan fighters in the 1980s war against the Soviets were bankrolled not only by the Pakistani secret police and the CIA—three billion dollars, writes Katha Pollitt in *The Nation*, “more money and expertise than for any other cause in CIA history”—but also by Saudi oil money. More important than this, though, are the values behind the terrorist organizations, which include—as Bin Laden made clear in his famous 1998 interview on ABC—defending the “honor” and “property” of Muslims everywhere and “[fighting] the governments that are bent on attacking our religion and on stealing our wealth.” Political scientist Paul Amar, in a recent talk at Hunter College, rightly urges us not to confuse these wealthy networks—whose nepotism and ties to oil interests eerily resemble those of the Bush family—with impoverished and resistant social movements throughout the Middle East and Asia. There is no evidence that economic justice or equality figure anywhere in the terrorist program.

Imperialist nationalism: The Bush administration's initial reaction to the attacks exhibited the behavior of a superpower that knows no limits, that issues ultimatums under the cover of “seeking cooperation.” “Every nation in every region has a decision to make,” pronounced Bush in his speech to the nation that was really a speech to the world; “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.” “This is the world's fight, this is civilization's fight”—the US, then, becoming the leader and spokesman of “civilization,” relegating not only the terrorists but also those who

refuse to join the fight to the ranks of the uncivilized. To the Taliban and to every other regime that “harbors terrorists,” Bush was the sheriff stonewalling the cattle rustlers: “Hand over all the terrorists or you will share in their fate.” And a few days later we read “the American announcement that it *would* use Saudi Arabia as a headquarters for air operations against Afghanistan.”

As the war campaign progresses, its aims seem more openly imperialist: “Washington wants to offer [the small, also fundamentalist, drug-dealing *mujahideen* mostly routed by the Taliban] a role in governing Afghanistan after the conflict,” according to the *New York Times* of September 24, as if this were “Washington's” official role. Further, it and its allies are courting the octogenarian, long-forgotten Afghan king (now exiled in Italy) to join in a military operation to oust the Taliban and set up—what? a kind of puppet government? Nothing here about internationally monitored elections, nothing about the UN, or any concept of the millions of Afghan people—within the country or in exile—as anything but voiceless, downtrodden victims and refugees.

Clearly, this offensive involves far more than rooting out and punishing terrorists. Though I don't want to reduce the situation to a crude Marxist scenario, one can't help wondering how it relates to the longstanding determination of the US to keep a dominant foothold in the Gulf region and to maintain control over oil supplies. At least one faction of the Bush “team,” clamoring to go after Saddam Hussein as well, is clearly in this mindset. And let's not forget Pakistan and its concessions to US demands for cooperation in

return for lifting of US economic sanctions—and now, the assurance of a sizable IMF loan. In the tradition of neo-imperial power, the US does not need to dominate countries politically or militarily to get the concessions it wants; its economic influence backed up by the capacity for military annihilation is sufficient. And, spurred by popular rage over the WTC attacks, all this is wrapped in the outpouring of nationalist patriotism and flag-waving that now envelops the American landscape.

Though lacking the actual imperial power of the US, the Bin Laden forces mimic its imperial aspirations. If we ask, what are the terrorists seeking? we need to recognize their worldview as an extreme and vicious form of nationalism—a kind of fascism, I would argue, because of its reliance on terror to achieve its ends. In this respect, their goals, like those of the US, go beyond merely punishment. Paul Amar says the whole history of Arab and Islamic nationalism has been one that transcended the colonially imposed boundaries of the nation-state, one that was always transnational and pan-Arabic, or pan-Muslim, in form.

Although the terrorists have no social base or legitimacy in laying claim to this tradition, they clearly seek to usurp it. This seems evident in Bin Laden's language invoking “the Arab nation,” “the Arab peninsula” and a “brotherhood” reaching from Eastern Europe to Turkey and Albania, to the entire Middle East, South Asia and Kashmir. Their mission is to drive out “the infidels” and their Muslim supporters from something that looks like a third of the globe. Provoking the US to bomb Afghanistan and/or attempt ousting the Taliban will surely

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Selected Letters of Margaret Fuller

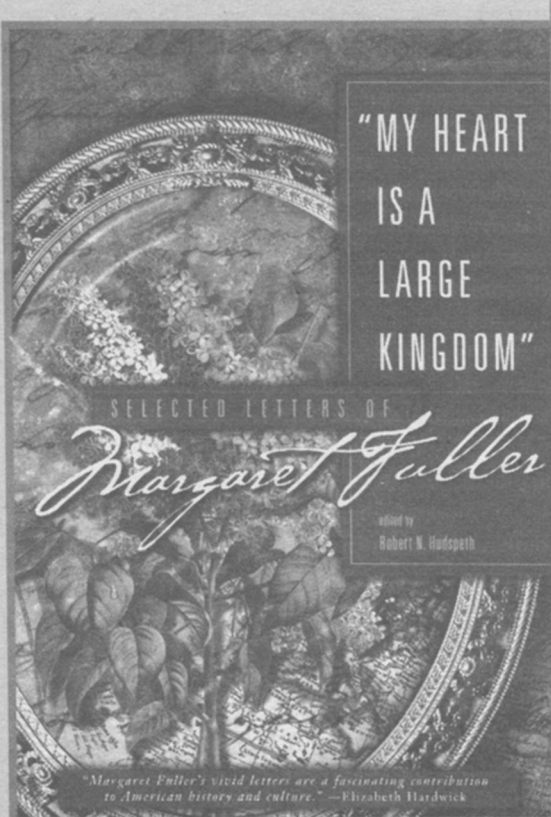
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destabilize Pakistan and possibly catapult it into the hands of Taliban-like extremists, who would then control nuclear weapons—a big step toward their perverted and hijacked version of the pan-Muslim dream.

Pseudo-Religion: As many others have commented, the “clash of religions” or “clash of cultures” interpretation of the current scenario is utterly specious. What we have instead is an appropriation of religious symbolism and discourse for predominantly political purposes, and to justify permanent war and violence. So Bin Laden declares a jihad, or holy war, against the US, its civilians as well as its soldiers; and Bush declares a crusade against the terrorists and all who harbor or support them. Bin Laden declares himself the “servant of Allah fighting for the sake of the religion of Allah” and to protect Islam’s holy mosques, while Bush declares Washington the promoter of “infinite justice” and predicts certain victory, because “God is not neutral.” (The Pentagon changed the “Operation Infinite Justice” label to “Operation Enduring Freedom” after Muslim Americans objected and three Christian clergymen warned that “infinite” presumed divinity, the “sin of pride.”)

But we have to question the authenticity of this religious discourse on both sides, however sincere its proponents. A “Statement from Scholars of the Islamic Religion,” circulated after the attacks, firmly denounces terrorism—the wanton killing of innocent civilians—as contrary to Sh’aria law. And Bush’s adoption of this apocalyptic discourse can only be seen as substituting a conservative, right-wing form of legitimization for the neoliberal internationalist discourse that conservatives reject. In either case, it is worth quoting the always wise Eduardo Galeano, here writing in Mexico’s *La Jornada*: “In the struggle of Good against Evil, it’s always the people who get killed.”

Militarism: Both the Bush administration and the Bin Laden forces adopt the methods of war and violence to achieve their ends, but in very different ways. US militarism is of the ultra-high-tech variety that seeks to terrorize by the sheer might, volume and technological virtuosity of our armaments. Of course, as the history of Vietnam and the survival of Saddam Hussein attest, this is an illusion of the highest order. (Remember the “smart bombs” in the Gulf War that headed for soda machines?) But our military technology is also a vast and insatiable industry for which profit, not strategy, is the driving rationale. As Jack Blum, a critic of US foreign policy, pointed out recently in the *Sacramento Bee*, “the national defense game is a systems and money operation” that has little if any relevance to terrorism. Missiles were designed to counter hostile states with their own fixed territories and weapons arsenals, not terrorists who sneak around the globe and whose “weapons of mass destruction” are human bodies and hijacked planes; nor the famously impervious terrain and piles of rubble that constitute Afghanistan. Even George W., in one of his most sensible comments to date, remarked that we’d know better than to aim “a \$2 billion cruise missile at a \$10 empty tent.” And yet four days after the attack the Democrats in Congress piled madness atop madness and withdrew their opposition to Bush’s costly and destructive “missile shield,” voting to restore 1.3 billion dollars in

spending authority for this misconceived and dangerous project. And the armaments companies quickly started lining up to receive their big orders for the impending next war—the war, we are told, that will last a long time, maybe the rest of our lives. US militarism is not about rationality—not even about fighting terrorism—but about profits.

The war-mania and rallying around the flag exhibited by the American people express desire, not for military profits, but for something else, something harder for feminist and anti-war dissidents to understand. Maybe it’s just the need to vent anger and feel avenged, or the more deep-rooted one to experience some sense of community and higher purpose in a society where we are so atomized and isolated from one another and the world. On September 25th, Barbara Kingsolver wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that she and her husband reluctantly sent their five-year-old daughter to school dressed in red, white and blue like the other kids because they didn’t want to let jingoists and censors “steal the flag from us.” Their little girl probably echoed the longings of many less reflective grownups when she said that wearing the colors of the flag “means we’re a country; just people all together.”

The militarism of the terrorists is of a very different nature—based on the mythic figure of the Bedouin warrior, or the Ikhwan fighters of the early twentieth century who enabled Ibn Saud to consolidate his dynastic state. Their hallmark is individual courage and ferocity in battle; Malise Ruthven’s *Islam in the World* quotes one Arab witness who described them, foreshadowing reports by Soviet veterans from the 1980s Afghan war, as “utterly fearless of death, not caring how many fall, advancing rank upon rank with only one desire—the defeat and annihilation of the enemy.”

Of course, this image too, like every hyper-nationalist ideology, is rooted in a mythic golden past and has little to do with how real terrorists in the twenty-first century are recruited, trained and paid off. And, like high-tech militarism, terrorist low-tech militarism is also based in an illusion—that millions of believers will rise up, obey the *fatwa* and defeat the infidel. It’s an illusion because it grossly underestimates the most powerful weapon in global capitalism’s arsenal—not “infinite justice” or even nukes but infinite Nikes and CDs. And it also underestimates the local power of feminism, which the fundamentalists mistakenly confuse with the West. Elaine Sciolino, writing in the *New York Times*, for example, reports that Iran today, in all its internal contradictions, shows the resilience and globalized/localized variety of both youth cultures and women’s movements.

Masculinism: Militarism, nationalism and colonialism as terrains of power have always been in large part contests over the meanings of manhood. Feminist political scientist Cynthia Enloe remarks that “men’s sense of their own masculinity, often tenuous, is as much a factor in international politics as is the flow of oil, cables, and military hardware.” In the case of Bin Laden’s Taliban patrons, the form and excessiveness of the misogyny that goes hand in hand with state terrorism and extreme fundamentalism have been graphically documented. Just go to the website of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), at www.rawa.org, to view more photos of

atrocities against women (and men) for sexual offenses, dress code offenses and other forms of deviance than you’ll be able to stomach. According to John Burns, writing in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1990, the “rebel” leader in the Afghan war who received “the lion’s share of American money and weapons”—and was not a Taliban—had been reputed to have “dispatched followers [during his student movement days] to throw vials of acid into the faces of women students who refused to wear veils.”

In the case of transnational terrorists and Bin Laden himself, their model of manliness is that of the Islamic “brotherhood,” the band of brothers bonded together in an agonistic commitment to fighting the enemy to the death. The CIA-Pakistani-Saudi-backed camps and training schools set up to support the “freedom fighters” (who later became “terrorists”) in the anti-Soviet war were breeding grounds not only of a worldwide terrorist network but also of its masculinist, misogynist culture. Bin Laden clearly sees himself as a patriarchal tribal chief whose duty is to provide for and protect not only his own retinue, wives and many children but also his whole network of lieutenants and recruits and their families. He is the legendary Arabic counterpart of the Godfather, the *padrone*.

In contrast to this, can we say that the US as standard-bearer of global capitalism is “gender-neutral”? Don’t we have a woman—indeed an African American woman—at the helm of our National Security Council, the president’s right hand in designing the permanent war machine? Despite reported gender gaps in polls about war, we know that women are not inherently more peace-loving than men. Remember all those suburban housewives with their yellow ribbons in midwestern airports and shopping malls during the Gulf War? Global capitalist masculinism is alive and well but concealed in its Eurocentric, racist guise of “rescuing” downtrodden Afghan women from the misogynist regime it helped bring to power. Feminists around the world, who have tried for so long to call attention to the plight of women and girls in Afghanistan, cannot feel consoled by the prospect of US warplanes and US-backed guerrilla chiefs coming to “save our Afghan sisters.” Meanwhile, the US will send single mothers who signed up for the National Guard when welfare ended to fight and die in its holy war; US media remain silent about the activism and self-determination of groups like RAWA, Refugee Women in Development and NEGAR; and the US military establishment refuses accountability before an International Criminal Court for the acts of rape and sexual assault committed by its soldiers stationed across the globe. Masculinism and misogyny take many forms, not always the most visible.

Racism: Of course, what I have named fascist fundamentalism, or transnational terrorism, is also saturated in racism, but of a very specific, focused kind—which is anti-semitism. The WTC towers symbolized not only American capitalism, not only finance capitalism, but, for the terrorists, Jewish finance capitalism. We can see this in the misreporting of the September 11 attacks in Arabic-language newspapers in the Middle East as probably the work of the Israelis, and their erroneous allegation that not a single person among the dead and missing was Jewish, so Jews must

have had advance warning of the attacks. In his 1998 interview, Bin Laden constantly refers to “Jews,” not Israelis, in his accusations about plans to take over the whole Arab peninsula. He asserts that “the Americans and the Jews... represent the spearhead with which the members of our religion have been slaughtered. Any effort directed against America and the Jews yields positive and direct results.” And finally, he rewrites history and collapses the diversity of Muslims in a warning to “Western governments” to sever their ties to Jews: “the enmity between us and the Jews goes far back in time and is deep rooted. There is no question that war between the two of us is inevitable. For this reason it is not in the interest of Western governments to expose the interests of their people to all kinds of retaliation for almost nothing.” (I cringe to realize I am part of the “nothing.”)

US racism is much more diffuse but just as insidious; the pervasive racism and ethnocentrism that fester under the American skin always boil to the surface at times of national crisis. As Sumitha Reddy put it in a recent teach-in, the targeting of Sikhs and other Indians, Arabs and even tan Latinos and African Americans in the wave of violent and abusive acts throughout the country since the disaster signals an enlargement of the “zone of distrust” in American racism beyond the usual black-white focus. Women who wear headscarves or saris are particularly vulnerable to harassment, but Arab and Indian men of all ages are the ones being murdered. The state pretends to abhor such incidents and threatens their full prosecution. But this is the same state that made the so-called Anti-Terrorism Act, passed in 1995 after the Oklahoma City bombing (an act committed by native white Christian terrorists), a pretext for rounding up and deporting immigrants of all kinds, and that is now once again waiving the civil liberties of immigrants in its zealous anti-terrorist manhunt. Each day the *New York Times* publishes its rogues’ gallery of police photos of the suspects, so reminiscent of those eugenic photographs of “criminal types” of an earlier era, imprinting upon readers’ minds a certain set of facial characteristics they should now fear and blame. Racial profiling becomes a national pastime.

If we look only at terrorist tactics and the world’s revulsion against them, then we might conclude rather optimistically that thuggery will never win out in the end. But we ignore the context in which terrorism operates at our peril, and that context includes not only racism and Eurocentrism but many forms of social injustice.

In thinking through a moral position on this crisis, we have to distinguish between *immediate causes* and *necessary conditions*. Neither the United States (as a state) nor the corporate and financial power structure that the World Trade Centers symbolized caused the horrors of September 11. Without question, the outrageous, heinous murder, maiming and orphaning of so many innocent people—who were every race, ethnicity, color, class, age, gender and some sixty-odd nationalities—deserve some kind of just redress. On the other hand, the conditions in which transnational terrorism thrives, gains recruits and lays claim to moral legitimacy include many for which the US and its corporate/financial interests are directly responsible even if they don’t for a minute excuse the attacks. It is often asked lately, why does the Third

World hate us so much? Put another way, why do so many people, including my own friends in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, express so much ambivalence about what happened, both lamenting an unforgivable criminal act and at the same time taking some satisfaction that Americans are finally suffering too? We make a fatal mistake if we attribute these mixed feelings only to envy or resentment of our wealth and freedoms and ignore a historical context of aggression, injustice and inequality. Consider these facts:

The United States is still the only country in the world to have actually used the most infamous weapons of mass destruction in the nuclear bombing of innocent civilians—in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The US persists to this day in bombing Iraq, destroying the lives and food supplies of hundreds of thousands of civilian adults and children there. We bombed Belgrade—a dense capital city—for eighty straight days during the war in Kosovo, and supported bombing that killed untold civilians in El Salvador in the 1980s. In the name of fighting Communism, our CIA and military training apparatus sponsored paramilitary massacres, assassinations, tortures and disappearances in many Latin American and Central American countries in Operation Condor and the like in the 1970s, and has supported corrupt, authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and elsewhere—the Shah of Iran, Suharto in Indonesia, the Saudi dynasty, and let's not forget the Taliban regime itself. September 11 is also the date of the coup against the democratically elected Allende government in Chile and the beginning of the 25-year Pinochet dictatorship, again thanks to US support. Yes, a long history of state terrorism.

In the Middle East, which is the microcosm of the current conflagration, US military aid and the Bush administration's disengagement are the sine qua non of continued Israeli government policies of attacks on villages, demolition of homes, destruction of olive orchards, restrictions on travel, assassination of political leaders, building of roads and enlarging of settlements that deepen the occupation of Palestinian territories, and continual human rights abuses of Palestinians and even Arab citizens—all of which exacerbate hostility and suicide bombings.

The US is one of only two countries—along with Afghanistan!—that has failed to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the only country that hasn't ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is the most vocal opponent of the statute establishing an International Criminal Court as well as the treaties banning land mines and germ warfare; a principal subverter of a new multilateral treaty to combat illegal small arms trafficking; and the sole country in the world to threaten an unprecedented space-based defense system and imminent violation of the ABM treaty. So who is the "outlaw," the "rogue state"?

The US is the only major industrialized country to refuse to sign the final Kyoto Protocol on Global Climate Change, despite compromises in that document designed to meet US objections. Meanwhile, a new global scientific study shows that the countries whose overall productivity will benefit most from climate change are Canada, Russia and the US, while the biggest losers will

be the countries that have contributed least to global climate change—meaning most of Africa.

As even the World Bank and the UNDP attest, two decades of globalization have enlarged rather than diminished the gaps between rich and poor, both within countries and among countries. The benefits of global market liberalization and integration have accrued disproportionately to wealthy Americans and Europeans (as well as small elites in the Third World). Despite the presumed democratizing effects of the Internet, the *New York Times* recently reported that a middle-class American "needs to save a month's salary to buy a computer; a Bangladeshi must save all his wages for eight years to do so." And despite its constant trumpeting of "free-trade" rhetoric, the US remains a persistent defender of protectionist policies for its farmers. Meanwhile small producers throughout Asia, Africa and the Caribbean—a great many of whom are women—are squeezed out by US imports and relegated to the informal economy or sweatshop labor for multinationals.

The G-8 countries, of which the US is the senior partner, dominate decision-making in the IMF and the World Bank, whose structural adjustments and conditionalities for loans and debt relief help to keep many poor countries and their citizens locked in poverty.

US-based corporations can cough up billions overnight to "aid" their counterparts whose offices and personnel were destroyed in the WTC attacks, and Congress can vote instantly to hand over fifteen billion dollars to the beleaguered airline industry. Yet our foreign assistance appropriations (except for military aid) have shrunk; we, the world's richest country, don't even meet the UN standard of .7 percent of GNP. A recent WHO report tells us the total cost of providing safe water and sanitation to everyone in the world who needs it would be only ten billion dollars, only no one can figure out where the money will come from; and the UN is still a long way off from raising a similar amount for its proclaimed World HIV/AIDS Fund. What kind of meanness is this? And what does it say about forms of racism, or "global apartheid," that value some lives—those in the US and Europe—far more than others in other parts of the globe?

And the list goes on, with McDonald's, Coca-Cola, CNN and MTV and all the uninvited commercial detritus that proliferates everywhere on the face of the earth and offends the cultural and spiritual sensibilities of so many—including transnational feminist travelers like me, when we find pieces of our local shopping mall transplanted to downtown Kampala or Kuala Lumpur, Cairo or Bangalore. But worse than the triviality and bad taste of these cultural and commercial barrages is the arrogant presumption that our "way of life" is the best on earth and ought to be welcome everywhere; or that our power and supposed advancement entitle us to dictate policies and strategies to the rest of the world. This is the face of imperialism in the twenty-first century.

None of this reckoning can comfort those who lost loved ones on September 11, or the thousands of attack victims who lost their jobs, homes and livelihoods; nor can it excuse the hideous crimes. As the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish writes, "nothing, nothing justifies terror-

ism." Still, in attempting to understand what has happened and think about how to prevent it happening again (which is probably a vain wish), we Americans have to take all these painful facts into account. The United States as the command center of global capitalism will remain ill equipped to "stop terrorism" until it begins to recognize its own past and present responsibility for many of the conditions I've listed and to address them in a responsible way.

But this would mean the United States becoming something different from itself, transforming itself, including abandoning the presumption that it should unilaterally police the world. This problem of transformation is at the heart of the vexing question of finding solutions different from all-out war. So let me turn to how we might think differently about power. Here is what I propose, tentatively, for now:

The slogan "War Is Not the Answer" is a practical as well as an ontological truth. Bombing or other military attacks on Afghanistan will not root out networks of terrorists, who could be hiding deep in the mountains or in Pakistan or Germany or Florida or New Jersey. It will only succeed in destroying an already decimated country, killing untold numbers of civilians as well as combatants and creating hundreds of thousands more refugees. And it is likely to arouse so much anger among Islamist sympathizers as to destabilize the entire region and perpetuate the cycle of retaliation and terrorist attacks. All the horror of the twentieth century surely should teach us that war feeds on itself and that armed violence reflects, not an extension of politics by other means, but the failure of politics; not the defense of civilization, but the breakdown of civilization.

Tracking down and bringing the perpetrators of terrorism to justice, in some kind of international police action, is a reasonable aim but one fraught with dangers. Because the US is the world's only "superpower," its declaration of war against terrorism and its supporters everywhere says to other countries that we are once again taking over as global policeman, or, as Fidel Castro put it, a "world military dictatorship under the exclusive rule of force, irrespective of any international laws or institutions." Here at home a "national emergency" or "state of war"—especially when defined as different from any other war—means the curtailment of civil liberties, harassment of immigrants, racial profiling and withholding of information (censorship) or feeding of disinformation to the media, all without any time limits and under an ominous new Office of Homeland Security. We should oppose both US unilateralism and the permanent security state. We should urge our representatives in Congress to diligently defend the civil liberties of all.

I agree with the Afro Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) in Cairo that "punishment should be inflicted according to the law and only upon those who were responsible for these events," and that it should be organized within the framework of the United Nations and international law, not unilaterally by the United States. This is not the same as the US getting unanimous approval from the Security Council to commandeer global security, which is a first step at best. Numerous treaties against terrorism and money-laundering already exist in international law. The pending International Criminal Court, whose establishment the US gov-

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ernment has so stubbornly opposed, would be the logical body to try terrorist cases, with the cooperation of national police and surveillance systems. We should demand that the US ratify the ICC statute. In the meantime, a special tribunal under international auspices, like the ones for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, could be set up, as well as an international agency to coordinate national police and intelligence efforts, with the US as one participating member. This is the power of international engagement and cooperation.

No amount of police action, however cooperative, can stop terrorism without addressing the conditions of misery and injustice that nourish and aggravate terrorism. The US has to undertake a serious reexamination of its values and its policies with regard not only to the Middle East but also to the larger world. It has to take responsibility for being in the world, including ways of sharing its wealth, resources and technology; democratizing decisions about global trade, finance and security; and assuring that access to "global public goods" like health care, housing, food, education, sanitation, water and freedom from racial and gender discrimination is given priority in international relations. What we even mean by "security" has to encompass all these aspects of well-being, of "human security," and has to be universal in its reach.

Let me again quote from the poet Mahmoud Darwish's statement, which was published in the Palestinian daily *A/ Ayyam* on September 17 and signed by many Palestinian writers and intellectuals.

We know that the American wound is deep and we know that this tragic moment is a time for solidarity and the sharing of pain. But we also know that the horizons of the intellect can traverse landscapes of devastation. Terrorism has no location or boundaries, it does not reside in a geography of its own; its homeland is disillusionment and despair.

The best weapon to eradicate terrorism from the soul lies in the solidarity of the international world, in respecting the rights of all peoples of this globe to live in harmony and by reducing the ever increasing gap between north and south. And the most effective way to defend freedom is through fully realizing the meaning of justice.

What gives me hope is that this statement's sentiments are being voiced by growing numbers of groups here in the US, including the National Council of Churches, the Green Party, a coalition of one hundred entertainers and civil rights leaders, huge coalitions of peace groups and student organizations, New Yorkers Say No to War, black and white women celebrities featured on Oprah Winfrey's show, and parents and spouses of attack victims. Maybe out of the ashes we will recover a new kind of solidarity; maybe the terrorists will force us, not to mirror them, but to see the world and humanity as a whole.

Letters

Dear *Women's Review*:

How breezy Jane DeLynn is—"For me history also stops at the Holocaust and other exterminations seem mere afterthoughts; been there, done that" [reviewing Sonia Pilcer's *The Holocaust Kid*, September 2001 issue]. If history stops at the Holocaust what's the point of remembering it? And to demand "personal accountability" from the "seemingly ordinary 'decent' citizens of countries like Germany, the USSR, Japan, China, Rwanda, or the former Yugoslavia"—what is this babble? Who is Jane DeLynn to declare whole populations guilty and all survivors of atrocities personally accountable for the atrocity? Has she visited Hiroshima lately? Or lower Manhattan? Been there? Done that? Maybe if she went a little deeper into her Buddhism she'd hit on the First Noble Truth.

Ursula K. Le Guin
Portland, OR

Jane DeLynn replies:

How breezy Ursula Le Guin is re her assumptions of others' experience! As a matter of fact I haven't just visited lower Manhattan lately—I live there, south of Canal, the part that's patrolled by cops and National Guardsmen. I also was in Saudi Arabia, and later Kuwait City, for two months covering the Gulf War. Not that I see the relevance of this. Surely she's not saying atrocities don't count unless they're experienced first-hand, is she? Or that because suffering exists (First Noble Truth) we should do nothing to alleviate it? The whole problem, as I see it, is that we don't have empathy for what doesn't touch us personally—in our own or others' countries—and not just those things that are caused by acts of war.

What most disturbs her is my discussion of personal accountability for citizens in countries that commit large-scale atrocities. As it is, the greater the crime, the less the punishment. In the past, the atrocities were committed mostly by armies, and defeat tended to take care of that, but that is no longer the case. The emphasis on "Nuremberg"-type trials, which focus on a few symbolic scapegoats, only exacerbates the problem by tending to exonerate the many. This satisfies no one's sense of justice, and it certainly has not worked as a deterrent to ward off further atrocities. That it is difficult to show precisely what degree of culpability each citizen has does not

mean that citizens, as a whole, have no culpability.

So—just as a thought experiment and seeing that we cannot imprison millions—suppose we take a rehabilitative approach, and force the perpetrators of evil to atone for that evil by doing good. E.g. after World War Two Germans could have performed two years of humanitarian service: help the Jews build Israel, work in DP camps, help rebuild destroyed Jewish homes and factories, Russian cities, etc. I mean every German, regardless of what they personally did or didn't do in the war, for as members of a community they are atoning for a community to which they belonged with all its privileges and responsibilities. Ditto the Japanese in China, Malaysia, Manchuria. Harder when the atrocities committed are mainly within the borders of one country—but how about making Hutus work as servants in Tutsi families, or Khmer Rouge taking care of the orphaned and the maimed? How about, for that matter, sending US citizens to Vietnam and Cambodia to atone for the harm we perpetrated in those countries?

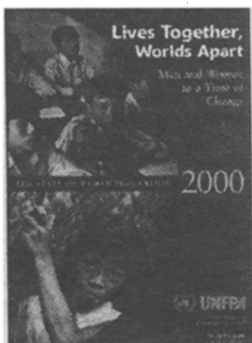
Hopelessly quixotic, I know—but if members of the Mormon faith manage to serve two year missions in foreign countries as a matter of course, should the perpetrators and passive bystanders to evil do less? That such a thing has not even been suggested merely shows how far the world is from even beginning to deal with these serious questions.

The Women's Review of Books welcomes letters from readers, sent via email or regular mail. We print as many letters as we have space for; to make room for as many different voices as possible, we ask readers to keep their letters to a maximum of 300 words. Letters longer than this will most probably be cut, and we may find it necessary to cut even briefer letters. All letters must include name, complete postal address and telephone number, although writers may request that we withhold their names from publication. Letters may be sent to The Editor, *The Women's Review of Books*, Wellesley College, Wellesley MA 02481, or emailed to lgardiner@wellesley.edu.

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