**Occidentalism: causes of the hatred**

One could probably be forgiven for thinking that Occidentalism (namely anti-Westernism) is a new phenomenon seen predominantly in the Middle East as a result of America’s “War on Terror” and consequent invasion of Iraq. But the new wave of Occidentalism seen in the Middle East is not just a knee-jerk reaction to recent events such as the war in Iraq, but in fact a sentiment that goes back much further and spreads far beyond the Middle East. We certainly cannot seek to find a solution to this threat without first understanding what caused it. So the purpose of this essay is to explain, but not to rationalize, the sources and the duration of this movement.

Occidentalism is a disgust for idea of “the City” and all it embodies. It is also a hatred of the commercial liberalism of the West and its comfort-seeking bourgeois. Moreover it is a loathing of the “mind” or psychology of the West which is based so entirely on science and reason. Finally it is abhorrence at the godlessness of the Western way of life.

Occidentalism deplores the idea of the Western city. It appears to embody what the West stands for, and is often referred to as whore-like. This metaphor can be traced back to the story in the Bible of the City of Babylon, which is described as the “mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the Earth” (Rev. 17,5). As an image of the perversion of all that is holy, i.e. a lust for money, for fame and for power, this metaphor in relation to the City is very effective. However, in recent years it has developed into a more literal distaste for the sexual freedoms of the City. Compared to the reticence and seclusion of Muslim women, cities like New York and London seem to exude female sexuality and the image of the brothel is intrinsically linked with the City in art and film.

Our system of capitalism, which is based on the competition for power and money, can be seen as equally whore-like; a lustful, ungodly way of living. Occidentalists might see Western cities as places where man is the ultimate God. The Twin Towers represented the modern equivalent to the Tower of Babylon. They were buildings reaching into the sky where people from all over the world spoke in one language and competed for money, wealth and power. It is, therefore, perhaps not difficult to understand why those of a certain mindset, not in the cosy club of wealthy western powers, might feel warranted in destroying such a building, and how to do so.
in the name of God might allow them to justify an act which by every natural law is unacceptable. By the same token, the Taliban invasion of Kabul was designed to turn what was a City of Man into a City of God, restoring purity to its people. The Taliban government decreed that “women going outside with flashy, ornamental, tight and charming clothes to show themselves…will be cursed by the Islamic Sharia and should never expect to go to Heaven.” Adultery was punishable by stoning, and drinking alcohol by whipping.

This disgust for the Occidental city is certainly not, however, unique to Islam but is seen in many other regimes and religions, most tragically that of Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh. Pol Pot considered that all cities should be demolished or transformed into temples of sacrifice to ancient gods, and that the capitalism and globalisation that could be seen in Cambodian cities like Phnom Penh was worthy of complete destruction: “Our aim is to exterminate capitalism, obliterate it from the face of the earth and make it a thing of the past.” And on this front he was merciless. By the time the Khmer Rouge left the town it was completely empty - its schools had been converted into torture chambers and 2 million people had been worked to death or shot.

Another contentious aspect of Western life that is condemned by Occidentalists is commercialism. This disgust is clearly evident in the words of a Taliban soldier on the Afghan/Pakistani border at the beginning of the American invasion. He said with confidence that the Americans could never win their war because “they love Pepsi Cola, we love death.” This view of the American led Western world as a society driven by a simple desire to live comfortably with no wish to strive for a greater good, is one common to many Occidentalists. It was a mentality described scornfully by Sombart (a 20th century German social scientist) as *komfortismus*, a hankering simply for an easy life. The acquiescent existence of the merchant class, on which capitalism is based, is simply about acquiring material goods and seeking physical pleasure. *Komfortismus* is one of the most hateful things about the West in many people’s eyes. And so when Osama Bin Laden talks to his young warriors about facing their deaths, it is about affronting everything that the West believes in. Rather than choosing to be satisfied by mere existence, as people are seen to in the West, these young men will be fighting for something they truly believe in and are as such empowered above and beyond the West. He said to a Western journalist that the American’s “problem will be how to persuade your troops
to fight whereas our problem will be how to restrain our youth from their turn.\textsuperscript{5} This fanaticism is not a Muslim tradition. Yes, the Koran justifies Holy War, but only in defence of the Islamic state, never was glorification of death for its own sake considered a part of this. In fact it is considered unholy to die for selfish reasons or without having any effect in war. The idea that suicide bombers could enter Heaven by murdering unarmed civilians is an entirely modern and un-Islamic idea that horrifies the majority of Muslims today.

In the eyes of many Occidentalists, the unwillingness to lay down lives and the reliance on the material and unspiritual make the West weak, despite its military power. The leader of Hezbollah, Sheik Hasan Nasrallah said in 2000 when the Israelis withdrew from Lebanon “Israel may own nuclear weapons and heavy weaponry but, by God, it is weaker than a spiderweb.”\textsuperscript{6} This is typical of this view of the West. By being liberal it is seen to celebrate mediocrity. As German nationalist Arthur Moeller van den Bruck suggested, in a liberal society “importance is given to everyday life rather than exceptional life”\textsuperscript{7}. When exceptional life is celebrated, it is always accredited to an individual, whilst the majority are destined to lead undistinguished lives. Politicized religious movements such as we see in the Middle East today, attract people partly because they offer everybody the opportunity to be part of something great, to have greatness associated with them in the form of a country or religious leader, rather than just bestowed upon individuals. Our Western world is the enemy of religious extremists, priest-kings and seekers of heroic salvation in that it is antiheroic and anti-utopian i.e. it is happy to settle for compromise rather than fighting uncompromisingly for an ideal.

These ideas might also be considered a fault of the Western mentality, which Occidentalists see as calculative, efficient, logical, but lacking in all spirituality and understanding of mankind. Plotinus (AD 204-270) was the first to coin the ideas of “discursive thinking” – the thinking of the brain, or intellect, and “nondiscursive thinking”\textsuperscript{8} – the thinking of the soul. In the mind of many Occidentalists, Westerners are well practiced in the art of discursive thinking but totally unable to think nondiscursively. In the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the Russian orthodox church saw the Catholic Church of the West, with its stress on the intellectual, as in stark contrast to the simple, pure-hearted faith of the Russian Orthodox religion. Tolstoy expressed this particularly well when he said “I believe that Russian people, who are less civilized than others - i.e., less intellectually corrupted and still possessed of a dim
conception of the essence of Christian teaching – that the Russian people, and above all agriculturalists will understand at last where the means of salvation lie and will be the first to begin to apply it. Dostoyevsky showed a similar sentiment when he said “what is truly ours is strange to Europe.” In fact this is woefully untrue since most of Russian Occidentalism seems to have been imported from romantic and idealistic strains of German philosophy. The sentiment, however, is one that is clearly felt by many who are not part of what is referred to as the West. Commonly there is a feeling that the West is like a machine - not possessed of anything human and therefore impossible to identify with for those who live in the rest of the world. Images of skyscrapers and modern warfare inevitably enhance this impression and with it the idea of the western mind as cold and calculating but estranged from anything human. As a result, it is much easier to attack and in fact the “War on Terror” is thought to have increased Islamic Jihadism (and therefore we must assume increased Occidentalism), by a factor of seven.

Finally, and in the modern world most dangerously, Occidentalism is often the result of a hatred of the West as the Infidel. Whereas secular Occidentalism takes the form of a hatred of certain ideas and practices of the West, Religious Occidentalism is presented in more Manichaean terms as a war against the idea and manifestation of absolute evil by those who represent absolute good. Islamism, as an ideology, depicts Western civilization as idolatrous barbarism. Because in the West, earthly authority demands political loyalty, earthly powers are seen by some religious Occidentals as an attempt to rival the power of God. Secular governments in the Middle East are therefore often accused by Islamists of being guilty of idolatry or tajhil. These accusations have on many occasions developed into political activism against those in command and against those considered to be behind the Muslim leaders’ secular power i.e. the West. In fact, the West is often accused of being guilty of New Jahiliyya. Jahiliyya used to mean religious ignorance and was used to describe the state of the Arab peoples before the revelations of the Prophet Mohammed. But Ignaz Goldziher, a Muslim scholar, changed the translation to “barbarism”, a much more noxious accusation which has come to mean something not quite human. It is this dehumanizing description that is fuelling the Holy War mentality and may justify suicide in the eyes of some of the young bombers in the Middle East today. Western barbarism is seen by some to be corrupting the spirituality of the East. Therefore the West needs to be destroyed in order to restore the East to God or, more specifically in
the case of extreme Islamists, the Arab world back to the time of Mohammed. Many Occidentalists think that the modernisation of the West has meant the need to apply science and technology to all, leaving no place for higher thinking. So whilst religion is still present in the West, religious Occidentalists believe it has but a nominal significance. These ideas were enshrined by three Islamic ideologues, Talequani, Qutb and Mauduidi, all three of whom have been highly influential in the Arab world over the last century. They all saw the Western lifestyle as the lowest form of existence possible, a pit of idolatry that needed to be eradicated to make way for pure Islam.

Religious Occidentalists also deplore our treatment of women, which they see as unholy. Orthodox Jews and devout Muslims often see the emancipated life-style of Western women as wanton and immoral. The way that Western women are considered to “sell” their bodies to the men’s desires is the ultimate incarnation of Western materialism and obsession with physical beauty and pleasure. Also, as Muslims traditionally consider women to be a man’s “protected jewel,” which bestows honour on a man by the way he protects her, Western men can be seen by their failure to protect women, as without even basic honour.

Occidentalism, as has been demonstrated, stems from many different avenues and has a long and complicated history that reaches far beyond what I have been able to describe in this essay. In summary it concerns a discontent towards the materialism, commercialism and godlessness of the Western World. As for the way to act on the new breed of religious Occidentalism that is emerging predominantly in the Middle East, it seems to me that the answer does not lie in outside intervention or in a “War on Terror” – the West must avoid the temptation to fight fire with fire. Likewise, it is imperative that the West does not allow a fear of Occidentalism to restrict the freedoms it seeks to protect in the name of national security. For then “we have all become Occidentalists”