

they produce “biographical availabilities,” fuel imaginaries, and foster a concomitant affinity for combat. This is brought about by *our* Western societies. Should we be shocked that eventually, for a few individuals, they lead to a desire to deal out death in spectacular fashion? Should we be shocked that they mold the necessary resources and dispositions? When action replaces introspection as a way of adjusting to violence (both perpetrated and endured); when a fascination with the about-face, the passion of conversion, and the promise of transcendence all seem likely to ennoble skills and knowledge acquired in the underground, the threat is clear. Such implosions don’t happen right away, they take time; meanwhile, the seething rage is palpable. Certain journeys must not begin too soon: a nine-year-old can become a “lookout” for 20 euros a day.

In the end, there has to be a “cause.” Islam, however radical, draws the political potency of its imaginary from the circumstances at hand. Though armed jihad is now exploding in France or Syria, this is an “ecological niche” that will be duly replaced in the course of history.² As Scott Atran notes, it conceals something more universal: “There is urgency, excitement, ecstasy, and altruistic exaltation in war, a mystic feeling of solidarity with something greater than oneself: a tribe, a nation, a movement, Humanity.”³ And the forms this “something” takes are determined by a known criterion: doing things as a group, in the name of a brotherhood beyond price.⁴ This anthropological glue underscores how difficult it is for capitalist reasoning to produce transcendent meanings and solidarities for all. It also suggests that schools will never be able to do everything for us; we already probably ask too much of them. It’s hardly surprising that in most Middle Eastern countries, the education of homegrown terrorists is above the average, while in France it is below. These differences testify to the same disappointed expectations toward schooling, in societies where the degree of educational democratization and the scope for economic opportunity – and thus the profile of those rejected – differ.⁵ Unless backup is forthcoming, the thirst for emancipation through instruction can be only partially quenched. We can talk all we like about the “problem of the *banlieues*,” the “problem of Islam,” the “problem of prisons,” or the “problem of education,” but as long as we mistake these symptoms for causes, our view will remain shortsighted. These are merely the delayed consequences of the contradictions of the economic system. The “global problems” are those of wealth distribution, limitless exploitation, infinite accumulation, the absence of moral meaning and direction for a portion of humanity which, because of its ever more glaring functional uselessness, is shunted aside or punished.

Here, perhaps, is a more pertinent issue than any “culture talk”: how long can we continue to push aside a growing number of increasingly combative individuals who have nothing to lose but their lives? How far will the dimensions of the second zone expand?

Here, we have examined its French version. It’s worth comparing it to the United States. At a time when Islamophobia has overtaken the US,⁶ the Islamist threat remains chiefly tied to American geopolitics. It isn’t really a homegrown product.⁷ The American second zone simply doesn’t need Islam or Syria to resolve its contradictions through bloodshed. The history of racial segregation is not the same as that of colonization. The inner cities are not the same as the *banlieues*. There, homicides, overdoses, suicides, deadly confrontations with police, and mass incarceration have already reached proportions comparable to those of many war zones. There, the state scapegoats the poor, who kill each other to claim their piece of the capitalist pie. That is how the problem of surplus is dealt with.⁸ In the US metropolis, combat unfolds through Hollywood imagery, making it almost picaresque. Lacking Islam’s floating political imaginary, it’s now almost invisible. Lacking any international label, there is little spectacle. Yet in both France and the US, the roots of the second zone lie in the same byproduct of the capitalist economy: the market for drugs and its consequences, for the bodies and minds of the most vulnerable.⁹ This “cause” is shockingly absent from debates over the threat to *our* peace – probably because the victims of the collateral damage are separated from those who safely enjoy its benefits by a social border that licenses silence. In a sense, theorizing a radicalization of Islam amounts to an extension of that border, replacing it with catchphrases: the “Islamization of the *banlieue*” and “Muslim anti-Semitism.”

(The political scientists Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog have shown convincingly that Islamic fundamentalism attracts individuals with the same personality traits as those seduced by the ideas of the extreme right. Three traits stand out clearly: a propensity for moral disgust (with an aversion to transgressions against tradition and a desire for social and sexual purity); a need for closure (with an aversion to change and upheaval in the social order); and strong intergroup prejudice (with an aversion to difference). Ideologies are simply the political-psychological reflections of an individual’s relationship to the Other, and unless we think it’s all genetically determined, a crucial question can be posed: how do we ensure that society avoids making its children, as Theodor Adorno put it, “intolerant of ambiguity”?¹⁰ Questions like these might have emerged as a result of the Islamist attacks that have recently struck Western societies,