

BOOK FORUM

“Do not disturb”

Why we need to be awake

Jonathan FRIEDMAN

University of California, San Diego / École des hautes études en sciences sociales

Response to comments by **George BACA**, **Christian GIORDANO**, **Giacomo LOPERFIDO** and **Piero VERENI** on **Jonathan FRIEDMAN**, *Politicamente corretto. Il conformismo morale come regime*, edited by Piero Zanini, translation by Francesca Nicola and Piero Zanini, Milano, Meltemi, 2018, pp. 348.

First, and briefly, I would like to thank the reviewers for reading and criticizing my book. After so many years it is a real pleasure to have the issues discussed. And I, of course, greatly welcome all your attacks. Open discussion is best weapon against PC.

Vereni definitely has an ax to grind, which, although he accuses me of the same tactics as those whom I criticize, is not the case at all (see below). But he may make whatever assumptions he likes. The picture he paints is one in which I am the angry old man, leftist nationalist or rather sovereignist as he seems to presume. The best way for me to deal with his critique given the limited amount of space allowed is simple outline:

1. It is interesting that there is a debate in Italy on whether or not the left can embrace the national or whether it should be cosmopolitan. This is an old debate in the left, which I do discuss in the book, one that divided the early communist movement between national Bolsheviks and internationalists. Now the internationalism of the workers movement is not really the same as the cosmopolitan ideology of today even if there is a certain overlap.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons © Jonathan Friedman

“Do not disturb”: *Why we need to be awake*

2018 | ANUAC. VOL. 7, N° 2, DICEMBRE 2018: 255-263.

ISSN: 2239-625X – DOI: 10.7340/anuac2239-625X-3517



George Soros and Trotsky do not have a lot in common other than what might be called a global intentionality. This is the difference between the International and what in France was referred to many years ago as «l'internationale du capital» (Dockes 1975).

2. Vereni states that PC is dead; that we have gone beyond all that; and that nowadays it's about being "reliable" rather than PC. It is true that some of the manuscript of the book dates from the first years of 2000 and two of the chapters are based on articles written in the late 1990s. I wondered myself over the years whether it was all still relevant. However circumstances have proved to me that the relevance has increased if anything. In my conclusion I do say that we have gone beyond PC, not to a more normal state of openness, but to one of open warfare. To say that PC is extinct is to be out of touch with what is happening in the US and in large parts of Europe, from "trigger warnings", to the new UN migration pact in which it will become more or less illegal to criticize immigration, to the expelling of employees who say the wrong things, all of which I refer to in the Postscript. The content of PC is the same but it is clearly more militarized, as in the current conflict between the "new populists" and the so-called traditional party complexes.

3. Is my argument of the same type as those whom I criticize? Do I make use of the same dichotomies as those whom I criticize? Am I out to kill the cosmopolitans? Is it wrong to make the connection between the new multicultural/hybrid discourses and the elites that I document have fabricated them? Where are the "undocumented, preposterous moral dichotomies" that he claims I make use of? This sounds like a very angry and vicious PC advocate, the kind who has applauded much of the so-called anti-fascist violence that is clearly on the rise. I do make a serious effort to document my arguments. I could have written a chapter on the history of elites, but I didn't think it was necessary in such a book, seeing that there are shelfloads of publications on the subject. Is there a real polarization in Western societies? All the increasing fear talk, not least in university organized conferences about the rise of populism is ample proof that this is real enough, to say nothing of the real politics of parties to the "gilets jaunes".

4. With reference to my use of the notion of "indexicality" to relate PC language to situations of instability, I am not sure that the critique is serious, even from the reviewer's perspective. Is the contrast between normal situations and situations of instability so counter-intuitive? After all I also illustrate the contrast.

5. In the remarks on the fact that Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (KEF in following references) and I have been writing about a global systemic anthropology for so long he finds it paradoxical that we can be so critical of globalists. I find this quite absurd and assume that the reader didn't do a careful job. First, trying to locate globalization within global systemic processes has been one of our priorities and has nothing to do with taking sides. Nowhere is Hannerz accused of leading a globalist movement. That would be absurd! On the contrary, he is described as more of an academic “wannabe”... not the same thing. This is just as false as the accusation that I say that PC is «rooted in multicultural ideology». What I do say and exemplify is that academics and other “intellectuals” have produced much of the ideological texts for the new elites.

6. Have I ever stated that cultural homogeneity is a “natural” phenomenon? Certainly not in this book. I have always discussed all identities as the product of practices and always in the process of production as such. The presentation offered here is a mere parody. If I live in a rental apartment, the history of its tenants does not eliminate my feeling of being home in it. This is typical globalist rhetoric, like accusing anyone who likes his home for being a racist. We are all nomads now!

7. Can it be maintained – as Vereni states – that «Inequality of opportunities, ignorance and utter poverty» is the real problem of multicultural society? It is a common explanation among liberals and leftists, i.e. it's all about class. Of course there is a connection which I have taken up many times, between marginalization of immigrants, poverty and criminality. This is, in fact, a principle argument of some populist parties for stopping mass immigration. They refer to the formation of a new underclass, not least where the labor market cannot absorb the newcomers. But this does not change the fact of ethnicization which occurs in such situations, one in which violence is often directed at the “other” group. And this is a generalized problem and not a product of the racism of the host society, something that has also been well documented. If it were otherwise, all poor people would be automatically redefined as culturally foreign.

8. I take it that my critic does not like my use of graphic representations. I apologize if there are some missing captions or numbers for some of the graphics (I think these are corrected in the longer American version of this book). I can only say that I have not been criticized for precisely these things before. He spends most of his argument on figure 8 in which I try to represent the inverse relation between processes of political-economic hegemonization and processes of cultural integration. First, these are two curves not sinusoid curves. And why is it that cultural integration and political-eco-

conomic hegemony cannot vary inversely to one another? I wrote an entire book about this in 1994 (Friedman 1994) and no one has ever informed me that this relation is impossible, especially in graphic form. Cultural fragmentation that is rampant in the West today but which began in the 1980s is, in my argument, closely related to the declining hegemony of the West, a process that is quite the opposite of what occurred in the period of increasing Western hegemony, something that I have been documenting for the past four decades. From the increasing regionalism in the 1980s, then the ethnic politics of immigration, indigenous politics, all have become increasingly salient, not least the shift in Europe to Islamic based immigration (see Tibi 2002 [1998], 2008) with serious consequences related to ethno-religious violence. This should not seem surprising for those who are not entirely repressed.

9. As for non-nation state social orders, I have been clear that the nation state is a recent phenomenon and in discussing the model to which the graphic refers I state that cultural homogeneity is common in the national order but ethnic hierarchy is the more general pattern of integration in the longer history of state orders. Both of these forms of integration break down in periods of hegemonic crisis. In fact the very proliferation of the nation state in the late 19th century is directly related to the crisis of, for example, the Habsburg Empire. Nationalism here was a product of the fragmentation of empire. The same might even be said for the emergence of nation states in Europe more generally. It has even been ventured that the French Revolution was essentially a nationalist project, pitting the “people” against a cosmopolitan aristocracy (Dubost, Sahlins 2000).

10. Vereni claims that I use a naturalistic rather than historical approach to issues of expansion and contraction of hegemony and that this is all an attempt to sound scientific. If there is anything that sounds “scientific” or natural it is the discovery that this “shit” has happened before, which could give reason to be a little suspicious about the functioning of the world or global system. Perhaps, as he says, he has read too much of the “Po-Mo” literature, especially if he thinks that using graphs is some kind of fake science.

George Baca’s discussion of the book is, of course, more to my liking and his criticism is thoroughly argued and I agree with much of his argument. However his focus on the issue of multiculturalism as a facet of the nation state is contrary to my own understanding of developments in Sweden as in other nation states in the West at least. There are a number of issues here. First, let me try to specify more clearly the nature of the argument concerning multiculturalism and immigration, not least because it is related to the

global systemic model that Baca seems to be in agreement with. Mass migration of populations with so-called different cultures, leads at first to a situation of cultural segregation and even enclavization, but this is dissolved when the host society is expanding so that immigrant groups are included in the national economy along with the host population. There are variations on this process, from the strongly assimilationist republican model of France to the more pluralist model of England and the even more complex model of the United States. So it is clear that the nation state has always absorbed new populations. But no one presumably would deny that there are serious contradictions involved that are distributed along a scale of increasing/decreasing integration. However the argument in the book is basically that global elite formation since the 1980s has been characterized by an identification of the latter out of the nation. In previous eras this was not an issue since aristocracies were not rooted in local territorial entities (although even that varied historically). Elites who have splendid residences all over the world and are married globally have been discussed before (Wagner 1999, Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1996, Friedman 2012). Their discourses define themselves as global citizens and their opposites are referred to as, e.g. “terriens”, terrestrials who inhabit limited spaces to which they are strongly attached (Wagner 1999: 204). This kind of discourse has been adapted by the new elites as well. I do try and demonstrate the extent to which some politicians identify out of the nation, and the section of the Swedish constitution which I quote recategorizes Swedes as an ethnic group among others and claims that we need a new way or forging unity in the new multi-ethnic world. Now one might well argue that this is still about the nation, but its content is greatly transformed in a way that turns political elites into a group positioned above the population over which it rules. The “will of the people” (now associated with Nazism) is transformed into the “wills of the peoples”. This political change is accompanied by a blade-runner like lower class formation that does not act as a subject but is divided into multiple groups with different cultural and even social orders that are maintained by multicultural decree as well as local circumstances, where criminality, aggression and violence increase and where no unity is achieved except within the local groups themselves. Could a national unity be forged out of this as occurred to some extent in the US as a result of WWII? That could only be realized in a world of nationalistic states and there is evidence that this is not the case although there are clear nationalist tendencies today, usually classified as populism.

The model of the EU is, to my mind, an excellent expression of this post-national elite tendency. Macron is its foremost symbol, combining his desire to be at Versailles with his attack on nationalism as opposed to “patriotism” whatever that is supposed to mean. Perhaps he means “for king and country” but his country seems to be the EU and he is intent on giving it its own army. The argument I think I made explicit was that there is a critical difference between a multicultural state and a nation state which resides in the dynamics of identification with the larger political unit and with its cultural content. Of course in countries such as the US the national culture is thin compared with Europe although there is a repertoire of attitudes, behaviors, and even forms of sociality that are quite distinct. Americans do recognize one another when they travel the world. The ethnicization of the country may have changed this significantly so that what was formerly American is now understood as white. In both the US and Europe, the contemporary multicultural trend has led in the direction of pluralism in the sense of segregation, enclavization and even cultural warfare. The new cosmopolitan elites, more visible in Europe, perhaps, are the main bastion of multicultural politics. While the latter is included geographically within the same state, I would not call this a mere variation on the nation state as such. The nation state project was also elite and did not emanate from some pre-defined “people”, of course, but the content of the project was quite different. As Benedict Anderson wrote «there is no tomb of the unknown Marxist» (1983: 10); the nation works in cultural terms but not the plural society. The Korean case is very interesting in this context because it is an example of an expansive order able to integrate foreigners into the workforce, which is the opposite of the Swedish situation as in other European countries. I wonder if the Korean state uses immigrants as a symbol of the good as opposed to Korean ethnics. Does this push me into the arms of cultural conservatives? Absolutely! But my point is to get the description right not to take sides. Lenin was a real cultural conservative... typical of Marxists once upon a time. As for Swedish elites and their politics, it’s true that they made a major change in the 1950s as they tried to become the world’s good guy, a position that they have tried to maintain, but this had nothing to do with multiculturalism and the internal restructuring of the country that occurred in the late 1970s and 1980s. As for my anguish... well maybe at the time but this is very much “anguish at a distance”. Was Kajsa the leader of an anti-immigrant group? Well they implied in the newspaper that she was leader of PWMI¹ and I would add that this was not so important since the group disappeared within a year or so. It

1. PWMI stands for the People's Will and Mass Immigration (Folkviljan och massinvandring).

was more of an event than a movement. As for the exploitation of Third World migrants in Sweden, my point was explicitly that this was not the case since this was in no way labor migration but rather welfare migration and it was quite explicit at the time. There is even a Ph.D thesis about how papers were prepared in West Africa for entry into different European countries depending on the scale from work to welfare.

Both Loperfido and Baca indicate that I seem to have been emotionally involved with this subject. It is true that I would have never indulged in this subject matter out of a purely intellectual interest even if I think I would have been wrong not to have done so. Perhaps I was lucky in having been thrown into this situation which was quite an ordeal. On the other hand both my wife and I have a history of being apparently provocative to those in power, first from issues of Marxism in the late 1960s and 1970s, then global systems and now this! What a pain in the ass. Being a provocative person seems to come naturally to some, I suppose, but this is no explanation. Perhaps it's hubris, but I do think that science and political correctness are totally incompatible.

This book was not meant as an ethnography in the normal sense, but an anthropological analysis of a situation. I should clearly have developed the issue of method in the book but I suppose I was too engaged in my argument to really care enough about the methodology. I think that some of these issues are resolved in the longer English version of this book where I have dealt more explicitly with some of the anthropological problems involved in this research. As for the question of elites, who they are and where they come from, this is also dealt with in more detail in the English version. The argument is basically that there is a transformation of elite identities in the period following the 1980s in which the latter begin increasingly to identify out of the nation state. This is not only Swedish, of course, and there are plenty of examples of the phenomenon that I describe. The context of this is what I refer to as double polarization, a simultaneous fragmentation of cultural identities and a polarization between elites and people and even between new upper classes and former working classes who are downwardly mobile in this period. I do mention the fact that Sweden in the post-World War II period was known for its very egalitarian political order in which the political class was hardly existent as an autonomous actor, where their wages were low compared to other social groups and where they were accessible to all citizens. This changed rapidly after the 1980s as the country as a whole became significantly more stratified. It is this change that I discuss at some length in the book. And where does PC come into it all. It is not merely a tool of the rising elites. Stalin's PC is not the equivalent of today's PC. The former is an expression of raw power, the latter is built into a mech-

anism of shaming which works within the forms of sociality that already exist in a particular society which accounts the differences between the places in which it occurs. It doesn't appear as a top-down phenomenon although it may well be orchestrated in such terms. Rather it occurs in relatively "egalitarian and cooperative" milieu such as the contemporary academy. What is significant here is the conjunction of a major ideological shift that is linked to the rise of new elites. That shift is crucial; one that takes us from the rise of cultural identities in the late 1970s to the ethnicization of the social order, so that cultural identity eclipses class identity. The globalization of elites entails their encompassment of the cultural fragmentation over which they preside. This takes the form of multiculturalism, the celebration of diversity, especially in symbolic terms, in the accumulation of cultural specificity in art objects, artefacts, home furnishing all of which is a logical subcategory of cultural cosmopolitanism. PC comes into play in situations where ideologies are vying for dominance, in this case the new cosmopolitan multiculturalism. Those who identify with such ideologies are often academics, cultural personalities, artists, media "intellectuals" who are not elites in themselves but identified with the latter. It implies a moralization of the social field and the use of techniques of exclusion to secure dominance. All this is necessary since both the ideology and the social positions implied in the latter are not clearly institutionalized but, on the contrary, quite fragile. So to answer Loperfido's question as to who is being defended by PC, it is both the elites and the set of cultural representations with which they have identified. This is about the attempt to turn a particular cultural identity into a dominant ideology.

Giordano's review, which is perhaps too flattering, but I enjoy it of course, concentrates on what he calls «anthropological correctness» and which he locates in the emergence in the 1980s of the self-critical tendency of the "reflexive turn" associated with Marcus and Clifford (1986). The thrust of this, which he sees as positive for the field, was the critique of anthropological authority, the third person defined description of the "Other" as something different although not lower unless we are willing to forget the pervasive relativism of much of the history of anthropology. Even Geertz is attacked, although, especially in the case of Marcus it is not a substantial criticism. In my understanding Geertz is the real problem here since he insisted on the complete authority of the anthropologist and the entire project of writing culture is really the Geertzian mission. No multivocalism is welcome here no matter how literary the style. Part of this development included something more, not just the reflexive turn but the post-colonial globalist turn which came later and which Geertz, of course, was quite against. I cannot but agree

with his discussion of anthropological correctness which is the form that it took in our discipline; all about terminology and what can be said. I recall of course, that Sami did and often today also insist that they are Laps and not Sami which is a language label only. And I remember seeing the same kind of comments from the San who preferred to be called Bushmen. It is quite a story, this, quite absurd and shameful as well. When KEF and I worked in Hawaii we had issues with the white members of the movement who wanted us not to discuss matters close to the lives of people in the village where we worked on the grounds that it was akin to racism. The villagers were furious about this. So yes, the “do-goodery” populism invoked by Giordano is a serious threat to research, but I would caution against calling this populism, since it is very much limited to academics and I would say academic elites even if the latter term has been deemed incorrect by some. Popular among some even if it is based on a culture of fear, it is not the same as the classic notion of populism, even if I do understand what the reviewer has in mind. The populism that is scaring the crap out of the new elites is one that has its roots in movements like the famous American movement of that name, which from the late Nineteenth century was composed of workers and farmers and opposed both the capitalist and political classes.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Benedict, 1983, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London & New York, Verso.
- Clifford, James, George Marcus, eds, 1986, *Writing culture. The poetics and politics of ethnography*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press.
- Dubost, Jean-Francois, Peter Sahlins, 2000, *Et si on faisait payer les étrangers ? Louis XIV, les immigrés et quelques autres*, Paris, Flammarion.
- Dockes, Pierre, 1975, *L'internationale du capital*, Paris, PUF.
- Friedman, Jonathan, 1994, *Culture, identity and global process*, London, Sage
- Friedman, Jonathan, 2012, The dialectic of cosmopolitanization and indigenization in the contemporary world system: Contradictory configurations of class and culture, in *The scope of anthropology: Maurice Godelier's work in context*, Laurent Dousset, Serge Tcherkezoff, eds, New York, Berghan.
- Pinçon, M., M. Pinçon-Charlot, 1996, *Les grandes fortunes*, Paris, Payot.
- Tibi, Bassem, 2002 [1998], *The challenge of fundamentalism: Political Islam and the new world disorder*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Tibi, Bassem, 2008, *Political Islam, world politics and Europe*, New York, Routledge.
- Wagner, A.C., 1999, *Les nouvelles élites de la mondialisation: une immigration dorée en France*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.