



1. "Postcard of War #2/18. Based on General Weygand Street, Beirut" from "Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer" by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

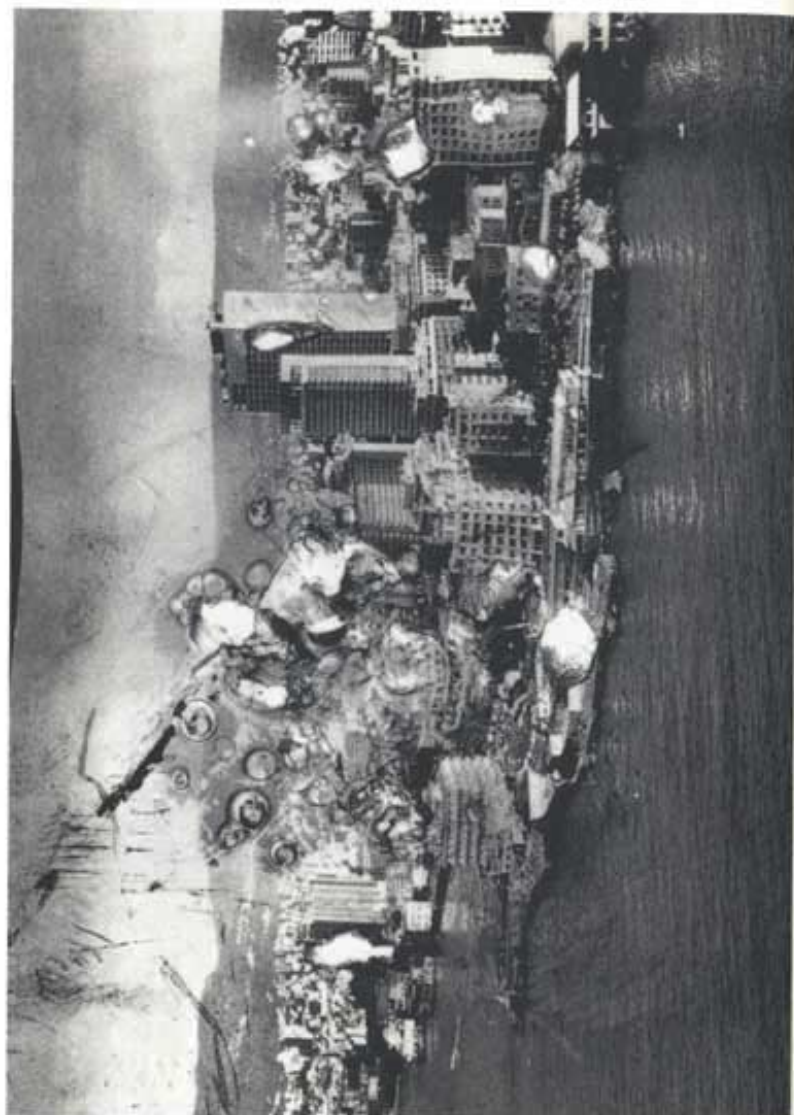
ONE

A GLOBAL PUBLIC SPHERE?*

September 11 has transformed irrevocably the context in which we as intellectuals speak. The acts of terror on that day were no invasion from the outside by a barbaric evil "other" but were, rather, produced fully within a coeval and common world. We are witnessing the mutation of a new, global body-politic, and if we intellectuals are to have any potency as part of its thinking organ, it will be in discourses that refuse to separate academic life from political life, and that inform not just national opinion, but a global public debate.

To think and write for a global public sphere is not an easy task.

* This chapter was presented at the conference of the journal, *Radical Philosophy*, London, November 7, 2001, and first published in the journal, No. 111 (January/February 2002).



3. "Postcard of War #12/18. Based on Beirut: General View with the Mountains" from *Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer* by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

TWO

CRITICAL THEORY AND ISLAMISM*

It is with deep respect for my colleagues and friends here today that I speak not about a past theoretical tradition, but about the present historical situation. I am aware that we may not share the same political sensitivities at the moment, sensitivities that run very deep. No one knows the future implications of what is now in process in the world. When it comes to history, we have no predictive science. This is as it should be, because the very concept of history asserts that human beings have agency, hence the possibility that human development is not predetermined – not by nature, nor by God, nor by the totality of history itself.

* This chapter is a revised and expanded version of a talk presented at the conference: "How Does Critical Theory Matter Now?", organized by Professor Helmut Dubiel at New York University, December 7–8, 2001. I am especially grateful for the challenging criticisms of Seyla Benhabib and Saba Mahmood.

and the Politics of Feminism," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

19. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*. Her perspective has been seen as dichotomizing women's and men's Islam, dismissing too completely Islamic Family Law as a rigid and quintessentially patriarchal institution; women have also used this law in daily practice to their advantage. (See Annelies Moors, "Debating Islamic Family Law," in *Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*, eds Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker [Boulder: Westview Press, 1999], p. 143.)
20. Zillah Eisenstein, "Feminisms in the Aftermath of September 11," *Social Text* 72, 20, 3 (Fall 2002): 79–100.
21. See here the pathbreaking work of Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
22. The Islamic Republic of Iran has provided more reproductive freedom for women than is endorsed by the conservative wing of the US Republican Party. See Esposito and Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, pp. 68 and 85.
23. Zillah Eisenstein, "Not In Our Name," November 29, 2001, unpublished op-ed piece for the *New York Times*. Eisenstein's current writing on feminisms in various cultural-political contexts supports differences in feminist practices while remaining uncompromising in its radical vision of women's equality.
24. Nationalist politics have hindered regional economic unity in the Middle East, despite repeated attempts (see Michael C. Hudson, ed., *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration* [New York: Columbia University, 1999]). It would appear to be in the interest of other actors – the United States, the European Union, foreign transnationals – to keep the region fragmented. If economic policy were politicized through Islamism as a transnational force, the effectiveness of these actors in the region would be seriously challenged.



Beirut Souvenir

4. "Postcard of War #13/18" (fragment).

Abdallah Farah is a photographer whose procedure illustrates the difficulty of making images during and after the war. Three periods can be distinguished through the course of his work. In 1964, Abdallah Farah is only 16 years of age when he joins the photography studio of his father, a former assistant of *Dalati and Nohra*. Studio Wahed is located in Bab Idriss in downtown Beirut. In 1968, Studio Wahed receives an order from the Lebanese Tourism Agency for a series of 24 postcards on Beirut, as well as twelve illustrations to be used in the official calendar of 1969. The orders continue in the following years.

The photographs shot over a period of six months for the postcards attempt to reveal the most beautiful tourist sites in Beirut: The city center, the bank district, the cinemas, the souks, the hotels, the beaches, the modern infrastructure, the urban monuments, the city's most important avenues, and so on. Some aerial views were also taken with the assistance of the Ministry of Tourism and the army.



5. "Postcard of war #9/18. Based on Hotel Phoenicia Intercontinental"

The idea behind the project, which was wholeheartedly supported by the prominent hotels, was to expose the city's modernity, its diversity and its richness. The quality of this work was such that it was regularly reprinted (and imitated). We still find reproductions of these postcards on sale today in Beirut's bookshops, even if some of the monuments they depict have disappeared. Abdallah Farah was certainly not the only one who produced postcards, but his work remains among the most distinguished.

After the Civil War breaks out, in the spring of 1976, besieged and invaded by militiamen from different factions, Studio Wahed is destroyed and subsequently burned to the ground. Abdallah succeeds in rescuing some material, a fraction of his negatives including those of the postcards and hundreds of rolls of virgin films, unshot and unexposed.

For some unexplained reason, Farah keeps quiet about embarking on a new venture.

Three years after the war begins and a few months after his father's death, he begins to damage his postcard negatives, burning them little by little – an intentional process of deterioration – as if he is seeking a way to have their state conform to his present. He imitates the destruction of buildings, which are progressively disappearing before his eyes, ravished by bombardment and street battles. In doing so, he inflicts yet another form of destruction. He spends his nights slowly burning his calendar and postcard clichés, making them correspond to his shattered reality.

Through a process, which integrates within it part hazard part accident, these "damaged" images appear like new photographs. Through the traces of fire and light an indexical rapport is recreated.

By the time Abdallah finishes burning all these images, the official peace ending the war is proclaimed in Beirut.



6. "Postcard of War #5/18. Based on St. Georges Hotel"

During the war, often confined to the house or to the bomb shelter, Abdallah Farah seldom goes out (as he himself says he has nothing of the adventurer or the war reporter). During these long years, he mostly photographs the people close to him, his neighbors, and neighboring places. He uses the unshot rolls of film salvaged from his studio; but, short on products, fixatives, and most of all, paper, he is not able to develop his images. The photographed films begin to pile up, waiting for a better day, for a moment when the shelling will stop, and Abdallah would be able to go out. Since and despite the end of the war, he maintains this habit. He doesn't develop his images any more. It suffices just to shoot them. The reels accumulate, without him feeling a need to reveal them. He nonetheless documents precisely each photograph he takes in a small notebook, describing it thoroughly. They are there to be read, leaving an immense space for the imagination. He entitles this work the "invisible image" or the "image in the text." For us, a little obsessed, we see it as a latent image.

From Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer and Latent Image by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige.

Susan Buck-Morss enables us to discover the Islamists as our neighbours: neither as fundamentalist fanatics unable to cope with modernity, nor as the exotic authentic Other, but as people sharing the same global predicament as ourselves. Based on this insight, she breaks out of the boring multiculturalist problematic of respect for and openness towards the Other, shifting the focus to the common struggle in which we should all participate beyond the cultural divide. If this book is not allowed to *explode* in political debates, the contemporary Left can close the store and erase itself as a relevant political agent!

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

With one act of courageous theoretical intervention, Susan Buck-Morss surpasses the thick psychological barrier that has for a long time discouraged critical theorists from thinking creatively in an Islamist context. She now joins her colleagues from the other side of the divide, Muslim intellectuals who also for quite some time have tried to converse with critical theory. *Thinking Past Terror* is the inaugural site of a creative conversation that is no longer limited to disciplinary and area specialists and marks the commencement of a critical discourse on the most vital issues of our terrorized times.

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SUSAN BUCK-MORSS

THINKING PAST TERROR


VERSO

THINKING PAST TERROR
Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left



SUSAN BUCK-MORSS