

Europe's Bloodless Universalism

By Theodore Dalrymple

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By now the story of Omar Ismail Mostefai, the first of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks to be named, is depressingly familiar. One could almost have written his biography before knowing anything about him. A petty criminal of Algerian parentage from what all the world now calls the *banlieue*, he was sustained largely by the social security system, an erstwhile fan of rap music, and a votary of what might be called the continuation of criminality by other means, which is to say Islamism and the grandiose purpose in life that it gives to its adherents. For feeble minds, the extremity of the consequences for self and others serves as some kind of guarantee that their cause is just.

Nor was the connection to Molenbeek, a neighborhood in Brussels where at least three of the terrorists lived, much of a surprise to anyone. Brussels—the “capital of Europe,” be it remembered—is slightly more than a quarter Muslim, and nearly 100 percent of Molenbeek’s residents are Muslims of North African background. When a few years ago I was shown around the place, my acquaintances told me it was virtually extraterritorial as far as the Belgian state was concerned—apart from the collection of social security, of course.

All the women wore headscarves, and the young men dressed like American rap music fans. The police rarely entered and were far more concerned not to offend Muslim sensibilities—for example, by not being seen to eat during Ramadan—than to find or capture the miscreants who made the area so dangerously crime-ridden. Businesses there (so my guides told me) paid no taxes but were not investigated for evasion by the tax authorities: it was the tax authorities who did the evading.

Everyone knew Islamist preaching and plotting were rife in Molenbeek, but nothing was done to stop it, in order to keep the tense and fragile peace going as long as possible. Sympathy for terrorism was the norm—or, it would be more correct to say, that no one dared publicly voice opposition to it.

If my informants were right, this was the perfect place for psychopaths with an illusion of purpose to flourish and make plans undisturbed by the authorities, while being supported by the welfare state. Events since have demonstrated that they did not exaggerate (as, to my regret, I rather suspected at the time that they did, for alarm is so often disproportionate to the reality that gives rise to it). Recall that the terrorists who were disarmed on the train from Amsterdam to Paris in August came from Molenbeek, as did the man who killed four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014. More volunteers to fight for ISIS have come from Molenbeek than anywhere else in Europe.

The Belgian Prime Minister, [Charles Michel](#), has now virtually admitted that the area was extraterritorial to Belgium, and out of all control. The time had come “to focus more on repression,” he said. But whether the determination or sufficient political unity necessary to carry it out will last is doubtful. Repression requires discrimination; we live in a regime in which murderers may come and go, but social security goes on forever.

Do we have the stomach to tar many people with the same brush? That we now know that terrorists among the Syrian refugees have entered Europe, which was precisely the objection of those opposed to accepting them (who were vilified by immigration-liberals for their moral obtuseness or nastiness, and have been proven right, which is even more unforgivable), now raises the disturbing question: How many innocent people should Europe accept for one suicide bomber?

A striking thing about the immigration debate before the massacres of November 13 was the almost complete absence of references, at least by the “respectable” politicians, to the national interest of the various countries. The debate was couched in Kantian moral terms. Sweden, for example, which has no

imperative to take refugees other than moral grandiosity and its desire to feel itself virtuous, has had a hard enough time integrating the immigrants it has already taken; their entry has made that country one with nearly the highest crime rate in Western Europe. Current family re-unification laws in Europe mean that the numbers any country agrees to take will soon be expanded.

There is a real moral dilemma, of course. Recently in Bodrum, on the Aegean coast of Turkey, I was approached by a family of four Syrian refugees begging for alms. The father of the family showed me his Syrian passport (precisely of the kind so easily forged by the terrorists), but all I could see was his wife and two small children who were obviously bereft of support and who would obviously suffer without charity. That day, 22 refugees were reported drowned as they tried to reach Turkey by boat, an occurrence so regular that it was not reported in the Western press. No one undertakes such a journey lightly: only safety or an egocentric thirst for “martyrdom” could impel him.

Europe has nothing equivalent to national interest, and if it did, it would have no way of acting on it. A kind of bloodless universalism has rushed in to fill the vacuum, whose consequences are now visible to all. The first thing President Hollande tried to do after the attacks was close the borders; he now talks (understandably, of course) of national security. He talks also of defeating ISIS militarily, but France, along with all of the other European countries, has run down its armed forces in the name of the social security that paid for at least some of the terrorists.

Just because Europe’s weakness is clear doesn’t mean that our heads are clear. Three days after the attacks, the most influential newspaper in Britain (and in certain ways the best), the liberal-Left *Guardian*, ran 40 small photos of some the victims, with the headline, “Killed in the Pitiless Name of Terrorism.”

They were not killed in the pitiless name of terrorism, of course. They were killed in the pitiless name of Islam—not the only possible interpretation if Islam, no doubt, but still in its name. In the cowardice of this headline was the encapsulated all the weakness of Europe, a real encouragement to the terrorists.

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