What Is Going On?

by Joel Hirst (September 2018)

The Protest, Farley Aguilar, 2015

Adorning the walls of my living room are pictures I have taken, printed large and glossy, of places across a world which has grown small. I often gaze at them, representing as they do—at least to me—the history of the rise and fall of countries and civilizations each telling me something about myself and, in turn, about others as well. Of those who rub up against me in the supermarket or on overcrowded subways or hurl insults at me over social media. About how ruin happens. But ruins captured on aluminum and put on display for an erstwhile guest to comment on do not capture the sadness or anxiety of how things fall away; the photographs of great buildings now empty or become instead curiosities for the

tourists. “Please place your backpacks and purses in the alcoves and adjust your headsets to the correct language, the tour is about to begin.” Swarms of High School students shuffling along, faces glued to their smartphones: Da Vinci and Jackson Pollock, denuded of meaning, naked of significance product of learning married to understanding—wisdom it was called before that term was christened as bigotry. “Bathrooms are to the right, please walk through the gift shop.”

That is if those places are lucky; the Latin Quarter inside the ring of newly-occupied Paris or walking the policed throngs of Sultanahmet’s ancient quarter where the chariots rode—Elysium held secure by wire-and-razor or the equally restrictive values of property in a society which no longer has any time for the riffraff, we used to call them “my fellow Americans.” The places I have often snapped are—due to perhaps the unique nature of my work—no longer on anyone’s curiosity list as they slip away from the Westphalian political maps printed in places safe and cold and clean, maps which tell only lies as “A pre-modern formlessness governs the battlefield, evoking the wars in medieval Europe (…), which ushered in the era of organized nation-states.” States that existed in Europe but never, not really, in the third world; where in truth maps represent more “(…) the Victorian atlas (…) consist(ing) of a series of coastal trading posts (…) and an interior that, owing to violence, volatility, and disease, is again becoming, as Graham Greene once observed, ‘blank’ and ‘unexplored,’” as Robert Kaplan has eloquently written[1]. But, I trekked these areas, to a certain degree, and I captured them for my walls—trophies of a man who ventured off the map to the places *hic sunt dracones* (where there be dragons).

Timbuktu besieged by jihadis, *Sankore Place* alone and quiet

where wizened men once debated Aristotle and Ibn Khaldun; Lubero, that most lost outpost of the Belgians under the imposing shadow of the Rwenzori mountains from which they administered a tiny corner of the Congo, now home to rape and the Hutu *genocidairefront saying "This is American Beauty?" What about Iranian beauty? What about Iranian freedom? All this comes from the new philosophy which interprets all actions subjectively through the lens of oppression, amalgamated into one gooey mass of oppression greater and more prescient than the smaller oppressions of the also-oppressed. All judgement is suspended in order to make a place for the new faith.*

The greatest oppressors, historically through colonization abroad and culture at home—so it goes—are Christians and their church. Then, as if through osmosis and buttressed by so great a vitriol, these same post-modern cultural Marxist subjectivist thoughts move into all other areas of public life. A refugee is brought in, even as there is evidence that they are a clear and present danger to the welfare of the host communities because their collective victimization "trumps" individual oppression in which that refugee has been engaged, and certainly is a greater issue of concern than the recipient community's safety. A baker must bake a cake though he considers the cake in question objectionable, because the recipient is part of the oppressed; assaults on restaurants that dared to do exactly what the same people demanded of the baker—serve whoever comes in—are applauded in a bait and switch that can only be understood examined through the lens of the new philosophy, new faith. Selective outrage, selective enforcement of the law, selective compassion—with the beneficiaries being only those who self-identify as oppressed.

The greatest oppression, therefore, "trumps" (no pun intended)

lesser oppressions as decided by nouveau prophets at public universities, the media, and Hollywood. Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" is in full flowering.

As in all faiths, there is a process of penance. The Catholic Church of old called them indulgences; in Islam they are *tawba*