

GGB REPRINTS

ALISON WEIR
HAMID DABASHI

THE NEW MACCARTHYSM

Forget reds under the bed, there's Arabs in the attic

by **Hamid Dabashi**

published 18 October 2003
in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*

*Fear of terrorism is fuelling a campaign of hate against Arabs in the
US.*

*Columbia University professor Hamid Dabashi describes his personal
experience*

Late in June 2002, I came back to New York from a fortnight's trip to Japan to find my voicemail flooded with racist, obscene and threatening messages.

"Hey, Mr Dabashi," bellowed an angry voice, "I read about you in today's New York Post. You stinking, terrorist Muslim pig. I hope the CIA is studying you so we can kick you out of this country back to some filthy Arab country where you belong. You terrorist bastard."

I subsequently discovered that on June 25, a certain Daniel Pipes had written an article in a New York tabloid attacking! me and a number of other academics, identifying us as anti-American, anti-Israeli and pro-terrorist. Among the charges that Pipes had brought against me was that I had cancelled one of my classes to attend a rally on behalf of the Palestinians. The rally was in connection with the April 2002 incursion into Jenin by Israeli forces. An Amnesty International expert had told the BBC that there was evidence pointing to a massacre.

Since the 2001 al-Qaida attacks, such reports do not find their way onto the major US networks. It is only through the miracle of the internet that ordinary people in the US have a chance to transcend the rampant tribalism of the major networks, challenge the monolingualism of their culture and search for a different angle on world events. Those who manage to do so then seek a more community-based venue to share what they have learnt. It is in this context that I and a number of colleagues chose to speak at the rally.

As soon as I came back from the rally I received an email from Rabbi Charles Sheer, who directs the Hillel Jewish Center at Columbia University, demanding that I submit to him the text of my speech. I answered that my speech was from scattered notes, and that I had published my views on the matter extensively elsewhere. I subsequently learnt that the rabbi had gone on a rampage, calling chairs and deans of my junior colleagues demanding an explanation as to why the faculty had attended such a rally.

I wrote an article about Sheer for the students' newspaper The Spectator and a flood of messages from students and alumnae promptly clogged the emails and voicemail of Columbia administration demanding that I apologise to him. I did not.

Instigated by the rabbi, some of my students went to the offices of the dean and the university ombudsman registering complaints against me. They were told I had done nothing wrong. I spent the following May and the early part of June 2002 lecturing widely in the US on Afghanistan and the terror of the US empire. The rest of the summer was relatively calm, but the threatening voicemails flared up whenever something happened in Palestine. When on July 31 a bomb in the student cafeteria at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem killed seven people, the following message, dated August 1 2002, was a typical example of voicemails I received: "I hope you are proud of your Palestinian heroes now, you ****ing animal. Killing college students, OK. How do you like it, if someone ripped your ****ing class, you pig!"

Late in August, I awoke to about 256 new messages. Startled, I opened my inbox and noted that the article Pipes had written about me in June was now emailed to me spasmodically hundreds of times, clogging my email account and preventing my account from receiving regular mails. This was the beginning of a nightmare that paralysed my email communications at the busiest time of the academic year. I informed Columbia security and computer technicians. They massively increased my quota and blocked the server from which these emails were initiated. They also taught me how to save these spasmodic emails on a separate file, which they in turn burned onto CD and gave to detectives in New York Police Department. But the onslaught of emails was relentless. They were coming at a faster rate than I could file them. Our technicians created a fictitious email for me - but it wasn't much help because nobody knew me by that name.

I soon found out that every person named by Pipes in that June article in the New York tabloid was the target of this spamming. The mystery was solved when I received a phone call from a reporter on the Chronicle of Higher Education and then another from a reporter on the New York Times, informing me that I had been featured on a website that Pipes had created called Campus Watch.!

Pipes was, of course, a bit late, because soon after September 11, Lynne Cheney, the wife of vice-president Dick Cheney, had created a list of what she called "suspicious professors", on which I was told that my friend and colleague Eric Foner and I had been posted for what she considered our anti-American views. But Campus Watch had added anti-Israeli and pro-terrorist charges, and now the spamming began to skyrocket and the voicemails turned positively nasty.

"Listen, you Muslim terrorist bastard," proclaimed one of the myriad emails I received subsequent to this website's launch, "we are watching you. We know who you support. We know you are the enemy of this country, and we are going to get you. We know where you live, we know where you work. Goodbye."

As the voicemail and email harassments proceeded apace in October and November, I was busy with a number of my colleagues at Columbia with a majordivestment campaign urging our university to clear its portfolio of stocks in companies that sell military hardware to Israel. Our divestment campaign was squarely defeated by an anti-divestment campaign that mobilised hundreds more signatures from very wealthy donors to the university. Before we had even submitted our petition to the Committee for Socially Responsible Investment before which Rabbi Sheer had appeared, Columbia's president dismissed our petition and killed the campaign.

Towards the end of the semester the spamming had subsided, replaced by the spammer/s subscribing me to every pornographic site in the cyber universe, or else ordering penis-enlargement medications, Viagra pills and Rolex watches for me. This was not as bad and fairly entertaining to delete.

I spent the rest of the autumn semester preparing for the most comprehensive retrospective on Palestinian cinema ever. I invited a brilliant young Palestinian filmmaker, Annemarie Jacir, to help curate the festival, and, in preparation for our event in the first week of the spring semester 2003, we created a major website on Palestinian cinema.

To prevent the sabotaging of our festival, a small band of community activists and I waited until the night before the commencement of the spring semester and then flooded the campus with our posters and the email listserves with our announcements. We put an announcement in The Nation and the Village Voice.

The festival was one of the most spectacular success stories of my academic career and was attended by thousands of students and members of the community. In the course of the festival, we were able to screen 33 films, including three world premieres.

Our website, dreamsofanation.com, meanwhile, had literally millions of hits, mostly from Palestine and Israel, followed by the Pentagon in Washington DC. We never suspected movie fans in such militant quarters.!

But the festival also brought more harassment. In January, our departmental administrator said she had received "an obnoxious phone call" from the Hillel Center about the festival, threatening to send a barrage of hate calls about the conference our way.

Three days later, someone from the Columbia University development and alumnae relations office called to say that the office had received complaints about the festival from some of our alumnae. Two days later, my junior colleague Gil Anidjar, who had nothing to do with the festival, received a phone call from the university president's office asking about the event. The same day, Gil received a voicemail from an outside caller objecting to the festival.

In a matter of hours we learnt that an organisation calling itself the Conservative Club of Columbia University had issued a statement against the festival, calling on its members to call Columbia president Lee C. Bollinger (and President George W. Bush) to object to! it. In this statement, the Columbia Conservative Club had misidentified the chairman of my department as Gil Anidjar.

On the morning of January 23, the day the festival began, I received a phone call from John Murolo of Columbia security, informing me that Rabbi Sheer had told him that Mordechai Levy was on his way from Brooklyn to disrupt the festival and the conference. Murolo claimed Levy was a criminal thug and suggested we increase security.

On the evening of January 23, I was interviewed for The Jewish Week newspaper about the festival. The reporter also spoke to Rabbi Sheer who, on an unrelated subject, said that "the appointment of Rashid Khalidi of the University of Chicago [as Edward Said professor of Arabic Studies] affirmed his belief that Columbia's Middle East department is biased against Israel".

He added that "Columbia is not a healthy place to study the Middle East", and said that the ! dean of the school for international and public affairs agreed that the problem of biased Middle East departments "is endemic to the field [of Middle East studies] and not just at Columbia".

The dean categorically denies having ever said anything remotely resembling what Rabbi Sheer attributed to her.

Immediately after the publication of these lies about me and my department in *The Jewish Week*, the racist, obscene and threatening voicemails increased dramatically. Columbia security brought a detective from the New York Police Department to my office for a long interview, and measures were taken to protect me.

In February, Bollinger's office called me to report a flood of phone calls objecting to the film festival and to ask what they should do.

A week later, the office of public affairs rang with a similar query and asked if I could do something on Israeli cinema.

The last week of February was the turn of the university secretary. I blew up and shot off a five-page email, promising to go public if they did not stop harassing me. They did.

But it didn't last. In March, during a formal university function, one of our alumnae singled me and my department out for a tirade against our perceived anti-Israeli positions and policies. Nobody in the upper administration raised an objection. I complained, but nothing was done.

I went about my business, preparing for a celebration for the silver jubilee of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which Said attended.

Over the summer, my activities were limited to a few radio or television interviews about US and UK involvement in Iraq.

September commenced uneventfully until the evening of September 24, when I learnt that Said had gone into a coma. He died the following day. He was scheduled to give the keynote speech at a conference on "US Imperialism in the 21st century", which I am helping to organise for early November and which is likely to spark further harassment. As I write, my department has once more come under attack after Campus Watch ran an article by a certain Greg Yardley.

Next year I go on sabbatical. I plan to spend my time in Palestine trying to set up a centre for cinema studies. Our adversaries call Columbia *Birzeit-upon-the-Hudson*.

Hamid Dabashi is chair of the department of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University, New York

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Article publié sur le site <www.solidarite-palestine.org>.

Menaces de mort à Berkeley

Par **Alison Weir**

CounterPunch
18 octobre 2003

Death threats in Berkeley. "Close your organization or die"
<<http://counterpunch.org/weir10182003.html>>

Alison Weir est directrice de If Americans Knew, une organisation à but non lucratif dont l'objectif est de donner toutes les informations réelles sur Israël et la Palestine. L'organisation a été fondée suite à son voyage pendant l'hiver 2001 dans les Territoires palestiniens en tant que journaliste free-lance. On peut la joindre à: <alisonweir@yahoo.com>.

If Americans Knew : <contact@ifamericansknew.org>.

Message trouvé sur notre répondeur à 2 heures du matin le 3 octobre 2003 :

L'Université de Berkeley aujourd'hui, le débat. Je te le dis maintenant. Lundi à 2 heures du matin tu ferais bien de n'être pas dans ton bureau. Parce que moi et mes copains, qui ont été formés dans l'armée israélienne, nous viendrons et nous tuerons chacun de vous, enfants de putes, pour ce que vous faites pour détruire Israël. Alors faites gaffe. Ceci n'est pas une plaisanterie. Lundi, tu ferais mieux de faire attention. Ne venez pas au travail. Et ferme ton organisation, ou tu vas mourir."

Cher Israël et tous tes défenseurs hystériques, je sais que vous avez l'habitude de tuer des gens qui se trouvent sur votre chemin. Des vieux, des jeunes, des dirigeants, des suiveurs, des mères, pères, professeurs, docteurs, ouvriers, fermiers...

Cela ne vous semble pas difficile. Les êtres humains sont extrêmement vulnérables. Quand les gens n'ont pas d'armure, aucune armée pour les défendre, pas de pouvoir, ça ne prend que quelques balles. Il est facile d'enfoncer des crânes avec de l'acier trempé. Les côtes sont faciles à briser.

Tout ce que cela demande, c'est d'avoir suffisamment de brutalité.

Depuis la naissance de votre nation, vous avez clairement fait savoir que vous possédiez cette brutalité en abondance. En 1948, vous avez nettoyé ethniquement la terre multiculturelle sur laquelle vous avez choisi d'imposer votre nation uniculturelle, et vous avez écarté les centaines de milliers d'êtres humains qui ne correspondaient pas à votre vision de pureté nationale.

Vous avez appelé cela la défense de votre nation.

S'il vous plaît, expliquez moi cela. De qui voulez-vous vous libérer?

Des fermiers dont les ancêtres ont labouré cette terre pendant des siècles?

Des pêcheurs dont les ancêtres avaient pêché dans la Mer de Galilée et qui ont été transformés, dit-on, en pêcheurs d'hommes?

Des agriculteurs et des gardiens d'oliveraies plantées mille ans auparavant et des vergers qui sont tous les jours déracinés par vos efficaces et cruels bulldozers militaires?

Indépendants de l'Humanité? De la moralité? De la normalité? De toute autre personne dans le monde?

Et vous avez encore tué.

Vous avez nommés «intrus» les fermiers qui essayaient de retourner dans leurs champs, et vous les avez tués. Vous avez accusé les nations qui leur avaient donné abri même à contre-cour, et vous avez tué leurs citoyens. Vous avez envahi voisin après voisin. Pas un seul n'a échappé à votre férocité: l'Égypte, la Syrie, la Jordanie, le Liban.

Et vous avez assassiné. Et comment! Vos assassins ont erré de par le monde avec beaucoup de succès - sauf quand vous avez ici et là tué par erreur la mauvaise personne. Vous tuez un serveur, le prenant pour un «terroriste», et vous ne vous excusez pas.

Vous écrasez la jeune femme de 23 ans, Rachel Corrie, «sans le faire exprès», deux fois, et vous ne vous excusez pas. Vous tirez sur le jeune homme de 21 ans, Tom Hurndall, à l'arrière de la tête, et vous ne vous excusez pas. Vous abattez «accidentellement» un jeune homme de 26 ans, Brian Avery, en ciblant son visage, et vous ne vous excusez pas. Vous tuez des grand-mères, des enfants de 9 ans, des bébés palestiniens, et vous ne vous excusez pas.

Environ 85% des personnes que vous tuez en Palestine sont des «dommages_collatéraux», et vous ne vous excusez pas.

N'avez-vous pas de manières?

Dans ce pays, vous tuez aussi. Vous avez tué Alex Odeh [1] et Iris Kones [2], et au moins cinq autres Américains.

Mais ce n'est pas tout.

Vous avez tué des carrières. Vous avez tué des affaires. Vous avez tué l'espoir. Vous avez sapé l'intégrité de nos politiques et de nos journalistes.

Mais c'est fini. Votre règne de terreur est terminé.

Nous sommes trop nombreux. Vous avez crié à l'«antisémitisme» trop longtemps. Vous avez fait pression une fois de trop sur trop de journaux, sur trop d'universités, sur trop de maires. Vous avez passé un appel téléphonique anonyme de trop, envoyé un e-mail grossier de trop. Menacé des organisations une fois de trop.

C'est fini. Vous continuerez à gagner vos batailles pendant quelques temps. Mais la guerre est à un tournant.

Nous nous sommes réveillés devant la brutalité de votre injustice et notre nombre va en grandissant. Nous appartenons à toutes les ethnies, à toutes les nationalités, dont votre propre nationalité, et nous nous joignons pour maintenir le côté sacré de notre humanité.

Nous travaillons pour créer un monde d'égalité, de fraternité, de compassion et de respect, de rire et d'amour.

Vous n'êtes pas nombreux, nous le sommes.

Vous ne pouvez pas tous nous tuer.

Rejoignez-nous.

Alison Weir

Traduit de l'anglais par Ana Cleja

Notes

[1] Alex Odeh a été tué en 1985 quand une bombe artisanale a explosé alors qu'il ouvrait la porte de son bureau à Santa Ana. Il était le directeur régional de l'American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. Cela s'est passé le lendemain du soir où il avait dit dans un programme à la radio que Yasser Arafat était un homme de paix.

[2] Iris Kones (27 ans) a été tuée en janvier 1972 par la Jewish Defense League quand une bombe a explosé dans le bureau de Sol Hurok à Manhattan, le blessant ainsi que douze autres personnes.

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La Gazette du Golfe et des banlieues

<<http://ggb.0catch.com>>