

The final death toll in the West's illegal war against Iraq can never be accurately determined because the bloody repercussions are still ongoing. Let it suffice to say it will be in the hundreds of thousands. But if we include the stunted lives caused by that criminal intervention along with the civil war that has ensued, the numbers will certainly turn out to be in the millions. And behind these statistics are real people with real families with real hopes and aspirations for the life ahead.

And then there is Libya, Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan. All at the receiving end of US led military interventions and all by coincidence Muslim countries. And lest we forget, Palestine remains in a state of bloody occupation by Israel, a sixty year occupation that would not have lasted five minutes without the military and financial backing of the United States of America. Another Muslim community put to the sword by Zionist colonialism and US imperialist ambitions. Little wonder then that we are witnessing a violent Jihadist reaction, a reaction that is consuming both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Until the western populations rise up to denounce these imperialist interventions and declare on mass not in my name, expect the bloody jihad to continue.

Instead of putting these ongoing imperialist occupations at the forefront of our thinking, we too easily get side-tracked into believing that the jihadist terrorist outrages are the main event. Sickening and barbaric as they are, they are really just a blow back from a rampaging US empire seeking to maintain its global hegemony. Since becoming pre-eminent in the course of twentieth century hostilities, the US has unleashed a terror across every continent including the use of two atomic bombs. Since the conclusion of the Second World War, the US has been militarily involved, without stop, in every corner of the planet. These military interventions show no sign of abating even under the so called more enlightened regime of Barack Obama. The US military-industrial complex, in conjunction with rapacious US corporations, will not be tamed it seems, even by liberal politicians. New York, London, Madrid and now Paris have felt the blowback. Terror begets terror. Barbarism begets barbarism. These are truisms as old as history itself.

Do I believe that Islam is in desperate need of its own Reformation? Yes I do. Concepts of Apostasy, Infidels, Jihad, Martyrdom, and Paradise in Heaven are feudal anachronisms that are anathema to any sense of modernity. Do I believe that Charlie Hebdo and all journalists have the inalienable right to mercilessly ridicule religion including Islam and its medieval shibboleths? Yes I do. But I am equally convinced that all religions, without exception, are nothing but an accumulation of ancient superstitions useful for charlatans and rouges, east and west, to further their territorial ambitions.

What could be more absurd than modern day Zionists using pronouncements by their imaginary Hebrew god as a pretext for their colonial land grab at the expense of the Palestinians? What could be more absurd than Catholics and fundamentalist Christians claiming god as justification for their rampant homophobia, misogyny and other cultural prejudices. It is not just Islam that is stuck in the dark ages. A recent quote from Salman Rushdie is apposite in this context;

Religion, a medieval form of unreason, when combined with modern weaponry becomes a real threat to our freedoms. This is as true for Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity as it is for Islam.

Philip Collins, writing in The Times the day after the Charlie Hebdo jihadist terror attack, made some salient points though I have serious reservations about some of his conclusions.

Some ideas, taken to their emotional extremes, grant an alibi for murder and some do not. This to be clear, is a pathology shared by religious thought everywhere. It is not unique to Islam, nor is it even historically most common there. The egregious history of the Christian Church shows that when people lay claim to certainty about ultimate questions, sooner or later there is going to be trouble. If the truth has been in some way vouchsafed to you by the

divinity then dissent is not reasoned disagreement, it is blasphemy. I am no longer an interlocutor, I am an infidel.

One only has to check out the Old Testament to get a flavour of the cruel, revengeful, psychopathic god that the ancient Hebrews created in order to justify their own tribal barbarism - the very same god that forms the bedrock of today's three Abrahamic religions that have been creating so much mayhem over the centuries. The end result of this monotheistic abomination? Christian crusaders knee deep in Muslim blood. Christian torturers carrying out the bloody Spanish Inquisition. Christian colonialists carrying out genocide in the Americas, and a Catholic Church quietly complicit in the attempted genocide of European Jewry. And, for good measure, a modern day Catholic Church mired in child abuse and financial corruption.

And contemporary Judaism is proving no better. A racist colonial project to create a Greater Israel directly at the expense of Palestinian aspirations of nationhood. If any religion should have an empathy for such aspirations it ought to be Judaism, but not a bit of it. Under the guise of god's chosen people there is no brutality, no outrage that Israel will not stoop to in order to further their land grab.

Can we look to the Eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism for an example of religion providing a moral basis for settling territorial disputes? No chance. The practitioners of these two religious doctrines are proving every bit as violently tribal in their ambitions as their Abrahamic counterparts. Watching footage of Buddhists monks burning down Muslim villages in Burma last year should dispel any false notions of Buddhism being a beacon of spiritual, civilised behaviour. And the least said of Hindu bloodletting against their Muslim neighbours the better. Since partition the Muslim victims of Hindu communalism must, by now, be well into the millions.

So even a cursory knowledge of human history will reveal that Islam does not have a monopoly on religious barbarism. But what commentators in the west are reluctant to concede, including our learned Mr Collins, is that lurking behind every religious act of violence is a dispute over territory, resources and markets. Whether it is secular imperialist governments seeking to consolidate or extend their hegemony, or governments and movements masquerading as doing god's work, it all boils down to humans behaving tribally, competing for land and scarce resources. And it seems the west still has not learnt the most basic of lessons; if you insist on invading other people's territory, expect a violent backlash.

Gary Younge, writing in *The Guardian* 12/1/15, tries to convince us and himself that it is all so very complex, that there is no single explanation to the Charlie Hebdo massacre. Well, on a superficial level I suppose he is right. But at root, what we are witnessing, whether it be in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Northern Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq, and now in the capitals of imperialism, is the end result of five hundred years of brutal European colonialism. On another less emotive day I'm certain Gary Young would concur.

And here is the joke if you have a taste for dark gallows humour; every time the newly liberated ex-colonies tried to move in a progressive secular direction they were brutally crushed by Western imperialism. And by repeatedly denying that healthy secular nationalism for fear it might give aid and succour to the Soviets, and installing their own pliant dictatorships, the west planted the seeds of today's jihadist terror. With legitimate nationalist sentiments suffocated, it is little surprise aspirations of independence would resurface decades later, distorted and full of hate for the modern world. Why would they look to modernity when all it had to offer them was post-colonial repression and US installed dictatorship?

So Mr Younge, I don't think it is that complex at all. The old colonies may be formally free but European/US neo colonialism and the colonial mentality

lives on. Just witness the outpouring of grief and anger when jihad arrives at the heart of the European capitals. World leaders pour in to offer their condolences. But what happens when similar or worse outrages occur in the old colonies? A brief headline, a shrug of the shoulders and then its business as usual. Boko Haram, ISIS and the Taleban have been slaughtering teachers and school children at an ever increasing rate but the West has had little to say. But when the medieval slaughter comes closer to home, we hear a cacophony of condemnation. Yes Mr Younge, it's the old colonial mentality alive and well. Not that complicated really.

What to do? Stop the military interventions, confine the troops to barracks and transfer the budget of the western military-industrial complex to a UN run world-wide secular education programme. And force Israel to accept a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders. Do this and the fuel for Islamic jihad will quickly dissipate. Of course, none of this is going to happen, so expect more of the same. More bloodshed, more division and more political capital for the European far right.

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