





The significance of the collapse of the Soviet bloc for the West meant that it had lost its useful Red bogeyman. The victory celebrations in 1989 were cut short because it was widely recognised that the free world's triumph over Communism had deprived the Anglo-American establishment of the one issue that allowed them to dictate the global agenda to everyone else in the 'free' world since 1948: anti-communism. After 1989, instead of following Washington's and Whitehall's orders without question, every other country began to ask 'Why should we?' Communism had gone, and so had the justification for the Anglo-American elite's global pre-eminence.

Hasty efforts were made to find a tinpot dictator who could serve as a suitable replacement for the 'evil empire' run by the Kremlin – for example Panama's General Noriega, Libya's Colonel Gaddafi, Mobutu of Zaire, Milosevic of Serbia, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Osama bin Laden of Al-Qaeda, Kim Jong Il of North Korea, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, and Syria's President Assad. All were too puny to be credible. The old Soviet Union had the nuclear capacity to destroy the world several times over. None of these tyrants ever had anything close to that power. 'Mr Big' always turned out to be too little to be believable. Another strategy had to be adopted: multiculturalism.

Stuart Hall's politically ruthless conception of multiculturalism may dress up the old irrationalities of art and ethnic culture in a series of 'modern' and 'trendy' outfits – but they are still irrational at the end of the day.

Indeed, hitched up to the erratic dynamism of capitalist power, they are arguably more irrational than ever.<sup>4</sup>

Edward Said's binary conception of culture was amended by the postmodernists, because its rigidity excluded the possibility of cultivating a plethora of different ethnic and gender options and agendas. That said, it is not the case that postmodernism could afford to dispense with Said's 'Good/Bad' binary entirely. It is more that that rigidly-structural binary was to be subordinated to postmodernism's hybridity and flexibility.

The Western regimes sought in multiculturalism an ideological framework that permitted them to retain the utmost flexibility and ability to manoeuvre, but also the ability to hit hard and fast whenever necessary. This put a premium on postmodernism's creative thinking and its unscrupulousness – but for the Western establishment the extra benefit of multiculturalism was its baggage of 'history from below' victim culture that it had brought along with it.

The overall effect achieved by official multiculturalism is to be found in a judicious combination of Said's and Hall's thinking.<sup>5</sup> As the power and assertiveness of multiculturalism grew upon the world's stage among the powers-that-be, the structural binary of Said was occasionally dusted off and brought out into daylight

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<sup>4</sup> On Hall's approval for the 'revolutionary' energy of modern capital, see Stuart Hall, 'Brave New World', *Marxism Today*, October 1988, cited in Mike Freeman & Gemma Forest, 'Post-Fordism: Old Ideas for New Times', *Living Marxism*, No 1, London, November 1988, p20

<sup>5</sup> For Hall's critique of black separatism, and implicitly Said's binary structuralism, see Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?' in Gina Dent (ed), *Black Popular Culture*, Dia Center for the Arts/Bay Press, Seattle, 1992; for Said's binary structuralism, see his *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994 [Orig 1978] and for the amendments he makes to it in his *Culture & Imperialism*, Vintage Books, London, 1994 [Orig 1993]

again – though this time in its newly inverted forms of ‘Black/White’ and ‘Women/Men’, with dead white males usually forming the demonised ‘Other’ this time. This hybrid framework combining change with structure enabled the multicultural state’s overall attitude of mobile fluidity to move from one version of ruthless ‘zero tolerance’ for abuse to another instance of liberating victims at lightening speed.

The retention of Said’s binary 'good/bad' oppositions allowed any multicultural Western state to pose as the supreme champion of selected ethnic and sexual minorities – if necessary by destroying other (temporarily less-favoured) groups of ethnic and sexual minorities. By shuffling and reshuffling through the myriads of cultural identities, angels are cherry-picked and rogues are slated. Those demonised as oppressors and abusers would then have inflicted upon them the full force of a superpower’s military might - only for the same state to drop their case and casually move on to some other issue.

The flexible character of multicultural militarism allows the rapid reassignment of Western allies as ‘nonentities’ or even ‘adversaries’, and vice versa. One instance of this startling fickleness was Western amnesia towards Libya when that country descended into turmoil after a Western invasion had removed its leader Colonel Gaddafi in August 2011. US president Barack Obama also drew ‘a line in the sand’ if the Assad regime in Damascus was found to be using chemical weapons against its own people. Damascus was found to be so guilty. Obama thereupon forgot all about Syria’s victims of chemical warfare. Another instance of Western inconsistency has

been the unexpected rehabilitation of Iran shortly after the West's client state of Iraq disintegrated in 2014. Iran is an Islamic Shia regime; the West's puppet regime in Baghdad is also Shia.

In the imbroglio of post-Saddam Iraq, a new fundamentalist adversary of the West suddenly stood revealed - the Islamic State (IS) group of Sunni militants who beat its Baghdad Shia foe in a series of lightning military strikes. Equally abruptly, a new ethnic culture oppressed by IS sprung up overnight: the Yazidi. This group had lived in Northern Iraq for centuries, practising a form of Zoroastrianism. The Yazidis were allegedly being subjected to genocide by IS, who accused them of being devil-worshippers. Provisions were dropped for the beleaguered Yazidi, while the USA launched airstrikes against IS. Kurdish guerrillas, previously frowned upon for their separatism from Iraq, began receiving Western munitions to help them fend off IS. Only days before the IS crisis kicked off in Iraq, the West had been sheepishly arming Israel to enable it to pursue its grisly invasion of the Gaza Strip. The West's reticent support for Israel is in marked contrast to its bellicosity when it comes to ISIS. Meanwhile, Washington warned Moscow that any attempt by the Kremlin to provide humanitarian assistance to the besieged Russian ethnic minority in Eastern Ukraine, then encircled by Kiev's nationalistic army, would be interpreted as an invasion of a sovereign state.

Reviewing all these inconsistencies, it sometimes seems as if the West is in love with being inconsistent. But there's method in its madness.

The most vicious wars of the post-millennial era have been caused by ‘humanitarian’ Western powers roaming around from one theatre of war to another, nonchalantly dropping their bomb payloads and firing off their arsenals, and then unconcernedly moving on to stir up trouble somewhere else. An open letter by the Bishop of Leeds, supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, to British premier David Cameron asked, while the media and his government’s focus on ‘the plight of the Yazidis has been notable and admirable’, what about the plight of Iraq’s Christian minority?

‘There has been increasing silence about the plight of tens of thousands of Christians who have been displaced, driven from [Iraq’s] cities and homelands, and who face a bleak future. Despite appalling persecution, they seem to have fallen from consciousness, and I wonder why. Does your government have a coherent response to the plight of these huge numbers of Christians whose plight appears to be less regarded than that of others? Or are we simply reacting to the loudest media voice at any particular time?’<sup>6</sup>

What this Anglican prelate fails to realise is that the reason why the West concentrated all its attention on the Yazidis, and disregarded Iraq’s Christians, is precisely because no one had heard of the Yazidis before. Consequently, whenever the West decides to up sticks and jettison them, the Yazidis will quickly fall from consciousness, and no one will give two hoots about

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<sup>6</sup> The Rt Rev Nicholas Baines, ‘Dear Prime Minister: What is the UK Government’s Strategy in Iraq and Syria?’ *The Observer*, London, 16 August 2014, accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/16/anglican-church-letter-david-cameron-islamic-state-uk-strategy>

them any more. The world's media will simply move on and start shouting loudly about the plight of some other, currently unknown, ethnic victims.

This callous indifference behind Western intervention was first addressed by the Modernist author Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, his early 20th century novella on the European powers' encounter with Africa in general, and the Congo in particular:

‘Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there and she was shelling the bush. It appears that the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts....In the empty immensity of earth, sky and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent....nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a touch of lugubrious drollery in the sight.’<sup>7</sup>

Conrad was sceptical of the official imperial message that the West was the benevolent conveyor of civilised values to the poor, benighted inhabitants of the tropics. For Conrad, the mission of the French man-of-war in Africa was incomprehensible, insane, and perhaps even absurd. That is why he sensed that it was not the ‘Dark Continent’ of Africa but Europe which was the true ‘heart of darkness’.

Many of Conrad's Modernist contemporaries - such as the Futurists and the Vorticists – begged to differ with this despondent image he painted of the West. They

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973 [Orig 1902], p40-1

pictured imperial war as invigorating; as an opportunity to purify and revitalise Europe. These muscular Modernists sought to debunk the common prejudice of the time that saw the aesthetic sensibility as decadent and effete, and artists as the very last people who could be expected to 'do their bit'. In effect, the Futurists were intent on reviving for artists the traditional military meaning of the expression 'avant-garde'. They wanted artists to be in the vanguard leading Europe into a re-energising war.

Though it rebuffs their Modernist assertion of a singular art style to salvage civilisation, multicultural militarism copies the Futurist aggressive interpretation of avant-gardism. It is a mistake to picture multiculturalism as demonstrating the enfeebled decadence of America and Europe vis-à-vis their rivals, the dynamically-performing economies of China and the Pacific Rim.

Multiculturalism is culture employed as a political instrument or a weapon: as multicultural militarism.

When the Papacy began to sponsor Renaissance art from the 15th century, and then the Counter-Reformation style of the Baroque in the 16th century, no one thought Rome must be going all soft and self-indulgent because it was pouring resources into touchy-feely culture. It was understood that art was just another form of conducting the religious war against Protestantism. Likewise for the West which mobilises its multicultural ethics against Islamic fundamentalism today.

Multicultural militarism is ideal for the contemporary world because its fluidity suits the chaotic conditions of our era, where there are no firm alliances or loyalties to



Is this all a fuss over nothing in regard to *Spiked's* decision to back US airstrikes in Iraq? Isn't it a matter of trivia, a few token bombs, and then we go back to the status quo ante of fighting imperialism once again?

In relation to Western intervention, context is everything. By presenting the decision to back a couple of bombs, or an assassination or two, as a trivial matter, then the context of Western intervention is being discarded. Why discard the wider context in this way?

If you take a photo of one man shooting another, it looks trivial (say, in comparison to the Holocaust). It can even be said to be proportionate - say, if the shot man had been threatening to murder a child. If you like, it is an inversion of the traditional tabloid image of the terrorist bomb outrage. The tabloids extrapolate from their terrorist bomb photo to claim that a liberation struggle is led by a bunch of criminals. They do not place the photo of the bomb explosion within the wider context, but use that horrific image to define that wider context. Similarly liberals might extrapolate from the pic of the man being shot dead for killing children to conclude that the police or whoever shot him were acting 'proportionately'. The issue is done and dusted, the man's been dealt with and now it's time to move back to thoroughly legal and peaceful politics. Hence the interest of liberal moralists in the short-term and proportionate character of conflict.

But for imperialism the concepts of 'short term', 'medium term' and 'long term' wars are fanciful categories advanced only to placate liberal

sentimentalists and win them over to its side. It is hardly rocket science to observe that every Western intervention is short-term in FORM these days. But the wider context is that the West has been CONSISTENTLY intervening in the Middle East for at least a hundred years now. The wider contest is that imperialist intervention is composed not just of militarism but also of humanitarianism. In other words, the carrot and the stick, or, in today's parlance, the airdrop and the airstrike. The airdrops do not contradict the airstrikes: they complement each other, as two sides of the same coin. Western intervention means both humanitarian airdrops of aid for its allies and militaristic airstrikes for its foes. So it is never a matter of selectively condoning the one and condemning the other: it's both of them or none of them.

The wider context is that the West now needs to keep these types of short-term wars going on permanent basis (or, in the recent words of Cameron, for the whole of the rest of his life). This is why liberals are constantly surprised by what they call 'mission creep'. They cannot understand that the long era of permanent peace is now coming to an end and permanent war is on the cards from now onwards (with the example of the Ukraine showing that short-term wars in the Middle East are now beginning to 'mission creep' ever closer to Europe). These short-term but continuous wars may still happen for a bit. The REALLY permanent war will only commence when the West opens hostilities with the Pacific Rim region.

Brendan O'Neill writes:

‘Emergency humanitarian aid must continue to be delivered, and we won’t particularly lose sleep over the emergency American airstrikes against ISIS positions, to the extent that they might in the extreme short term allow the safe fleeing of people under threat. But no long-term or medium-term solution can come from Western intervention, because Western intervention is the ultimate author of the nightmare in northern Iraq.’<sup>8</sup>

Let me finish by asking how short is this ‘extreme short term’? My guess is that it will last the rest of our lives.

Aidan Campbell  
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<sup>8</sup> Brendan O’Neill, ‘ISIS: a monster made by the moralists of the West’, 12 August 2014, London, *Spiked-Online*, accessed at [http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/isis-a-monster-made-by-the-moralists-of-the-west/15594#.U\\_mhTq90z4g](http://www.spiked-online.com/newsite/article/isis-a-monster-made-by-the-moralists-of-the-west/15594#.U_mhTq90z4g)