

Empire Games : Who Writes the Rules?

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The Western left's abdication, nay abandonment of principles that go to the heart of the socialist liberation project has been long in the making, centuries even and made all the more obvious by the left's take on events in Libya and now Syria. Critiques of the 'humanitarian, socialist interventionists' came thick and thin but for the most part the fundamental question of why the left had abandoned its historic mission has not been asked.

I am confused by the analyses of the Anglophone left with regard to the social revolts in Libya. The only thing folks seem able to muster is a series of bifurcated abstractions. Thus certain metaphors in the analyses of Libya prevail such as, 'greed and grievance', 'patron and client', 'rapacious rule vs innocent population', 'madness vs sanity' etc. Absent from the discussion are: social forces, social base, achievements and contradictions of Libya's Green revolution, contradictions of liberal democracy, and the contradictions of market dependency on specific social formations. — Elleni Centime Zeleke, 'Libya: The Poverty of Analyses', [MRZine](#), 11 June 2011

All true and not merely of the 'Anglophone left' but the Western left in general suffers from a shallowness of thinking and the inevitable retreat into slogans and automatic writing. And although I agree with pretty much everything Zeleke has to say on the subject of the Western left I have a problem with the language Zeleke uses.

Zeleke's essay suffers from the disease of left writing in general, inherited from its middle-class, 'intellectual' university roots. The tendency to speak in a private language that only those 'in the know' are privy to eg, "the contradictions of market dependency on specific social formations".

Yeah okay, nobody's saying it's easy to figure out what's going on and why things happen, but who are we talking to here? People who already agree with us? If so, surely it's pretty much a wasted effort insofar as the objective is to persuade people to get involved in making change happen, not preaching to the converted (some of whom may actually understand what Zeleke is saying). And surely isn't that the point of writing with a specific objective in mind? To explain what is happening and why.

Zeleke puts the confusion (is that the right word?) down to:

One of the results of such a skewed discussion is that liberal democracy is idealized as the only viable political order in Libya (or the rest of the world for that matter). This is because absent of an analysis of social processes (which the left seems incapable of doing), liberal democracy gets proffered as at least having the institutional checks and balances to keep evil at bay.

Again true but Zeleke doesn't ask the question, why?

Why is there no real opposition to the by now 'normal' actions of our governments, that bomb at will anywhere, *all the time* with total impunity, using increasingly flimsy pretexts ('humanitarian intervention')? Because they know that there will be no real opposition from the citizens of Empire. This is the essential point missing from Zeleke's essay: the Western left is not merely trapped in the illusion of a liberal democracy, it has contributed to its creation and the Western left is itself a *product of liberal democracy*.

And this is not a new phenomenon, it is rooted in the simple fact that we are citizens of Empire and we have enjoyed the benefits for centuries using identical methods to those now directed at Libya. The Western left's total debacle over Libya and now Syria reflects the innate contradictions, essentially trying to square the circle, as its confusion over 'what to do' about Gaddafi reveals. Having gotten onto the 'human rights' bandwagon, it's really difficult to get off it, opportunism raises its head. Protest is not only hollow, it is compromised from the getgo.

"For the first thirteen days starting on March 19 under the control of U.S. Africa Command and Operation Odyssey Dawn and thereafter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization-led Operation Unified Protector, the air assaults represent the second longest armed aggression in NATO's history, already surpassing by a week the 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. Only the now nearly decade-long war in Afghanistan exceeds the current campaign in length.

"The U.S.-dominated military bloc not only acknowledges but fairly boasts of conducting almost 11,000 air missions and over 4,000 combat sorties since March 31. Preceding that, hundreds of air strikes and over 160 cruise missile attacks were launched by the U.S., Britain, France and other NATO powers." — ['NATO's Afrika Korps Escalates War Of Attrition Against Libya'](#) By Rick Rozoff, Stop Nato

It's the idea—so deeply embedded in Western thinking—that we have the right 'to do something' about Gaddafi that exposes the Empire's ideology at work in all of us. The corollary of this would be Gaddafi deciding he had 'to do something' about us bombing his country back into the stone age, not that he possesses the power or even the idea itself to 'do something' about *our* barbaric behaviour, this is an idea that belongs *only* to Western 'civilization'.

We live in a world where political/economic events have at their centre the objectives of a relatively small group of very powerful people, say five thousand, who represent a handful of rich and powerful countries and corporations, and rivals they may be, but they are [united](#) in their desire to preserve and extend the power of capital. This is the bottom line and they will do literally *anything* to preserve their rule.

Thus it surely should be a gut reaction for those of us on the left when we hear the Pirates going on about 'humanitarian intervention' (with bombs and missiles), to reject the idea out-of-hand and reject the idea in principle. One thing inevitably flows from another and as surely as night follows day, declaring a 'no-fly zone' over Libya was an *a priori* act of war, any idiot can see that, even those who pushed for it knew it was an act of war and stated as such.

But not apparently the Western left. The left's dilemma is further highlighted by the paucity

of writing on events in Syria. It really is a case of should we? or shouldn't we? Condemn? Support, or stay mum? Better stay mum.

I have only the sketchiest idea of what's going on in Syria, and especially its root causes but of one thing I am sure, there is a Western hand in there somewhere, muddying the waters and this goes without saying.

The State Department, for example, is financing the creation of stealth wireless networks that would enable activists to communicate outside the reach of governments in countries like Iran, Syria and Libya, according to participants in the projects. — '[U.S. Underwrites Internet Detour Around Censors](#)', NYT 12 June, 2011

So the issue is clear just as it was back during the days of the liberation struggles in Africa and elsewhere; we in the West supported struggles against Western colonialism but we didn't take sides or interfere in the internal struggles of colonized peoples (well that was the theory) and the principle still holds. The difference here is that the Empire is in the business of trying to *re-colonize* what it has lost, any fool can see that.

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