

Outrage at Paris Terrorist Attacks Masks Our Racism

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An article in the Australian publication New Matilda gets to the real point about last night's attacks in Paris - one that no one wants to talk about. What westerners feel right now is a powerful and very selective outrage that identifies with the suffering of people "like us". We mourn the deaths in Paris while not even noticing those killed in Lebanon a day earlier and almost certainly by the same fanatics that launched the attacks in France.

Lots of westerners like to dismiss such observations as "whataboutery". It is natural, they say, to care more about people we know and who are similar to us. That knee-jerk reaction may be comforting, but it is precisely the problem.

After all, what drives our selective outrage if not selective compassion? But our selective compassion is what got us into this mess in the first place. As Europeans we have always viewed ourselves as fully human, but seen those in the Middle East and much of the rest of the world as slightly less than human, and not quite as deserving of our sympathy. It is such feelings that allowed Europe to colonise, abuse and exploit brown people.

The historic racism that we Europeans are all too ready now to acknowledge, and that we understand fed western colonialism, is not a thing of the past. It still thrives deep in our souls. Where once we felt the white man's burden, we now feel his outrage. Both depend on the same arrogance, and the same ascription of lesser human qualities to those we see as different from us.

We are still trying to civilise brown people. We still think we have the right to change them, bend them to our will, improve them by force. We still want to lecture them, condemn them, threaten them, overturn their elections, arm their oppressive leaders, plunder their resources.

And after we have destroyed their societies, we expect to be able to shut our borders to them as they make desperate journeys to find some peace, some safety away from the war zones in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and elsewhere we either created directly or supported with our money and arms.

Our racism has not changed. It is alive and creating new justifications for our selective compassion every day.

What has changed is that technological advances have made weapons of death and destruction ever easier and cheaper to acquire. Those we once oppressed with impunity and

far from our homes, out of sight, can now find us and give us a taste of our own medicine.

If we want to stop the attacks, and avoid turning our own societies into the oppressive dictatorships we have supported across much of the rest of the globe, then we need to stop interfering, pillaging, manipulating and abusing. And we have to start by refusing to allow ourselves to identify more with the victims in Paris than those in Beirut. If we were really as civilised as we believe, we would understand that both are equally deserving of our compassion.

Note

<https://newmatilda.com/2015/11/14/paris-attacks-highlight-western-vulnerability-and-our-selective-grief-and-outrage/>

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