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EDITORIAL

We are here because you were there

More than one hundred years after the advent of the First World War, known as the ‘war to end all wars’, we have entered the twenty-first century much like the last one, mired in conflict and war in many parts of the world. The fact is, we are bombarded with ubiquitous violence on our television screens, the internet, and all forms of social media. We live in a world shrouded by war, conflict and violence. War potentially affects us all, with sporadic terrorist attacks aimed at the West, sending a deep fear amongst our societies. Nevertheless, such forms of violence and war are seen as immoral and cowardly, for they are not fought according to a moral ethical code, with civilian populations often the victims.

That such forms of violence and war are seen as immoral suggests that there are moral forms of war that can be justly and appropriately invoked. Indeed, moral discourses have been used to justify the large numbers of civilian casualties, for example, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Libya. Furthermore, notions of ‘just war’ have been deployed to support the need for such wars. Moral arguments are now an integral part of why a war is justified and part of the war apparatus itself. This is especially true in the frequent recourse to the Second World War to exemplify the legitimate use of violence to stem the tide of fascism.

Whatever the correctness or otherwise of that history, the sheer brutality of war is far too often made palatable through media spin, military terminology (as symbolised through briefings) with terms such as ‘collateral damage’ now an integral part of our lexicon. These techniques ensure that moral and political rules are established to guide the very conduct of war. In contrast, the actions of groups like Islamic State, the Taliban or Al-Qaeda are judged to be outside accepted norms of international law and moral conduct. It is precisely in this way that ‘just war theory’ has been, and is, used in the contemporary period both for providing justifications for military action (*jus ad bellum*) and for placing moral limits on its conduct (*jus in bello*).

The wars that have been engaged in since the beginning of this millennium, or that are continuing at present, may well have been conducted or justified under the rubric of ‘just war,’ but they have left an indelible mark on our collective psyche. Recent events around the world have placed unprecedented pressure, particularly on Europe. In recent months, we have witnessed much suffering and pain, with refugees and migrants crossing borders and enduring the harshest conditions imaginable in their desperation to escape war, persecution and prejudice in search of a safer haven. This unprecedented large-scale movement of people has unleashed new tensions and fears in Europe.

Perhaps these societies can learn some lessons from the large numbers of post-colonial subjects already residing in metropolitan nations. They have both experienced and stimulated considerable social and cultural transformation. Vijay Prashad’s term

‘polyculturalism’ appears to capture this, ‘as it takes into account the sensibilities of fusion rather than mere co-existence’ (Dhouib 2014, p. 121). This offers an alternative lens through which to engage the world; there is no harking for a lost land but rather engaging the world from ‘home’, the only ‘home’ that new entrants to Europe will know for the very long term. Those of us who are voluntary migrants or long-established residents would do well to ponder such thoughts, and the famous slogan from the 1970s popularised by immigrant activists in the UK: ‘We are here because you were there.’

Reference

Dhouib, J. A. (2014). Textual transformations in contemporary black writing in Britain. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 5(2), 120–126.

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