

Arundhati Roy- Too Extreme?

"She puts the attacks on the [World Trade Center](#) and on [Afghanistan](#) on the same moral level, that of terrorism, and mourns the impossibility of imagining beauty after 2001: "Will it be possible ever again to watch the slow, amazed blink of a newborn gecko in the sun, or whisper back to the marmot who has just whispered in your ear - without thinking of the World Trade Centre and Afghanistan?"

"...she described the [United States](#) as a global empire that reserves the right to bomb any of its subjects at any time, deriving its legitimacy directly from God."

After reading her wiki, I think that it's safe to say that while many of her arguments are sound, e.g. Kashmiri independence, her comments concerning American foreign policy are much too extreme, and the last line of the quotation above borders on absurd. She's clearly one of the most passionate activists around, but her rhetoric leads me to dismiss her as a truly credible academic. She is doubtlessly brilliant, but she sounds less like a well-educated political thinker and more like a vitriolic mouthpiece for the catchall anti-globalization movement. If this is the best that the Post-Colonialist camp has to offer, they are in dire need of a new and more rationally pragmatic leader. That's not to say that her well is entirely poisoned, as she would like to believe (*"Once someone is branded anti-American, the chances are that he or she will be judged before they are heard, and the argument will be lost in the welter of bruised national pride."*). It is not out of foolish national pride or self-regard that I criticize her comments but out of fear that she will undermine the very movement she supports. Though her heart may be in the right place, it seems that her head is not.

This rhetoric manifests itself in disingenuous claims such as *"the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer"* when the UN indices reveal that since 1990, the number of those living in extreme poverty has fallen by some 50% (pg. 4 on the 2009 MDG report)

Consider this quotation as well:

"So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a story-teller who wants to share her way of seeing."

I find it difficult to believe that she is only interested in "sharing her way of seeing" when she calls George W. Bush a war criminal, decries the people of India as a *"brain-washed citizenry"* and the government as something approaching *"communal Hindu fascism,"* or says things like *"Does it mean that you don't admire the hundreds of thousands of American citizens who marched against nuclear weapons, or the thousands of war resisters who forced their government to withdraw from Vietnam?"* when accused of being "anti-American." She even somehow manages to raise the bloody shirts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki without considering how many Japanese civilians would have lost their lives in a mainland invasion during World War Two (I'm not even going to open this can of worms, but she doesn't hesitate to rip the lid off.)

I'll be the first to support the reasoning behind the famous line *"Patriotism is the last refuge to which a scoundrel clings"* (Dylan sang it but I think Samuel Johnson said it), however people like her are blinded by the light of their own insight(s); power is, indeed, the most crucial yet monopolized resource in all of human existence, but is resorting to a single-minded pursuit of this *idée fixe* the only way to advance such a concept? Most certainly not. A desire to right the wrongs of the past must be coupled with a recognition of the inherent difficulties of creating a more equitable distribution of power. In utilizing her full arsenal of loaded-language, she cannot avoid the crushing weight of ideological associations and baggage.

I'm no stranger to los desaparecidos of Chile, El Salvador and Argentina, among many others. I know about the Gaza wars, the 7 (or rather 6) days war, the intifadas, the check points, the suicide bombers, the IDF abuses, the internment camps etc. I understand that American grief must be contextualized to fully appreciate global suffering, but what does all of her finger pointing really accomplish? At least U.N. poverty and hunger initiatives have been effective in several regions (according to their own reports).

Perhaps I'm being too harsh on her, especially considering that this extended wikipedia article and those posted lecture transcripts are my only real exposure to her. Any thoughts?

One final thing I just remembered, consider this as well:

"Can we bomb our way to a feminist paradise? Is that how women won the vote in the U.S? Or how slavery was abolished?"

I know that the British abolished slavery without bloodshed, but if I remember correctly, didn't we fight a civil war over it?