

## THE AMERICANISATION OF CULTURE RACIST OR RACISH.

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This article is a follow on from a previous article in the March 2003 edition of *Psychologically Speaking*, White(2003) These articles, are a study in social psychology which examines the effects that globalization has on the psychology of very large numbers of people. It seems that a new window of opportunity has opened up for social psychologists not only in a field of study but also in a method of study.

The Bali Bombing, September 11th, Afghanistan, Iraq, globalization, anti-globalization are all crying out for social psychologists' to examine them. However in order for this to happen the study of psychology must move with the times. To produce a social psychological analysis of the war in Iraq into a journal or book as we know takes one to two years at least, before it gets out to the profession and the public in general. The problem is that by then it has past and the next 'thing' has occurred. Social psychology has the potential to play a significant role in these very transitory world events but it has to move with them in order to be relevant and to have any impact on how we deal with such events.

A prime example of this is that organisation called the "coalition of the willing". As we know three participants of that organisation were Britain the US and Australia. The combined populations of these three countries amounts to hundreds of millions of people and thus it would seem worthwhile to seek to understand the psyche of those people when it was relevant. The problem is that this coalition is now 'gone'. Two years down the track with a journal article about it and it would be hard to recall what it was. Such approach is basically a historical exercise in social psychology.

A possible vehicle in which to engage such examination can be with publications like "Psychologically Speaking". Such a publication does not portend to be a scientific journal, therefore it is capable of reporting events of human nature that are transitory and rapidly changing like many national and international events can be. A scientific journal as mentioned before takes two years to get the information out and thus cannot deal with such aspects of social psychology. If social psychologists can come up with a

method of study like this article attempts to do, then psychology can begin to have a pro-active impact on how national and world politics and events play out rather than just being a historical reporter of what happened and why.

## EMPIRES

In this treatise of social psychology one finds that there has been other versions of globalization previously in history of human civilisation. These are usually referred to as empires.

When I first began looking into this topic I was surprised at the number of empires there had been over the history of mankind. Like ants, it seems humans are constantly reorganising themselves. The Byzantine empire, Roman empire, Ottoman empire, Mongol empire, Fulani empire to name just a few and of course an empire with which the readership of 'Psychologically speaking' is very familiar. Australians, are direct descendants of the British Empire.

So what is an empire:

"The term empire generally refers to a group of regions or nations under the rule of a more powerful nation. Most empires have been won through military conquest. .... But all empires come to an end, usually because the empire becomes more trouble than it's worth to the controlling nation. Historically, empires were maintained with a large force of soldiers and bureaucrats at a cost that eventually became intolerable. .... Every empire's story is unique, but the final chapter could always be entitled "Decline and Fall." World Book (2002).

## THE AMERICANISATION OF CULTURE

I think it is safe to say that a large section of the world is under the influence of the US or American culture at this point in time. But is it an empire?

My short answer to this is no, or at least not yet. It seems that the formation of an empire requires one particular group to gain some advantage over the others. That is usually with some form of technological and/or military might. A key to the British empire was the advantage gained with their mastery of sailing the oceans of the world. A pivotal advantage that the the US has achieved is a political and economic structure that feeds the needs of the Free Child better than any other current culture on earth.

As mentioned before empires are primarily won through military might and ruled through military might. The US by and large has not done this.

However as I sit writing this right now, I hear radio reports of troops entering Baghdad. If Iraq and Afghanistan become colonies of the US in the same way Australia became a colony of the British empire, then it is no longer just the Americanisation of culture but becomes the American empire. Particularly if they then move onto other nations in the so-called "axis of evil" and endeavour to colonise them and rule by military might. We will simply have to wait and see.

The primary nature of a democracy is a popularity contest. The most popular choice in a democracy becomes the dominant choice. This is how a significant section of the world has now become Americanised, not so much through military might and control. I hear some in my community of Australia complain about the Americanisation of our society. How the US has infiltrated our diets with McDonalds, our wardrobes with Nike and our television sets with Hollywood. This is an example of some resentment in our culture that reflects a racist attitude. We want to be who we are as well. This it would seem is felt in varying degrees by a number of nations in the world at the moment.

The key here is that it has not been forced onto the world. Consider this quote from BBC News(2000), "National cultures and identities are also under threat thanks to the spread of satellite TV, international media networks and increased personal travel. In French cinemas, around 70% of filmgoers watch Hollywood movies."

To my knowledge there are no new statutes that are being enforced in France that require people to go and see Hollywood movies. The French moviegoers go of their own volition. They go out and make their hard earned money and then choose to spend it on such American made movies. The catch however is then the US gets the blame. It seems to me that in our racism there is a feeling of resentment and this is often expressed by the view that the Americanisation of our culture is being imposed on us. This is not true. We are choosing it. If you do not like the Americanisation of your culture then do not buy American goods, do not eat at McDonalds, do not drink coke, do not watch Hollywood movies. Can you imagine your children's reaction when you tell them about this new household policy. There would be howls of protest and that is the key. The Americans at the moment have won the popularity contest for the Free Child. They make very popular movies, foods, drinks, clothing and so on. They have learnt how to appeal to the Free Child in a very large number of people. They do not coerce us, they seduce us - democracy in action.

However, the point at hand is that we are currently blaming the wrong thing with our racist resentment. We tend to blame the Americans when it is ourselves. As any psychotherapist will testify, one is often confronted with clients who complain about their woes being due to the unfair action of others. "I would be happy if only my wife, husband, mother, father would .....". Of course those who believe this are forever doomed to remain unhappy, because they are putting themselves in a powerless position where their happiness is dependent on the will and actions of others. The goal is to accept and own my role in contributing to the difficulties and unhappiness. As soon as one does this then one is empowered and is in a position to change their actions and thus change their situation and thus stop the unhappiness. We as a culture need to do this stop blaming the US for 'coercing' us into accepting the Americanisation of our culture and blame ourselves for embracing the parts of that culture which we may not like. This will allow us to be racist in a far more positive and healthy way.

#### ANTI-GLOBALIZATION

With the acceleration of globalization in recent times this of course has accelerated the Americanisation of cultures around the planet. As one surveys the literature and surfs the net one comes across a term (come political action) called "anti-globalization".

To sum up what this is about I refer you to a Canadian security intelligence service report(2000) on anti-globalization - "The growing trend toward anti-globalization activism is directed, first, against "big business"—multinational corporate power—and, second, against "big money"—global agreements on economic growth. Allegations of exploitive labour and human-rights abuses reach back to the mid-1990s when a number of corporations producing major brand name products, such as Nike sneakers, Gap jeans, and Starbucks coffee, were accused of union-busting, sweatshop working conditions, and child labour practices on a global scale."

This describes well what the anti-globalization movement is about. It is limited however as it focuses on economics alone. I suggest that there is a much more powerful force of anti-globalization that has to my knowledge not been fully articulated yet - psychological anti-globalisation. Globalization is about the movement of people, cargo, money and information around the globe with ever increasing ease and in ever increasing volumes. This has led to people feeling much more connected with others on the globe and national

boundaries become more and more ill defined and are less and less meaningful.

What happened right after the Bali Bombing?. Most immediately came 'home'. The government immediately warned against international travel to an ever growing list of places on the globe. Our national boundaries all of a sudden became very well defined, very closely watched and gained great importance. The exact opposite to what was happening with globalization. I would certainly not be buying any shares in the airline industry at the moment. Rather than people moving freely around the globe now nations are watching very carefully who comes and goes through their national boundaries. This is supported by Bradley (2003) who states: "This 'bunkering down' is taking people right back to the basics of ontological security issues, according to Amanda Allan - they orient to more primal and safe attachment relationships (e.g. spending more time with family) and changing their activities (e.g. staying closer to home, cancelling travel plans) (P12)

If one assumes that terrorism is at least partly due to some countries and cultures feeling like they are losing their identity, then the terrorists have achieved their goal. If terrorists can make large numbers of people feel unsafe about travel then one of the central aspects of globalization is greatly impeded. The free and prolific movement of people around the globe slows dramatically. Globalization as mentioned before has accelerated the Americanisation of cultures around the globe. If such 'psychological anti-globalization' gains a foothold then that will at least slow the Americanisation of cultures around the globe which one can assume is a main objective of terrorist activity.

## CONCLUSION

Sir Isaac Newton's third law of motion states - "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". An astute observation and perhaps he should have been a psychologist rather than a physicist as that law certainly applies for the way in which humans behave. Globalization will inevitably breed anti-globalization. Racish attitudes can be an emotional expression of psychological anti-globalization.

This country of Australia has a policy of multiculturalism which is very much on the globalization side of the ledger. It now needs to alter so it can cater for the resentment that our racish feelings develop and the inevitable evolution of psychological anti-globalization. How can psychologists contribute to us learning how to live in a multicultural society and get on with

other cultures, whilst at the same time letting those individual cultures have their own individual sense of who they are?

In practice, multiculturalism means "they are going to become like us". It is the same as the policy of assimilation that was adopted a number of decades ago to make the indigenous and migrant populations become just like 'us', primarily the anglo-celtic Australians. It is the same policy but with better window dressing.

It can be reasonably assumed that the homogenizing effect of globalization combined with the current Americanisation of culture means that the Arabic and Muslim societies are going to be disembowelled within two generations. They will either cease to exist or only exist in a highly westernised form. One is hard pressed to contemplate a set of circumstances where large numbers of women in westernised cultures are going to voluntarily take on the mandate of hijab. Yet it is very easy to contemplate that the muslim children, adolescents and young adults in our culture are going to be very keen to take on the western dress, diet, entertainment, recreation, work and overall life style. Then the next generation of muslim children, adolescents and young adults after that, are going to take it on even more so.

Yet the policy of multiculturalism seems to be taken on without question. There is no better example of this than on the back cover of InPsych (April 2003) which promotes the next APS conference in October, 2003. It pictures people from a variety of races and cultures with the title, "Development through Diversity" when we know they are all going to be homogenised into one if we follow a policy like multiculturalism. I would suggest that if one presented Racish (White(2003)) ideas at such a conference it would quickly be labelled as 'racist'. I doubt that such a paper would even get past the assessment by the conference scientific programme committee, to actually get presented at the conference.

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