

One-eyed ‘trolls’ in real life

ATLE HETLAND
EN ROUTE

Europe, with Oceania and North America, has as long as I remember been the righteous in moral, social, political and economic issues. Little would be put on the agenda, stay there, and decisions made unless they wanted it. Few international and regional cooperation institutions would be established either, unless they wanted it, and they would dictate their terms. I say ‘they’, but maybe I should say ‘we’, because I am also a European.

But I have also come to realize that not all the Western values are as objective as we pretend they are. With age and experience, I have come to reflect on that. I have learned to question issues also because I have lived on three other continents other than my own for several decades, notably Africa, Asia and North America.

Often, the ways that solutions to problems are propagated are not neutral. We, the Westerners, use premises and arguments that suit ourselves. That may be common to all human beings, groups and states, you may say. All want to present themselves in the best light and get as much as possible in return. Yet, the problem lay in the West’s upper-hand, indeed in access to resources, effective institutions, and popular organizations and parties. They spread information and disinformation; they control most TV chandelles and other mainstream media. Even those who disagree must follow their agenda for the debate otherwise they can’t be part of it. No wonder then that the West wins most debates – on its premises. And, obviously, I talk about the political and economic rulers in the West, not the ordinary people.

True, there is freedom of speech in the West, but not freedom of volume of speech, and selection of topics. True, too, there are many Western values that are truly universal, and I believe the International Human Rights are indeed the best driving rules that we have. But there are many other values that are not as universal.

Important, too, people in non-European countries don’t just want to be presented with the conclusion and solutions; they want to be part of the process. It is a fact that without being part of the debates of moral, political, social, economic and other issues, we often don’t feel we own the solutions either.

Spreading of one-eyed information is nothing new. The Nazi propaganda machinery before and during World War II is often used to show how dangerous misinformation can be. We ignore that the West’s propaganda machinery today is much larger and more advanced. We don’t see how one-eyed it is because opposing information and views are also allowed. Yet, if views against the leaders’ interests gain major support, then massive actions are taken to discredit those with dissenting views and interests.

The crisis in Ukraine is portrayed as a conflict about democracy in and independence of the smaller land, with 50 million people, against Russia, with about 120 million people and enormous resources and vast land. But it is much more than that. It is mainly about the West’s and NATO’s own geopolitical control. We may even begin to question what the Cold War really was about. It was about containing Russia, the Soviet Union that time; it was not just against communism, the competing economic system to the West’s.

We should also recall that World War II perhaps could have been ended a year earlier than what was the case, but then the Soviet Union would have come out as a clearer winner of the war, and the West would have had to include it more prominently in the world’s new leadership. WWII was not only a war against the Nazi ideology; it was about who the world leaders should be. The Anglo-Americans will never tell us that!

Today, the West is the world's policeman, with USA in the chief commissioner's chair, and the EU and other NATO members, in the deputy commissioner' chair. To police the world has first of all to do with military and geopolitical control, access to resources and keeping challengers at bay. The term 'preemptive strikes' is not mainly a military concept; it has to do with keeping countries and regions down if they don't accept the West's ideology and leadership, or if there is some uncertainty about where the newcomers stand on the support of the West, and if the newcomers' citizens are controllable.

The colonial area is more than a dark era of the West's history, as was indeed its predecessor of slavery. The Asian and African colonies gained their independence from a few years after WWII, as was the case for India and Pakistan, until the 1970s. The South Africans are this year celebrating the land's 20 years of overturning white supremacy, apartheid, and the people's struggle ending in majority rule and (Western) democracy.

Today, the Westerners advocate democracy, education and health for all, and observance of human rights in the whole world, including the former colonies. But the West has deliberately swept under the carpet that it did not provide anything of it in its colonies – less than three-quarters of a century ago. Yes, it is good what the West does now. But isn't there something dishonest about distracting attention from history, knowing too that much of the young independent countries' problems lay in the colonial past?

I have spent much of my professional career in bilateral and multilateral aid. I think we tried to do our best. But alas, we should have done so much better. We too were, and still are, part of the West's glossing over policies. We believe we do good with aid (but poorly with fair trade). And we also force onto the young states political and economic systems that have not grown out of their cultures. Without adopting Western democracy and capitalism, they won't get much aid, and they would have no license to trade either. It is indeed sad that Cuba still is kept under the thumb, not by Castro but by USA. And the 'democratic' West lets America get away with it. We truly live in a one-eyed world, don't we?

I must mention something about the nuclear arsenals and huge military expenditures that we keep having even in our modern times, with NATO being the world's largest military machinery ever, and the majority of the budget comes from America. It is wastage of resources that should have been used for human development. How come all those weapons are made, even used? How come the otherwise quite pragmatic Europeans and Americans accept it? We are told it is to protect the 'free world', of course, but I believe it is rather to protect an old world order and an anti-social capitalist economic system, with growing differences within and between countries and people. We must all be brainwashed and one-eye if we believe this is justifiable.

No, I am not only worried about the one-eyed trolls in the West; there are many dangerous trolls, and Russian bears, too, with heavy footprints.

And if you don't agree with all I have said in this article, then I may have written a good article. Well, provided that you analyze issues independently and draw better conclusions yourself. I just told a bit of the history. I didn't even mention that when the truth is seen, when sun light is shed on those nasty 'trolls', they vanish into nothingness. At least that is how the story goes in Norwegian fairytales.

The writer is a senior Norwegian social scientist with experience from university, diplomacy and development aid.
