

# CounterPunch

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

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## *A Witch-Hunting We Will Go*

### Lizzie Phelan vs. The New York Times

By Alexander Cockburn

On February 10, Robert Mackey ran a long piece in the *New York Times*, titled “Crisis in Syria Looks Very Different on Satellite Channels Owned by Russia and Iran.” It was intended to discredit Lizzie Phelan, a British journalist who has worked in Libya and Syria. Phelan has broadcast on Press TV (an Iranian network) and Russia Today (RT). Mackey seemed to think that the mere act of appearing on these networks indicates slavish fealty to Teheran and Moscow. Like other CounterPunchers, I have been interviewed a number of times by both networks. Why? Because both networks are interested in hearing from critics of U.S. and NATO policies. The *Times*, by and large, in common with about 99 per cent of the U.S. corporate media, is not interested in giving space or air time to such

critics, and clearly regards it as heinous – disloyal, even – for them to appear in such venues as Press TV and RT. Press TV was obviously getting popular in the U.K., perhaps because it offered an alternative to the usual propaganda barrage, so the British government shut it down.

Anyone who followed the performance of the corporate NATO press in Libya knows well that it would be hard to find, in the entire annals of journalism, a clearer record of willful failure. Amid the rubble and disintegration of that country, it is now generally agreed that the NATO bombing raids inflicted immense destruction and killed a very large number of people. One seasoned rebel estimated 50,000 dead. Yet, it remains true that across the months of the bombing campaign, it was virtually impossible to find ONE journalist from a corporate or state-

influenced outlet from the Nato countries simply visiting a destroyed home and interviewing survivors or witnesses.

As readers of *CounterPunch* know well, it took human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, to demolish the claims of Western governments and their captive press that Gaddafi was committing “genocide” against his own people, that there were mass, state-ordered rapes, that rebels were not maltreating and murdering guest workers. It’s only recently that, very occasionally, a reporter like the late Anthony Shadid disclosed that “The militias are proving to be the scourge of the revolution’s aftermath. Though they have dismantled most of their checkpoints in the capital, they remain a force, here and elsewhere.

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U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice had a strong reaction to the Russian and Chinese veto of the Moroccan resolution on Syria. She called it “disgusting and shameful.”

Standing outside the U.N., she told a television channel that the Resolution would have “aligned the international community behind a process in which both sides had to come together and on a very swift timetable negotiate a transition to a new democratic regime.” In other words, the “international community” would lean on the regime of Bashar al-Assad to “step aside” and allow an alternative government to be formed, which would include the various factions that are currently outside Syria (with some representation from within). Unusually for a diplomat, Rice then said that “any further blood that flows will be

on their hands,” namely, on the hands of the Russians and the Chinese.

A diplomat I spoke to said that he was rattled by Rice’s bluntness. The arena of international diplomacy is decorous, with differences articulated mostly through gestures and silences. Rarely do diplomats speak their mind, and when they do, it is often calculated outrage. So, what did Rice’s comments indicate? That her comments on Syria are fiercer than those of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton either indicate that the White House has decided to extend itself in many moods at different allies, or else that there is a

## *Disgusting is as Disgusting Does* The Agonies of Susan Rice

By Vijay Prashad

divide in the Washington establishment with the liberal interventionist hawks eager for another Libya versus the more cautious realists hostile to another military engagement. It is hard to be precise on these options. Less unclear is the motivation or the agony of Susan Rice. This has its roots in Rwanda, and it is helpful to unravel it.

As a member of Bill Clinton’s National Security Council, in late April 1994 Rice was on an interagency conference call on the events in Rwanda. News had come of the killings in Kigali in response to the assassination of President Juvenal

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Habyarimana on April 6. In the weeks that followed, 800,000 men, women and children were killed. The U.N. had already documented the massacres at Gikondo and at the Nyarubuye Roman Catholic Church. Before the call, the Kibuye massacres took place in the Gatwaro Stadium in Gitesi, with twelve thousand Tutsi killed. All this had already been revealed. It was hard for the United States government to utterly ignore the events.

Rice was cagey about the news from Rwanda. "If we use the word 'genocide' and are seen as doing nothing," she said on the phone call, "what will be the effect on the November [congressional] elections?" This remark shocked the others on the phone, who recounted it to Samantha Power (then a journalist, who wrote it up in the *Atlantic*). Rice disavowed the sentiment. She later told Power, "There was such a huge disconnect between the logic of each of the decisions we took along the way during the genocide and the moral consequences of the decisions taken collectively, I swore to myself that if I ever faced such a crisis again, I would come down on the side of dramatic action, going down in flames if that was required." Power's article be-

came the centerpiece of her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (2002).

Samantha Power should have read Mahmood Mamdani's book on Rwanda (*When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*, 2001). It would have given her the historian's view. In his book on Darfur (*Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror*, 2009) Mamdani writes, "Rwanda is the guilt that America must expiate, and to do so, it must be ready to intervene, for good and against evil, globally." But this is the wrong lesson drawn by Power and others. The West had already intervened in Rwanda, with the French creating a sanctuary for fleeing Tutsis (Operation Turquoise) and the U.S. backing the

**"If we use the word 'genocide' and are seen as doing nothing," she said on the phone call, "what will be the effect on the November [congressional] elections?"**

Rwandan Patriotic Front and its leader, Paul Kagame. Rather than struggle to create a political solution, the U.S.A. "signaled to one of the parties that it could pursue victory with impunity. This unilateralism was part of what led to the disaster, and that is the real lesson of Rwanda." Mamdani argues further, "Fostering hopes of an external military intervention among those in the insurgency who aspire to victory and reinforcing the fears of those in the counterinsurgency who see it as a prelude to defeat are precisely the ways to turn Darfur into Rwanda. Strengthening those on both sides who advocate a political settlement to the civil war is the only realistic approach for ending the violence."

The guilt over Rwanda shadowed the liberal interventionists in their assessment of Darfur. The colonial, ecological and political details of what was taking place in Sudan were of no consequence. What was important was for the United States to throw its full military muscle

into stopping the killings in the Sudanese province. U.N. sanctions and African peacekeepers were not enough. The U.S. needed, Rice said in a speech at Johns Hopkins University in 2007, "to turn the screws." In that speech, Rice bemoaned the reluctance of the Bush administration to remain steady in its use of the term "genocide." "Such language games shock the conscience," she said, perhaps with an ear to her own games 13 years before. If the U.S.A. did not stand firm and act firmly, it would ruin U.S. credibility and damage "our already diminished international standing by the Administration's seemingly empty threats."

Zachariah Mampilly, who teaches at Vassar and is the author of *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War*, notes that in this speech Rice "vacillates between genuine outrage at events going on in Darfur and the importance of demonstrating U.S. power. She refers to U.S. inaction (i.e., not bombing Sudan) as 'cowardly' and implies that the U.S. should act in response to 'taunting' from Khartoum." Rice's "blueprint for unilateral military action against a regime for ostensibly humanitarian purposes" was "essentially the model pursued in Libya," Mampilly suggests.

Rice called for a serious cocktail of financial sanctions against Khartoum and military action by NATO and the U.S. In an op-ed in the *Washington Post* in 2006, Rice (with Anthony Lake) asked, "Will we use force to save Africans in Darfur as we did to save Europeans in Kosovo?" The Kosovo example framed the Sudan conflict. Calls for a timid "no-fly zone" had to be swatted away. Rice wanted something more muscular. "Rather than standoff air strikes against defined targets, maintaining a no-fly zone would require an asset-intensive, 24 hour per day, 7 day per week, open-ended military commitment in a logistically difficult context. ... In short, [a no-fly zone] would require many of the same steps that are necessary to conduct the air strikes [to strike] Sudanese airfields, aircraft and other military assets," including intelligence assets. In other words, the "no-fly zone" would no longer simply allow the Sudanese Air Force to act in Darfur, but it would mean an air war against Sudan. The liberal interventionists redefined the "no-fly zone" into a full-scale air assault. No wonder that the former head of the Arab League, Amr Moosa, went into a tizzy when the

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aerial bombardment began on Libya in March 2011 (he had to be summoned to stand beside the U.N.'s Ban Ki-moon to repent for his hastily critical remarks).

When Barack Obama began his run for the presidency, the liberal military interventionists gathered around him. Rice and Samantha Power were his foreign policy advisors. They came into his administration – Rice as ambassador to the U.N. and Power as Obama's special assistant. They were the ones who pushed hardest for intervention in Libya, and they succeeded. Syria is simply the next station on their crusade.

Obama is a little more hesitant than the Rice-Power team of interventionists. He telegraphed this in his *The Audacity of Hope*, where he wrote that while the U.S. has a "moral obligation" for people who suffer under totalitarian states, it should not act unilaterally with military force to free them. "Nor do I mean that we round up the United Kingdom and Togo and then do what we please," he added. What was needed was "the hard diplomatic work of obtaining most of the world's support for our actions." The entrails of the White House debates reveal that there is a tussle between the Rice-Power team (with Biden in tow) and the Obama realist group that is less willing for a new air campaign in Syria (the hesitations of Israel are also part of the equation). Where this debate will fall is anyone's guess. But it might not remain long in the hands of the U.S., which is being driven by the newly buoyant Gulf Arabs, notably the Qataris.

The moralism of Rice and Power does not extend to the victims of Atlantic imperialism. Genocides are only such when the perpetrators are not among the Atlantic powers. The long finger is pointed at the Eastern Europeans and the Africans – never at the United States government or NATO. Thousands certainly died in Kosovo [and also in the Krajina, Editors] but hundreds of thousands died in Iraq and East Timor – two states where the U.S.A. was either the perpetrator or the benefactor. The word "genocide" has been sequestered to U.S. imperial ends, with Rice and Power disgusted with the violence of others but not of their own

There is no disgust at the consistent egging on by the U.S. of the Pakistani military to act against its own people, the most egregious being the campaign

in the Swat Valley, where hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives and were rendered displaced. An Amnesty International briefing pointedly noted, "The Pakistani government's response to the rise of insurgents in the Northwest Frontier Province's Malakand Division (mainly in the Lower Dir, Buner, and Swat Valley) and in the Tribal Areas fluctuates between launching often indiscriminate and disproportionate military operations that harm mainly civilians and abandoning Pakistani citizens to abusive militant groups. Security forces deployed in government operations often fail to differentiate between civilians and militants and use disproportionate force, causing civilian deaths and injuries and

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destroying civilian property. Such disregard for civilian life and civilian infrastructure, such as homes and schools, is common throughout the region." It is not just the Pakistani government that came in for criticism by Amnesty, but its "international backers – notably the United States," who have said that the aim is not to protect civilians but to pursue "military and counterterrorism objectives, with often fatal consequences for civilians."

Rice's disgust is not moral. It is calibrated to the interests of U.S. foreign policy. **CP**

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A Human Rights Watch researcher estimated there are 250 separate militias in the coastal city of Misurata, the scene of perhaps the fiercest battle of the revolution. In recent months those militias have become the most loathed in the country."

Shadid met an elder, Jumaa Ageela, who told him, "Nobody holds back the Misuratans." The same was true for the militias in Tripoli. Shadid heard from Bashir Brebesh: "On January 19, his 62-year-old father, Omar, a former Libyan diplomat in Paris, was called in for questioning by militiamen from Zintan. The next day, the family found his body at a hospital in Zintan. His nose was broken, as were his ribs. The nails had been pulled from his toes, they said. His skull was fractured, and his body bore signs of burns from cigarettes.

"The government has acknowledged the torture and detentions, but it admits that the police and Justice Ministry are not up to the task of stopping them. On Tuesday, it sent out a text message on cellphones, pleading for the militias to stop. 'People are turning up dead in detention at an alarming rate,' said Peter Bouckaert, the emergencies director at Human Rights Watch, who was compiling evidence in Libya last month. 'If this was happening under any Arab dictatorship, there would be an outcry.'"

The performance of the Western press in Syria has been almost uniformly disgraceful. In the wake of the Aleppo atrocities, network journalists eagerly relayed the suggestion from rebel propaganda outlets that yes, perhaps the Syrian security forces had blown themselves up to discredit the rebels.

The Western press and Al Jazeera, tightly controlled by Qatar's absolute monarchy, have nothing to be proud of in their performance in Libya, and their coverage of Syria has been equally wretched. Our website has featured Aisling Byrne's devastating exposé of the propaganda machine at work in the latter case. As Byrne reported, "Of the three main sources for all data on numbers of protesters killed and numbers of people attending demonstrations – the pillars of the narrative – all are part of the 'regime change' alliance. The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights, in particular, is reportedly funded through a Dubai-based fund with pooled (and, therefore, deniable) Western-Gulf money (Saudi Arabia alone

has, according to Elliot Abrams, allocated \$130 million to ‘palliate the masses’ of the Arab Spring). What appears to be a nondescript British-based organization, the Observatory has been pivotal in sustaining the narrative of the mass killing in Syria of thousands of peaceful protesters using inflated figures, ‘facts,’ and often exaggerated claims of ‘massacres’ and even recently ‘genocide.’”

*CounterPunch* is running the interview because Phelan gives a spirited challenge to Mackey’s assumptions. We don’t sign on to everything Phelan thinks or writes or broadcasts – but what we regard as very sinister are Mackey’s premises, with the old Cold War subtext that somehow to consent to appear on RT or Press TV is giving aid and comfort to the “enemy,” plus his own complacent and patronizing ignorance of what has actually happened in Libya and is now happening in Syria.

We are no clap-hands fans of the Assad regime. As Byrne wrote, “All this is not to say that there isn’t a genuine popular demand for change in Syria against the repressive security-dominated infrastructure that dominates every aspect of people’s lives, nor that gross human-

rights violations have not been committed, both by the Syrian security forces, armed opposition insurgents, as well as mysterious third-force characters operating since the onset of the crisis in Syria, including insurgents, mostly jihadis from neighboring Iraq and Lebanon, as well as more recently Libya, among others.” But what has been astounding is the lengths to which the Western press goes to skirt the fact that Syria is confronting a well-armed Sunni insurgency not in the least interested in free speech, or democracy,

**Malcolm X famously said, “if you are not careful, the media will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the oppressor,” and that quote rings true more than ever today, most recently in the way that the Western and GCC media has covered events in Libya and Syria.**

but rather in advancing, with indiscriminate high explosive, the Sunni cause as spearheaded and financed by those shining exemplars of democracy and human rights – Saudi Arabia and Qatar, with a neocon propaganda machine fuelled with CIA and National Endowment for Democracy money purring away in the background.

In the intro to his interview with Phelan, Mackey writes: “On Friday, Syrian state media reports, featuring graphic views of corpses, blamed the bombing of military and police targets in Aleppo on ‘terrorists.’ A spokesman for the Free Syrian Army, an opposition group of military defectors, denied involvement and called the explosions a cynical government ploy to draw attention from the bombardment of Homs. Note here that he is referring to the two bombs that killed 28 and wounded 235 in Aleppo, and – like more than one U.S. network anchor – blithely relaying the preposterous claim of the Free Syrian

Army that the government security forces are blowing themselves up to obtain propaganda advantage. It’s plain enough that the bombs were set by Sunni suicide bombers, probably operating through al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and were intended to elicit government repression, not to encourage negotiation. Does Mackey think that al-Zawahiri’s call in the wake of the explosions for jihad against the Syrian government was also a forgery, designed to elicit sympathy for Assad?

Over to Phelan:

**Phelan:** Earlier today I was video interviewed over Skype by *New York Times* journalist Robert Mackey about my coverage of events in Libya and Syria and my critics of the mainstream Western and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) media in relation to events in those countries. This was my first interview by a mainstream Western media organization, and I have been told that the video will be published in full.

Prior to the interview, I was sent three questions outlining the general topics that would be covered in the interview. In some ways, the interview veered away from these topics, and so, here I will publish the questions that were outlined prior to the interview and publish my full answers to them, just because I feel like it is important that full responses are given to these questions in particular, and while I made most of these points in the interview, there are some points that I omitted.

**Robert Mackey:** *Since your impressions of what is happening in Syria seem to be strikingly different from those of many foreign reporters who have worked there, I wanted to ask you about how you found your sources and what you think accounts for the different picture painted of the conflict by other journalists.*

**Lizzie Phelan:** First of all, I hope that you will give me the opportunity to answer all of your questions in full, so that the context which is always lacking can be provided. I also hope that you will ask all the questions that you proposed when I agreed to do this interview. If not, I will myself publish the full questions and my full answers.

This question is flawed, because what you really mean is that my impressions of what is happening in Syria seem to be strikingly different from those reporters from the NATO and GCC countries, which have a vested interest in destabiliz-

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ing Syria. Of course, my impressions are actually shared by the majority people of this world, from those countries outside of NATO and the GCC and particularly those which are victims of these powers. But because they do not own powerful media, their voices are drowned out by the impressions of the minority reflected in the mainstream media of the NATO and GCC countries.

So, in relation to my sources, I find my sources through a number of different means, but my main means is I talk to ordinary people everywhere I go, and in Syria this is not difficult because people are really keen to speak about the crisis in their country, especially to foreigners who, they feel strongly, have a false impression about their country and current events. This was overwhelmingly, but of course not exclusively, the point of view that I encountered. And this is reflected in my reporting.

In fact, like in Libya, I was so overwhelmed by the volume of people who wanted to talk about their anger at the fabrications in the media of the NATO and GCC countries that my colleague Mostafa Afzalzadeh and I decided to make a documentary, so that we could reflect what ordinary Syrian people are really saying. This documentary will actually expose how, if it was not for such media, the crisis in Syria would have been over before it started and the people of Syria would be living in peace now.

The difference with journalists from mainstream media in NATO and GCC countries is that they come with an agenda, and that agenda is to cover what they call a “revolution” happening inside Syria and to give substance to the false claim that the Syrian government is a threat to the Syrian people. So, if, for example, they walk down the street and they have 10 people telling them there is no revolution happening in Syria and actually the people want the army to protect them from the terrorists who are flooding the country, and then they have one person who tells them that there is no democracy in Syria, they will discard the 10 as government spies and run with the one person who said something different. I witnessed this myself.

If they were to do the reverse and reflect the majority view on the street, then this would undermine the coverage of their media organizations over the previous 10 months that have painted a pic-

ture of a government hated by its people, and, in turn, it would undermine their own credibility as journalists working for those organizations.

But in time they will not be able to suppress the truth. However, like in Libya, the danger is that the truth only comes out when it is too late, when a country has been successfully destroyed by the NATO and GCC countries, with the vital help of their media. Then the Western media can afford to be more honest, although never entirely, because the aim – for example, of regime change – of their paymasters have been achieved.

I, on the other hand, am not concerned about towing a line in order to “make it” as a journalist working for one of the

## **The Western press and Al Jazeera, tightly controlled by Qatar’s absolute monarchy, have nothing to be proud of in their performance in Libya, and their coverage of Syria has been equally wretched.**

world’s most respected media organizations, I became a journalist in order to reflect the truth at whatever cost that may come. The only thing I am loyal to is my conscience.

**RM:** *Since you have appeared on Press TV and Russia Today, as well as Syria state television, do you have any concern that you might seem to be endorsing the governments that finance those channels, or do you see your role more as that of an activist opposing the policies of the U.S. and U.K. than as a neutral reporter?*

**LP:** This question in itself is a very deceitful and loaded question, and it is taken out of context. It implies that BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, etc., and the journalists who work for those organizations are independent from their financiers. If I worked for BBC, does that mean that I am endorsing the British government which funds it and that government’s centuries long and present abuses across the world?

Why is the *NYT* concerned about my work for Russia Today and Press TV? I challenge you to find me specific ex-

amples of journalists who work for these organizations who have engaged in bad journalistic practices. Why are you not concerned about journalists who work for Al Jazeera that is funded by and reflects the foreign policy of the Qatari emir and royal family? Al Jazeera has been proven many times over in the past few months to have published false reports about events in the region, not least Libya. How can their journalists be neutral when their employer hosts the largest U.S. military base in the region, and has been responsible for sending thousands of fighters, weapons, and a lot of money to kill and destroy in Libya and is now doing the same in Syria in addition to having called for Arab troops to invade the country.

Likewise, I have yet to hear the *NYT* question the “neutrality” of journalists who work with the British state-funded BBC, or journalists who work for the Murdoch press, which is well documented to have strong connections with all the major Western powers which are responsible for the greatest violations of international law. So, the question should start from the premise that no news organizations are neutral, and each represents a certain ideology. So, if you ask me if I feel more at peace working for news channels which reflect the ideology of states that are defending themselves from constant attack by the West – that is an ideology that opposes foreign interference in their affairs and promotes their own independence – or would I feel more comfortable working for media organizations that reflect the arrogant ideology that Western civilization is superior and should be imposed across the world by any means necessary, then I think any person with the slightest understanding of global politics and at least recent history would say the former.

An additional deception in this question is that there is such a thing as neutrality and that journalists are able to separate their own beliefs in what they choose to cover and how they cover it, or, indeed, the pretence that journalists do not hold an opinion.

As I said, I am not concerned about others’ perceptions of these things, because anyone who perceives that because I have worked for Russia Today or Press TV it means that I am in someone’s pocket, whereas if I was working for a Western organization I would be “neu-

tral,” is deceiving themselves and choosing to look at a tiny portion of a whole picture.

Incidentally, when I was stuck in the Rixos Hotel in Tripoli with those 35 other press people, one day two American journalists rushed into the hotel and swiftly exited when they realized that the hotel was being defended by Gaddafi supporters. Actually, one of the two in particular was worried about the Gaddafi supporters harming him, but they requested that they just leave. Why was he so worried? Because he said he was related to somebody senior in the National Transitional Council of Libya, no less. I have never seen his neutrality being called into question by the mainstream media.

Finally, what is an activist? If it means that the role you play has the effect of agitating events, then I would say that we are all in some shape or form activists. For anyone to think that their actions are benign, and have no repercussions, is at best naïve. This is particularly true for all journalists, whose actions as reporters have greater repercussions than the actions of other ordinary citizens of this world. And this is, of course, because their voice is afforded a special platform, and when you study journalism, you are taught that a reporter should act as the eyes and ears of the general public, and thus you have greater influence than the ordinary citizen. So, you either use that platform to promote justice and the principles of international law, which are fundamental for everyone’s well-being, or you bury your head in the sand about the responsibility that comes with that platform and you use it to promote your own personal career or interests.

**RM:** *I also wanted to find out more about your reporting from Libya, and ask how you respond to allegations that you supported the government of Col. Gaddafi? All in all, I’m trying to get a better understanding of what drives you to speak out against Western governments but apparently lend your support to governments, like those in Iran, Russia and Syria now, that have been accused of serious human rights abuses.*

**LP:** Again, this is another deceitful question and epitomizes the manipulative approach of the world’s powerful media, such as newspapers like the *NYT*. Here you are asking me this question because the West’s major powers and media criminalized Muammar Gaddafi,

Iran, etc., by accusing them of abusing human rights. So, you are trying to put me into this trap by saying that if I support Muammar Gaddafi, and Iran, I also support abuses against human rights.

But, first of all, this question of human rights is an absolute fallacy and is, at present, the number one stick used to bash leaders of independent developing countries in order to provide a moral justification for the imposition of the Western system upon those countries.

My colleague Dan Glazebrook did an interview on Russia Today last week, following the decision by Doctors Without Borders to stop their work in Libya in de-

## **How is it that one can moralize about human rights but not give a second’s thought to the fact that a senior member of the U.S. government, Hilary Clinton, called for the death of another head of state, Muammar Gaddafi, just two days before he was assassinated?**

spair at the appalling torture against tens of thousands of pro-Gaddafi Libyans by those rebels who have been cheered on for the past year by the Western media. He reminded the public that according to HRW reports from the past five years, there were three possible cases of deaths in custody in Libya], which is really exemplary, but in Britain there were four cases last month alone. So, I would be far more concerned about being associated with the British government and, thus, its appalling human rights record. And that is just Britain – the rest of the NATO countries, the U.S. and also Israel and the GCC countries fare no better.

Factually speaking, Libya was a paradise for human rights, and Muammar Gaddafi was due to receive a human rights award prior to the NATO onslaught. And, of course, Libya had the highest standard of living in Africa and much of the region, including a much higher standard of living than Saudi Arabia, which hardly ever is in the spot-

light in the mainstream Western press.

Nonetheless, you wouldn’t dream of implying that journalists who work for the *Sun* or the *Guardian* in Britain – both of which take a position of supporting one way or another, the Conservative Party or the Labour Party – support abuses of human rights because they work for papers which back parties that have committed some of the greatest injustices known to man throughout history all across the world and up until this day. Injustices which far outstrip any injustices that have occurred at the hands of any leader of a developing country.

So, why the two faces? This is all part of the prejudice in Western media that Western civilization is superior to anything else and, therefore, those responsible for the injustices committed by the West need not be held accountable, and anyone who speaks out against that should have their name dragged through the mud.

Malcolm X famously said, “if you are not careful, the media will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the oppressor,” and that quote rings true more than ever today, most recently in the way that the Western and GCC media has covered events in Libya and Syria.

But to respond to your question directly, as I have stated, what I support is respect for international law, and the most important principle in international law, and one of the main stated aims for the body that was set up to uphold international law, the now redundant U.N., is respect for the sovereignty of nations and noninterference in the internal affairs of states. Recent history shows that the root of the greatest injustices known to man is the violation of these principles, and so, anyone who violates these principles is a criminal and should be treated as such, and anyone who is a victim of such violations should be defended.

Now, not only these principles, but all relevant international laws were violated in the case of Libya and the West’s treatment of Muammar Gaddafi, and this has been well documented. The same violations are playing out against the Syrian government.

How is it that one can moralize about human rights but not give a second’s thought to the fact that a senior member of the U.S. government, Hilary Clinton, called for the death of another head of

state, Muammar Gaddafi, just two days before he was assassinated? I hope I don't need to tell you that that was entirely illegal and abhorrent.

I am wholly against such violations, just as anybody who believes in international law and justice would be, and, therefore, I will support the right of anyone to defend themselves against this violation by any means necessary.

I have been accused by some of being a mouthpiece for the Libyan government, but now the truth is coming out, we know that the essence of the former Libyan government's analysis has been proved correct, whilst almost everything reported by the mainstream Western media has been proved wrong:

The rebellion WAS, indeed, armed from the very first day of the uprising (this was confirmed in Amnesty's in-depth report from late last year) – not a peaceful movement.

The rebels WERE working hand in glove with Western intelligence agencies to facilitate a NATO blitzkrieg.

The NTC ARE disunited and incapable of governing the country.

The rebels DO have a racist, even genocidal, policy toward sub-Saharan African migrants, and the third of the Libyan population is dark skinned.

Gaddafi's government WERE NOT conducting aerial attacks against protesters or mass rape (or, indeed, ANY rape, according to Amnesty).

There HAD NOT been 10,000 people killed in Benghazi by Gaddafi's government during the uprising (as the NTC claimed), but 110 (Amnesty figures again) killed on both sides prior to NATO's attack, etc.

On every major issue, the Gaddafi government's analysis and figures have been proven far, far closer to the truth than the NTC's and the Western media's initial and unequivocal position. So, ANY journalist telling the truth about these issues would have "sounded like a mouthpiece of the regime," because the government's analysis was essentially correct, and has now been proven correct. CP

**Alexander Cockburn** wants to tell readers that he's nearly done with his latest collection, *A Colossal Wreck: American Diaries, from the Time of Clinton to Obama*, which will be published this spring by CounterPunch Books.

## **Blaming the Poor Yes, It's Charles Murray, singing for his Supper**

By Carl Ginsburg

**T**here are many weapons in the public relations arsenal of the 1 per cent. An old stand-by in that stockpile is to fault "the family," a predictable verbal assault invoked to shift the debate away from the gross pocket-stuffing that defines our time. As poverty and inequality engulf America today – the greatest transfer of wealth upward in the nation's history – a new barrage of insults is aimed at those most in distress, with claims of floundering family values, failed

**As Les Leopold argues persuasively in *The Looting of America*, for the last half-century productivity increases in the workplace have gone to owners, not even shared with the workforce.**

responsibility, cultural shortcomings, and the like.

These assaults are now being given prominent play on the battlefronts of the media. From Charles Murray, always the good soldier, ensconced in his ideological bunker at the American Enterprise Institute, arrives a new book, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*. It describes income inequality as "more of a symptom than a cause." Murray is quoted in the *New York Times* as saying, "When the economy recovers, you'll still see all these problems persisting for reasons that have nothing to do with money and everything to do with culture."

In the *New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof bemoans the "eclipse of traditional family patterns." He says that a "chunk of working-class America risks being calcified into an underclass, marked by drugs, despair, family decline, incarceration rates, and a diminishing role of jobs and education." Referring to Daniel

Patrick Moynihan's incendiary 1965 report on black families, Kristof concludes, "Moynihan was right to sound the alarms."

"The situation is independent of outside influence and has to be dealt with from within," Moynihan told an interviewer in 1984, reflecting on his 1965 report. "It is beyond economics."

Beyond economics? Cash hoarding is up. Way up. U.S. companies are now sitting on \$2 trillion in cash, much of it being used in stock buybacks and executive bonuses, making the 1 per cent even richer. But you won't see those weapons – notions of failed responsibility, cultural shortcomings and moral bankruptcy – targeted at the super-elites. Instead, we are told that sitting on this essential capital derives from a failure of "confidence" in consumers – whose wages and buying power are stagnant. One more grand obfuscation in the class war. Never mind that some of that cash hoard comes from U.S. taxpayers – more than \$130 billion remains to be repaid from the financial bailout, according to a report of the special inspector general.

Turns out family values are just the cover for an assault on family assets. As more and more people lose their homes to foreclosure, the aspiring are taking financial advantage in many places, such as Atlanta, where government subsidies for landlords are now to be captured. This is expected to be the worst in recent years for families facing foreclosure. The backlog of properties to be processed, by some estimates may run as high as 10 million additional residences to come on the auction block. Properties for a song and rents for a chorus – you gotta live somewhere.

Much of the 1 per cent steers its growing wealth into financial instruments, seeking double-digit returns. Private equity firms, where minimum buy-ins in eight digits are common, continue to hit high returns for those very responsible investors. One company alone, Apple, holds \$100 billion in reserve.

Marching in lockstep with the cash

**return service requested**

hoarding comes wage discipline, a well used weapon of the 1 per cent. Today, close to 45 per cent of food stamp recipients are working adults, as taxpayers continue to foot the bill for the substandard wages of business: why exactly is taxpayer money needed to supplement wages? As Les Leopold argues persuasively in *The Looting of America*, for the last half-century productivity increases in the workplace have gone to owners, not even shared with the workforce. Had wages kept paced with worker productivity, estimates Leopold, average worker pay would be \$16 per hour higher. “Nearly all of it was snatched up by the owners of capital,” he writes.

The warriors of profit are driving forward on all fronts, “diving into a wide range of riskier assets: emerging countries’ stocks and bonds; real estate; ... commodity funds; fine art; private-equity funds, which buy stakes in nonpublic companies,” Leopold writes.

In 2010, according to a Centers for Disease Control study, the percentage of American women being screened for breast and cervical cancers *declined*. The upshot of this offensive carried out by

and for the 1 per cent meant that fewer American women had the resources to undergo cancer checks. “[T]here is good evidence,” wrote the *New York Times*, “that ... screening for these cancers can

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reduce illness and save lives.”

Even with guns to their heads, you would have trouble convincing unemployed young people, those 18-24 years old, that their plight is “beyond economics.” Their employment has dropped to

54.3 per cent, the lowest level since the government began tracking this data in 1948. And for those in this age group who are employed, there has been a 6 per cent decline in median weekly earnings since 2007. The minimum wage in New York State is still \$7.25 an hour in 2012. “Beyond economics”? More than one out of six children live in a household with food insecurity, which means they do not always know where they will find their next meal. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture report, 16.2 million children under 18 in the U.S.A. live in this condition – unable to consistently access nutritious and adequate amounts of food necessary for a healthy life. Is this what constitutes “independent of outside influence”?

“Persistent poverty is America’s great moral challenge, but it’s far more than that,” fired off Kristof at those already riddled by poverty in his *Times* piece. The war on poor people soldiers on. **CP**

**Carl Ginsburg** is on the staff of National Nurses United. You can learn more about the activities of the nurses union at [www.protestintheusa.org](http://www.protestintheusa.org).