
BOOK REVIEW

Colin Mooers (Ed.). ***The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire.***
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While recent discussions of imperialism on the socialist Left have been rich, most of the debate has played itself out *within* Marxist circles. Direct confrontations with the intellectual apologists for imperialism are comparatively underdeveloped. Colin Mooers' new edited volume, *The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire*, does a fantastic job of helping to fill this lacuna.

As Mooers notes in his introductory remarks, the defenders of contemporary imperialism "must now speak the language of democracy and human rights; of freedom and dignity; of inclusiveness and respect for difference; of gender equality and the alleviation of poverty; of good governance and sustainable development" (2). Against this rhetoric, much of the book is devoted to unveiling the unsavory realities of imperial domination and its impact in each of these spheres. In seeking to underline what is novel about the "new" imperialism the book attempts to situate immediate developments – such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – within the deep structural shifts of global capitalism over the last two decades.

It is now widely recognized that the new imperialism no longer requires formal colonial occupation (Magdoff, 2003; Wood, 2003; Panitch & Gindin, 2003). If colonial occupation is no longer a requisite component of imperialism, the necessity for state military power and war has hardly eroded, as a cursory glance at daily newspapers reveals. Mooers contends that, "in a world comprised of limited territorial states and the global reach of capital, the use of overwhelming military might becomes the only way of policing capitalist interests... a more or less *permanent* state of warfare – war without end – has become definitive of twenty-first-century capitalism" (5-6).

In her chapter, Ellen Meiksins Wood shows that under capitalism legal inequalities among individuals can disappear, appropriating and producing classes can be represented as being constituted by individuals who are free and equal under the law. Even with universal

suffrage, the class power disguised under liberal capitalist democracy can be maintained without fundamental danger to the economic power of capital. With the development of capitalism, the economic and political spheres of life were separated in unprecedented ways, such that democracy in the political sphere could leave class power in the economic sphere untouched, democracy without substance.

On the domestic front of advanced capitalist states, “Formal democracy, with its ideology of freedom, equality, and classlessness, has become one of the most effective mechanisms in sustaining and reproducing class relations” (11-12). Likewise, ideologies of capitalist imperialism root themselves in similar values. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, one facet of capitalist imperialist ideology surfaced in the notion of “globalization” as a natural phenomenon. The universalization of capitalist social-property relations was portrayed as inevitable, and therefore resistance was futile. In addition to the naturalization of globalization, capitalist imperialism also requires ideological justifications for permanent war. Attached to the war on terror, therefore, has been the notion that the United States is bringing democracy to the Middle East.

The Bush doctrine of democracy promotion relies on the “U.S. conception of democracy,” one which couples “formal democracy with substantive class rule, the class rule of capital” (19). For Wood, one of the critical anti-democratic strategies of the new imperialism is the “desocialization of democracy,” in which the point is, “to put formal political rights in place of any social rights, and to put as much of social life as possible out of reach of democratic accountability” (21).¹

Elsewhere, David McNally provides a devastating critique of Michael Ignatieff’s “imperial narcissism.” Ignatieff, the former Harvard professor, “presents himself as the thinking person’s imperialist – thoughtful, anguished, decent” (87). In fact, McNally shows Ignatieff to be a fetishist extraordinaire, his fetish being the American Empire. “As is well known,” McNally writes, “fetishism crucially involves structures of denial. In place of real objects and relations, the fetishist substitutes imaginary ones.... In the case of Western colonialists, practices of pillage and terror are denied, only to be replaced in the imagination by uplifting ‘ideas’ – civilization, morality, progress – meant to redeem the imperial cause. Simultaneously, the violence and terror whose reality is denied are attributed to the ‘uncivilized’ and ‘barbaric’ colonized people themselves” (88).

McNally quite simply demolishes the foundations of Ignatieff’s “ethics,” and the widely influential liberal defense of imperialism that he has offered the West primarily in the pages of *New York Times Magazine*, and a string of small books. Any fair reader of McNally’s critique familiar with Ignatieff’s writings will have to admit their flawed logic,

1 Wood’s theoretical foundations for understanding democracy as an ideology for empire can be tied to a deep empirical fountain of evidence from the historical record. One important source in this regard is Robinson (1996).

self-delusion, avoidance and distortion of evidence, and imperial narcissism, as well as their adherence to a profound moral colonial superiority.

Adam Hanieh's chapter is an original, perceptive, and hard-hitting frontal assault on neoliberal ideology. Hanieh begins his examination with a summary of military orders given in the first months after the US-led invasion of Iraq, through which then-administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Paul Bremer, dictated the neoliberal economic restructuring of the occupied country. This portrait of neoliberalism-through-imperial-war acts as a window into a broader discussion, with Iraq providing "a perfect illustration of this intimate connection between neoliberalism and imperialism. The significance of the Iraqi case lies in the manner with which neoliberalism has been so thoroughly driven by U.S. military force" (168).

While Iraq provides one point of entry into the military side of neoliberalism, an elucidation of the finer points of the collected works of leading neoliberal economist, Deepak Lal, is Hanieh's way of commencing a broader engagement with neoliberal economic ideology. The sum of the parts are tied together as Hanieh analyzes the "current material and social reality of the capitalist mode of production," as well as the "defense of imperialism offered by the proponents of neoliberalism," through the "Marxist concept of the 'circuit of capital'" (169). Hanieh's analysis leads us nowhere else but to the conclusion that effective anti-imperialism will necessarily entail anti-capitalism.

Elsewhere in the collection, Mooers provides a thoroughgoing critique of the call for the American state to return to formal empire, registered by the conservative ideologue Niall Ferguson. Paul Cammack convincingly argues that the headquarters of the United Nations has become a bastion of the new imperialist project to export not simply capital, but "*capitalism*: the social relations of production that define it and institutions devised to promote and sustain them" (229-230). He demonstrates this part of his thesis through a study of the Millennium Development Goals. To appreciate this insight, one need not agree with the second and more controversial argument Cammack offers: "... as the central role of the U.N. suggests, [contemporary imperialism] is led not by states but by international organizations committed to capitalism as a *global project*" (230).

Such an insightful and comprehensive collection on the ideologies justifying the latest phase of imperialism was a longtime coming. Admirably, in this volume the discussion of ideology never becomes a simple deconstruction of texts, but rather is a thoroughgoing embedding of those texts and arguments in the capitalist world order. The analyses collectively demonstrate how capitalism and imperialism are intricately intertwined. For these reasons, I highly recommend *The New Imperialists: Ideologies of Empire*.

References

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