

Editor's Introduction

This issue of *Radical History Review* is devoted to “new imperialisms.” The term *New Imperialism* (in the singular) was coined in reference to the heightened imperialism of the Western powers during the period from the latter decades of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of World War I. This was a period marked by both a more accelerated and aggressive Western competition for outright annexation of territories, particularly in the African continent—known as the Partition of Africa or the Scramble for Africa—and in parts of Asia. This was accompanied by a more intensified process of establishing and expanding the informal imperial hegemony of various Western/European powers around the globe, primarily through diplomatic-political pressures and economic leverage, often backed by threat of military force, or through concluding “spheres-of-influence” arrangements with rival/competing imperial powers. Among others, J. A. Hobson, Rosa Luxemburg, and V. I. Lenin variously, albeit hyperbolically and in overarching frameworks, expounded New Imperialism in terms of interaction between private capital and the Western/European militarist states.

The title of this issue of *RHR*, “New Imperialisms” (in the plural), on the other hand, refers to two interrelated themes configuring the essays appearing here: (1) the recent insightful and critical trends in the contentious analytic historiography of Western/European imperialisms in the “modern” era, particularly those emerging from the fertile dialogue with, within, and against the theoretically nebulous field of colonial/postcolonial studies that emerged on the scene in the 1980s, despite some intellectual roots in earlier critiques of imperialism; and (2) the overt U.S. imperial aggression and hegemonic aspirations of the George W. Bush administration, unleashed in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. The post-9/11 U.S. imperial aggression and hegemonic posturing, masterminded by the so-called neoconservative-dominated administration, has

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been brazenly legitimized not only by the talking heads of the “clash of civilizations,” the Project for the New American Century, and similar groupings on the Right but also in the contorted apologia of a number of leading liberals who at most merely question certain features of the process by which the Bush administration is carrying out its sinister grand design.

The reinvigorated imperialist aggression of the United States has met with extensive opposition from the progressive Left and generated debates concerning the attributes of the current U.S. administration’s vision of a mono-imperialist U.S. “world order.” Among other concerns, the progressive Left has engaged in critical analyses and demystification of the interface between the latest U.S. imperial aggression (and its domestic and global consequences), on the one hand, and the manifold globalization processes from above and below in the so-called *postcolonial* and post-Cold War world, on the other hand. In this connection, the very field of colonial/postcolonial studies has been confronted with the challenge of explaining the applicability of the term *postcolonial* in light of intensified, transparent U.S. imperialism; even if the term *postcolonial* all along had been intended to imply the continued dependency of former colonized/semicolonized regions of the world on the West following their territorial independence (with some commentators also extending this mode of analysis to the Cold War influence exerted by the former Soviet Union).

In effect, the post-9/11 U.S.-led “global” military aggression in the name of an ostensible global war on terror—and underscored by vacuous, but no less threatening, statements such as “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” “good” versus “evil,” and so on—and particularly the U.S. occupation of Iraq in March 2003, have raised substantial questions about the very category and condition of postcoloniality, which had come to denote the continued economic and, for many analysts, the more problematic category of “cultural” dependency of former colonized and semicolonized regions of the world following their territorial independence from the former imperial powers (mainly in the period between the end of World War II and the 1970s). While the field of colonial/postcolonial studies primarily focused on the manifold and multidirectional legacies of imperialism, as well as the continued hegemony of some former Western imperial powers in the newly independent territories—all along highlighting sites and modes of resistance to imperialism and its assorted legacies in the form of “the Empire Strikes Back”—we once again are confronted with stark reminders of continued “the Empire Strikes Again.”

Yet, the defenders of current U.S. imperialism themselves consider the field of colonial/postcolonial studies enough of a threat to the envisioned Bush empire, inducing them to push for congressional legislation regulating the teaching of the field at colleges and universities, while conducting a whole range of other neo-McCarthyite witch hunts through organizations such as Campus Watch, which

primarily targets academics and scholars critical of U.S. and Israeli policies in the Middle East.

The debates on the progressive Left, as some works in this issue, also have sought to discern the ways in which the new American empire can or cannot be understood by reliance on former patterns of imperialism. These investigations have explored the topic of whether the current “Bush empire” should be approached as an outgrowth and continuation, or a metamorphosis, of what was once referred to as U.S. neo-imperialism during the Cold War era, or if the new empire signals a sharp break with the past: ranging from ideological (e.g., self-righteous Christian fundamentalist overtones as opposed to anticommunism) to logistical-tactical (e.g., unilateralism and preemption as opposed to the NATO-backed anticommunist containment policy during the Cold War), or structural (e.g., both domestic and international economics, etc.)—with corporations such as the Bechtel Group and Halliburton fleecing hundreds of millions of dollars thanks to the militarist-expansionist policies of the administration and the no-bidding contracts these corporations are routinely granted, as Washington meanwhile rapidly slashes federal funding for such domestic programs as public education, housing, health, and social security in general. In this analytic framework, the U.S.-led multinational invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 and, particularly, the subsequent U.S.-British led invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003 are interrogated in reference to the previously prevalent Cold War patterns of U.S. imperialist aggression—including direct U.S. military engagement in places such as Vietnam, wars by proxy in places such as Angola and Somalia, the so-called regime changes through CIA-backed coups, and/or the initial post-Cold War U.S. “humanitarian” military engagements in places such as Bosnia—in order to discern the new range of “interests” and guiding principles of the Bush empire, as well as its modus operandi and manifold consequences. The current U.S. unilateralism and mono-imperialism has not been confined to the battlefield; it also encompasses attempts to further consolidate U.S. hegemonic leverage in world bodies such as the UN, or through the organizational outlets of Western neoliberal economic policy, such as the World Bank, alongside continued endeavors to sabotage the impartial principles and operation of organizations such as the International Criminal Court.

At the same time, in the cases of both Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, analysts on the Left are mindful of the fact that attempting to elucidate the U.S.-led invasions, as well as Washington’s broader imperial aspirations, entirely in terms of post-Cold War global-political configurations and/or the post-2001 presidential inauguration of George W. Bush and the post-9/11 U.S. pretext for large-scale militarist aggression runs the risk of both overlooking and occluding the continued, extensive, and brutal U.S. intervention and involvement in both Afghanistan and Iraq since at least the 1980s (direct and indirect). A narrow time-frame perspective also would ignore prior U.S. accountability for creating some of the conditions, and

giving rise to some of the very same forces, which the current Bush administration claims to be obliterating. In addition, it should be kept in mind that the invasion of Afghanistan and, even more egregiously, the invasion of Iraq were expedited by the prior existence of a vast U.S. military presence around the world, currently in the form of well over 700 military bases operated in nearly 130 countries, predating the events of 9/11 that provided the excuse for the invasions. In spite of the new form and context of U.S. mono-imperialist ambitions, we also clearly hear echoes of the older imperialist rationalizations, such as the “civilizing mission,” in the Bush administration’s banal mantras of “spreading democracy” around the world and “freedom is on the march,” with Britain’s Tony Blair quick to play a Faustus-like second fiddle to Bush, as if a politico reincarnation of Rudyard Kipling who penned “The White Man’s Burden” in homage to the savage U.S. occupation of the Philippines in 1899—even if this time around Britain is bereft of its former imperial “glory.”

Still, we should not forget that imperialism, too, operates in a relational, or a dialogical and dialectical situationist, framework in the world at large, encountering planning and implementation shortcomings and engendering discontents, defiance, and resistance at home and abroad. The world is not simply a derivative of the Bush administration’s grand illusion. In addition to the continued antiwar protests around the globe, the rapidly mounting public opposition to the occupation of Iraq in the United States and Britain, the incremental escalation in anti-American insurgency movements in Afghanistan and Iraq (whatever their diverse ideological motives may be), and the internal political and ethnic/religious/regional divisions in both Afghanistan and Iraq, among many other factors, render the future of these countries and the future of self-serving U.S. imperial ambitions in the region and beyond highly unpredictable. Added to these unpredictability factors are the financial burden of worldwide U.S. military operations, not to mention the U.S. casualty rates in Iraq and Afghanistan (which pale in comparison to the *much higher* civilian casualties in both countries, mainly victims of U.S. military operations). The U.S. share of the so-called reconstruction price tag in Iraq and Afghanistan will also impact the Bush administration’s long-term ability to pursue its grandiose and hubristic mono-imperialist “crusade,” particularly in other parts of the Middle East, such as Iran and Syria. These dynamics are further compounded by Washington’s failures to push through U.S. plans in other regions of the world. Among many other examples, while so far failing to oust (and even assassinate) the Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez through CIA-sponsored coup attempts, and stinging from Fidel Castro’s continued administrative control of Cuba, Washington lately also has witnessed the election of “left-wing” *populist* and anti-U.S. imperialist governments in Brazil and Bolivia and the center-left electoral victory in Chile, along with increased anti-Washington sentiments throughout Latin America and elsewhere around the world. Meanwhile, the United States has recently been pressured to vacate its military base in Uzbeki-

stan after embarrassing disagreements with the absolutist head of the Uzbek state Islam Karimov, who, in the aftermath of the 9/11 U.S. military buildup in the region in preparation for the invasion of Afghanistan, was hailed by the Bush administration as a valuable friend in the war against terrorism—notwithstanding Karimov's brutal regime of domestic terror and torture. Despite mending Washington's differences with Paris and Berlin subsequent to the invasion of and debacle in Iraq, there have been widening rifts with Russia over the elections in Ukraine or the U.S. policy toward Iran (which Washington accuses of harboring military nuclear ambitions) and strained economic-diplomatic arm-twistings with China and India, as well as renewed tensions with Paris and Berlin (along with other members of the European Union) over the U.S. policy of "extraordinary rendition," whereby "terrorism" suspects are flown to friendly countries or to U.S. military bases around the world for the purpose of torture and interrogation.

In the meantime, in the United States itself, civil rights are drastically curtailed and many people are incarcerated without trial, as Washington concocts new justifications for torture and gratuitous incarceration in different parts of the world and continues to support the state-sponsored terror of its allies, such as Israel. Unfettered U.S. aggression simply fuels militant "Islamist" fundamentalism across the globe, among other reactionary forces. All this happens in the name of Washington's inane motto of defending and exporting "freedom."

Our issue opens with Vijay Prashad's examination of the Global War against Teachers in the post-9/11 United States. Prashad deftly demonstrates how in the name of ostensibly promoting intellectual diversity and academic freedom on U.S. campuses, the pro-Bush Right has waged a one-sided ideological campaign against critics of the U.S. military aggression and imperialism, pushing for a congressional bill that not only will restrict faculty criticisms of U.S. policy in the classroom but will also regulate the subject matter taught in social science and humanities classes. Nicholas Mirzoeff's contribution, "Invisible Empire: Visual Culture, Embodied Spectacle, and Abu Ghraib," investigates the implications and visual-cultural effects of the recent revelations of U.S. treatment of Iraqi "prisoners of war." Mirzoeff, whose latest book is also reviewed in this issue, analyzes varying cultural interpretations of the spectacle of abused Iraq prisoners in light of the contested "inner truth" emerging from "the visibility of globalization in the age of empire." The following feature essay by Ed McKennon provides an illuminating glimpse of the multifaceted ongoing forms of U.S. "cultural hegemony" predating 9/11. McKennon's "Importing Hegemony: Library Information Systems and U.S. Hegemony in Canada and Latin America" explores the more subtle ways in which U.S. economic and technological predominance have impacted the library information systems in Canada and Latin America via the adoption and adaptation of the Library of Congress (LC) cataloging system and the ways in which certain countries in the region have succeeded or failed in circumventing the U.S.-biased qualities of the LC system. Our final

feature essay, “Surveillance Creep! New Manifestations of Data Surveillance at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century”—originally intended for another issue of *RHR*—deals with yet another form of gathering and recording information in the United States, in this case the Automatic Identification and Data Capture (AIDC). The authors, Beatriz da Costa, Jamie Schulte, and Brooke Singer of the Preemptive Media collective, examine how information collected from various ID and/or credit/debit cards is used to create profiles of individuals that can be used and manipulated by the authorities and businesses. While not entirely focusing on the collection and use of personal data and surveillance in the war on terror by U.S. federal and local authorities in the aftermath of 9/11, the essay underlines the ways in which ordinary individuals can be profiled and affected by surveillance in general. For our “Reflections” section, we invited commentaries on post-9/11 configurations of new imperialism. The contributions reflect some of the divergent assessments on the Left of recent developments and their modes of historicization. Among other themes, Michael Hardt, Ann Laura Stoler, and Hakim Adi probe the question of whether recent U.S. and British military aggression resembles former patterns of Western imperialism and if there are elements of continuity between the recent U.S.-led imperialist aggression and the former colonial and postcolonial patterns of Western hegemony. In the next section, Sina Rahmani conducts a highly nuanced interview with Mark Rudd, a founding member of Weathermen/Weather Underground, in which Rudd reflects on the anti-imperialist activism of the Weathermen during the Vietnam War and comments on the current climate of U.S. imperial aggression and the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza at the time of the interview. In the “Teaching Radical History” section, Christopher Joon-Hai Lee reflects on the challenges of teaching “modern imperialism” in the classroom, among them the task of “linking ‘the local’ to ‘the global.’”

We also are very pleased to include a special forum section on the largely forgotten, but extremely seminal, 1955 Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, that marked the conception of the nonaligned movement that was formally inaugurated at a meeting in Yugoslavia in 1961. The essays in this section by Antoinette Burton, Augusto Espiritu, and Fanon Che Wilkins engage in highly complex panoramic reexaminations of nationalism in “the Age of Bandung,” during the heyday of the Cold War and the ongoing post-World War II anti-imperialist nationalist struggles. Underscoring the continued “significance” of Bandung “for post- and anti-colonial politics,” the essays respectively interrogate the literary works of the cosmopolitan Indian-born author Santha Rama Rau, the nationalist politics of the Philippine representative at the Bandung conference, Carlos P. Romulo, and the works of the African American author and playwright Lorraine Hansberry. In “Reviews,” Kathleen Wilson surveys some recent historical perspectives on imperialisms past and present in a multireview essay. Carol Burke offers a review of *The Price of Freedom* permanent exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Robert

Perkinson reviews a recent work on “America’s culture of terrorism,” while Jared Sexton looks at two new works on U.S. foreign policy and its discontents. We end this section with Mark LeVine’s review of the groundbreaking DVD *About Baghdad*, which examines life in Baghdad in the months following the U.S. invasion.

Thanks to biographical essays by Andor Skotnes and Sharon Hartman Strom, we remember the editorial collective’s departed colleagues François Ngolet and Susan Porter Benson, both of whom passed away in 2005. We collectively cherish their contributions to *RHR*, as well as their progressive activism in general, and celebrate their lives, which propitiously affected our own and the lives of many others. Needless to say, we were terribly saddened by news of their loss and extend our deepest condolences to their families and loved ones.

As usual, we complete the issue with the penetrating and biting humor of R. J. Lambrose in “The Abusable Past.” My co-editor, Iona Man-Cheong, and I would like to underscore that this issue would not have been possible without the collective assistance of *RHR* editorial members and other colleagues. In particular, our special thanks go to Yael Simpson Fletcher, Benjamin Talton, Mark Lewental, Tom Harbison, Marc Goulding, Doug Haynes, Andor Skotnes, Jim O’Brien, Kate Dunningan, Conor McGrady, and David Serlin.

—Mansour Bonakdarian

