

**FEAR AND PROPERTY:  
Why a Liberal Social Ontology Fails Postcolonial States**

Anna M. Agathangelou  
York University, Toronto and  
Global Change Institute, Nicosia

and

L.H.M. Ling  
The New School

International Affairs Working Paper 2006-07  
April 2006

Paper for a panel on “Contesting the Modern State: Stateness in the Postcolonial World,”  
International Studies Association, 22-26 March, 2006, San Diego

Copyright 2006 by Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling

**FEAR AND PROPERTY:  
Why a Liberal Social Ontology Fails Postcolonial States**

Anna M. Agathangelou  
York University, Toronto and  
Global Change Institute, Nicosia

and

L.H.M. Ling  
The New School  
[lingl@newschool.edu](mailto:lingl@newschool.edu)  
[www.gpia.info](http://www.gpia.info)

International Affairs Working Paper 2006-07  
April 2006

**ABSTRACT**

Liberalism fails world politics *ontologically*. Its definition of social being, based on a Hobbesian fear of the Other reinforced by a commitment to Lockean private property for the Self, invariably leads to policies of annihilation/conversion. Accordingly, Liberalism gives way to practices of hegemony and hierarchy despite its laudable ideals of sovereignty and equality. Note, for example, how current US rationales for and acts in Iraq echo those made a century earlier for the annexation of the Philippines. Today's Neoliberal project differs, however, in its "seductions of empire" where imperialist practices become fun, even hip, thereby reducing dissent into individualized voices of discontent. Redress for postcolonial states, then, requires more than mere adjustments of "the rules of the game." It demands another social ontology altogether.

**FEAR AND PROPERTY:  
Why a Liberal Social Ontology Fails Postcolonial States<sup>1</sup>**

Anna M. Agathangelou  
York University, Toronto and  
Global Change Institute, Nicosia

and

L.H.M. Ling  
The New School, New York

INTRODUCTION

Liberalism fails postcolonial states. Its social ontology of fear and property *necessarily* alienates the Other, whether embodied in an individual person, a society, or an institution of power like the state. Along with class, this alienation carries connotations for race, gender, and culture as well. We find echoes of the current war in Iraq, for example, in the US annexation of the Philippines in 1898 not just in terms of military violence, political manipulation, and economic exploitation but also ideological rationale.<sup>2</sup> But where the Anti-Imperialist League (1898-1921) mobilized domestic public opinion in the US and Britain against such self-defeating and self-mocking ventures overseas, no such movement, even internationally, commands a comparable level of prominence today. Here, we find Neoliberalism's "seductions of empire" at work. By recasting dour, hardworking Calvinism into global capitalist fun, Neoliberalism's intellectual infrastructure of media and academic elites market to the general public a

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is drawn from our book, *Seductions of Empire: Complicity, Desire, and Insecurity in Contemporary World Politics* (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Plenty of other cases come to mind, of course, such as Iran in 1953 and Chile, 1973. We focus on the Philippine case as one representative example.

tolerance of technologies of fear and control, law and order in exchange for promises of wealth and security. By hiding the brutality behind fear staunchly by property and property driven by fear, Neoliberal globalization isolates dissent into individualized voices of discontent or ineffectual, albeit entertaining, satire. As Coca Cola puts it: “Welcome to the Coke Side of Life.”

To redress inequities and injustices, postcolonial states cannot simply adjust extant rules and institutions to the contemporary world order. They must also contest and reframe the social ontology that underlies world politics. Merely changing “the rules of the game” cannot succeed when “the game” itself remained untouched.<sup>3</sup> Policies of annihilation (e.g., military conquest) and/or conversion (e.g., ideological education) invariably arise when decision-makers cannot conceive, not to mention consider, other, equally plausible strategies for engagement. During the Cold War, for instance, the Soviet Union differed little from its Liberal counterparts in the capitalist West, despite the former’s Marxist-Leninist ideology, given their common acts of hegemony in world politics. Now that Russia has formally pledged allegiance to a Neoliberal world order, ruling elites can admit more openly to convergences in state policy (e.g., “preventive wars,” “economic liberalization”).

We begin with Liberalism’s social ontology by reviewing Hobbes and Locke. Subsequently, we show how an ideology committed to personal freedom and prosperity

---

<sup>3</sup> Some examples come to mind: the Bandung non-aligned movement in the 1950s, the Czech “spring” of 1968, challenges by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and a “new international economic order” in the 1970s, the rise of Asian capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s.

turns into unabashed colonial power relations.<sup>4</sup> We conclude with a call for another social ontology altogether for world politics.

### HOBBS, LOCKE, & CO.

Fear, for Hobbes, is “natural.” It inheres in the individual (“the passions”) as well the environment (“State of Nature”) before the establishment of law and order by the state (“Leviathan”). From this primordial condition come secondary fears such as the fear of death from murder by one’s enemies or through starvation. Both stem from the same cause: competition for scarce resources in the State of Nature. Given this equation of resources with survival and the constant insecurity that it induces, man’s rationality compels him to give up the absolute freedom of the State of Nature for the relative freedom of the Leviathan. Accordingly, Hobbes believed, man must obey the Leviathan absolutely or lose his protections.

Locke argued for the same benefits from the state but with greater skepticism regarding absolute rule. Locke accepted Hobbes’ premise of the individual’s radical democracy in the State of Nature and his ability to reason into society but did not have faith that any state, especially with unchecked power, could rule *fairly*. It is necessary, Locke stressed, to safeguard the individual’s rights against the state and only property could do so. For property results from the individual’s labor, thereby granting him a natural right over the product of that labor, whether it is land tilled for farming or the

---

<sup>4</sup> Finding this linkage between the Enlightenment and its “dark side” is not new. Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) first raised it to understand how the Holocaust could have occurred in Enlightenment Europe. Thakur and Chung (1998) have extended this analysis to account for the Enlightenment’s seemingly contradictory legacy in former colonies: that is, early generations of colonized elites embraced Enlightenment values as a means to overthrow Western imperialism. Muthu (2003) takes the analysis inwardly. He finds that the Enlightenment tradition always had anti-colonial strains within it but these were not allowed the prominence they deserved.

harvest from that farm. No one, including the state, can/should usurp the individual's rights over that property which he acquired or produced through the feat of his own hard work.

In both cases, Hobbes and Locke sought to control "the passions." For Hobbes, the Leviathan allowed man's "rationality" to control his "animal appetites and aversions" (quoted in Crawford 2000: 120). Similarly, Locke defined labor as both mental and physical to fulfill the Christian life's highest ideal: that is, to "train for war, a war upon one's own 'lusts and vices'" (Dienstag 1996: 502).<sup>5</sup> The purpose of education, then, is to inculcate the virtue of self-denial. Adam Smith (1776) took a more radical stance. "Private vice," he proposed, would lead naturally to "public virtue" (though not the other way around) precisely because the former is so controlled, reasonable, and banal. Two centuries later, Max Weber (1958) white-washed colonialism by asserting that public and private virtue are one and the same. That is, the Western state is not pursuing any venal self-interest when it conquers markets, territories, and peoples but acting on "rational" and "bureaucratic" impulses that are reflective of "the Protestant Ethic." He concluded that Others who followed a contrary ethic like that of Confucianism could not possibly reach the same level of capitalist development due to their fundamental *passivity* compared to the West's *dynamism*: "Confucian rationalism," Weber wrote, "meant rational adjustment to the world [whereas] Puritan rationalism meant rational mastery of the world" (Weber 1951: xxix). Albert O. Hirschman (1977) echoed this version of Western economic history by documenting how leading lights of commerce, trade, politics, and public opinion believed that capitalism tempered "the passions" with banal, calculated "interests." Francis Fukuyama (1989) modernized this line to declare an end to

---

<sup>5</sup> We thank Tim Emmert for bringing this article to our attention.

History itself, since the fall of the Soviet empire demonstrated only one true path to development and that is the one paved by Western Liberal Capitalism. So it is, then Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan agreed. In face of Asia's financial crisis (1997-1998), he declared that there is only one economic model for the world to follow and that is "the Western form of free-market capitalism" (quoted in Singh and Weisse 1999: 204). Nonetheless, Fukuyama lamented, he'll miss the heart-thumping, blood-curdling, saber-rattling times of old. Instead of battles for glory, territory, or ideas, we'll have endless capitalist bean counting and its other cold, hard, calculating preoccupations.

Constructing the passionate Other, then, serves a vital function for the Liberal Self. The Other provides an easy target not just for Europe's guns, ships, and trade but also a moral and physical landscape on which to project all those passions and desires not allowed at home by the dour Protestantism. The Other has none of what Europeans could identify as "civilization": a Leviathan-like state ("this land is free!"), religious virtue through self-denial ("they have no morals"), codified laws to establish order ("they cannot govern themselves"), and most importantly, repression of "the passions" ("they're animals"). With Liberal and Neoliberal modernization as doctrine for economic development since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Other is seen to lack all those qualities assigned to the Western, capitalist Self: "rationality," "impersonal decision-making," "specialization" (cf. Banuri 1990).

## *Liberalism in World Politics*

Liberals extend Hobbes' State of Nature to the world. Since no global Leviathan exists, a "warre of all against all" must prevail in world politics. Accordingly, fear and insecurity of theft, murder, or domination by Others requires a strong, domestic Leviathan. The Liberal state thus takes on the autonomous, singular, and self-defined "sovereignty" of the individual in the State of Nature who, as Hobbes put it, springs forth "like mushrooms after a rain." This Liberal presumption runs deep. Even those who identify themselves by another theoretical tradition, like Alexander Wendt (2005) with constructivism, reveal their Liberal stripes by stipulating that the state must take on the "sovereign" attributes of a "person" to be held accountable for its actions.

Counter-intuitively, Liberals claim to herald an era of "democratic peace."<sup>6</sup> Liberal capitalism's emphasis on uninterrupted transactions, they contend, maintain mutually-beneficial returns on investment that raises the stakes for war thereby discouraging it; indeed, capitalism actually effects the opposite by encouraging cooperation even under conditions of international anarchy (Keohane 1984). Both domestically and internationally, capitalist market practices produce all the fundamentals of a democratic society: e.g., a "revolutionary" middle class, an active civil society, rational pursuit of individual interest that leads to self-censoring collective action, rule of law, and so on (Olson 1993; Held 1995). Globalization, as another venue for Liberal capitalism, embeds democracy "in the depths of people's hearts and minds" (Sakamoto 1991: 122).

---

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive introduction to Democratic Peace Theory, see ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic\\_peace\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_peace_theory)).



Liberals are able to do so only through its Other. By mystifying or denying its own desires and passions (Crawford 2000), Liberals can claim that their states are ruled by “rational,” “objective” interests that promote “democracy” and “rule of law.” Indeed, the Liberal inter-state system can be understood formally, mathematically, and impartially (cf. King, Keohane, and Verba 1994).<sup>7</sup> In fencing off “passion” for the cultural, historical, colonized Other, Liberals fold colonial power relations conveniently into a capitalist world order run by rational elites. Indeed, for Uday Mehta (1997), Liberalism has always utilized “strategies of exclusion” to sustain the bourgeois order. Now the same logic and practice, he suggests, are applied to world politics. Where previously Liberals subordinated and exploited domesticated identities in term of gender (e.g., women) and class (e.g., workers),<sup>8</sup> Liberalism exported to the world at large now takes on racial, sexual, and cultural characteristics. It targets externalized Others like India, for instance, by labeling it “inscrutable,” “child-like,” or “barbaric.” Accordingly, the Indian Other needs to be defined and educated by the all-knowing, worldly, civilized West.

Neoliberalism jazzes up dour, penny-pinching Protestant capitalism to emphasize its multicultural, youthful, and trendy pleasures. Note how the Coca Cola Company, one of capitalism’s enduring icons, captures this Neoliberal appeal with effective advertising

---

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Agathangelou, Anna M. and Ling, L.H.M., “Fiction as Method/Method as Fiction: Stories and Storytelling in the Social Sciences.”

<sup>8</sup> C.B. Macpherson and Leo Strauss, for example, found Hobbesian authoritarianism lurking within Locke’s Christian asceticism to condone, ultimately, a “rapacious capitalism” (Dienstag 1996: 499). Carole Pateman (1988) dissected the Hobbesian notion of a “social contract” to reveal its anti-social nature given that women, despite their labor in both productive and reproductive senses, were packaged, along with “children and chattel,” as men’s property to bring into civil society.

slogans over the years. A sample from the end of the Cold War in 1989 to the present indicates the easy, everyday allure promised by and associated with a bottle of Coke:

1990: You Can't Beat the Real Thing

2001: Life Tastes Good

2005: Make it Real<sup>9</sup>

2006: Welcome to the Coke Side of Life

Under Neoliberal globalization, “difference” is marketed into “sameness.” Much like the Benetton ads featuring good-looking youths from different races, ethnicities, and cultures but all, nonetheless, wearing the latest Italian fashions, Neoliberals wipe out the violent history that produced our differentiations of “race/ethnicity” in the first place or the fact that the Italian clothing industry enjoys far greater profits and standing in the global marketplace than, say, an Ethiopian one. In this way, Neoliberalism manages difference into a wholly-owned subsidiary of Western-capitalist, consumer-based “goodness.”

Another example comes from the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2004 Human Development Report, *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*. It calls for valuing “cultural diversity” in all its “vitality” but defeats the UNDP's own purpose by defining identity in Neoliberal terms only: e.g., “[c]ultural liberty is a vital part of human development because being able to *choose* one's identity – who one is – without losing the respect of others or being excluded from other choices is important in leading a *full* life” (emphases added, p. 1). Identity here becomes a singular, self-enclosed

---

<sup>9</sup> The Coca Cola Company. ([http://www2.coca-cola.com/heritage/cokelore\\_slogans.html](http://www2.coca-cola.com/heritage/cokelore_slogans.html)).

social signifier with a right to representation – much like the right to consume goods – in order to lead a “full” life, thereby requiring state-protected tolerance and other virtues of Liberal pluralism. We define identity as a collective legacy, not individual choice. This legacy, moreover, results from *interactions* among and within multiple legacies which themselves are products of such interactions in the past. Tolerance in this case is nice but problematic. It renders invisible the power plays necessary for “tolerance” to take hold in the first place. What we need is a concrete working-through of contending *terms of being* so that we may sustain and generate connections for generations to come. Simply negotiating “turf rights” between majorities and minorities misses the point and merely postpones the struggles to come.

Indeed, daily, lived reality for most of humanity is anything but fun or glamorous. Evidence mounts daily that the Neoliberal way of business cannot continue as usual. High income inequalities and polarities now afflict the world, especially those who are neither white, male, professional, or Western.<sup>10</sup> More disturbingly, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF 2005) reports that poverty, war, and HIV/AIDS deprive more than half of the world’s children of a healthy childhood. These conditions do not pertain to the developing world alone, the Report adds. The proportion of children living in low-income households has risen in the past decade in 11 of 15 industrialized countries. In countries torn by war since 1990, nearly half of the 3.6 million killed are children, either as combatants or civilians. Contrastingly, US military aid continues to spike up – by 68% from 2001 to 2003 – with 80% of its recipients labeled “undemocratic” or found guilty of

---

<sup>10</sup> As Susan George (2001) notes, “successive UN Development Programme Human Development Reports or the UNCTAD Trade and Development Reports [that] the top 20 percent of the world population now indeed holds more than 80 percent of the wealth; the bottom 20 percent makes do on slightly over one percent” (<http://www.tni.org/archives/george/budapest.htm>).

major human rights abuses by its own State Department (Berrigan, Hartung, and Heffel 2005). The scourge of HIV/AIDS has swelled, also, the number of orphans to 15 million worldwide, forcing many – especially girls – to hazardous, early labor in the fields, the factories, and the brothels. Not coincidentally, 90% of those trafficked for sex are women and girls, toiling in a global industry that rakes in an estimated \$8 billion a year for its madams and pimps (Agathangelou 2004). Yet the US alone vetoed a UN resolution introduced in November 2003 to give developing countries easier access to drugs that fight pandemics like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria (Mariner 2003).

The US State Department explained its veto in typical Neoliberal terms: i.e., it wanted to keep the state out of the economy: “We do not support *an entitlement approach*; we do not believe that this right should be interpreted as a *legally enforceable entitlement*, requiring the establishment of *judicial or administrative remedies* at the national or international levels *to adjudicate such presumed rights*...[T]he United States is [also] *not a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Therefore, we cannot reaffirm the Covenant and cannot accept the [resolution] as written” (emphases added, 22 December 2003, <http://www.state.gov/s/l/2003/44380.htm>).<sup>11</sup>

Here, we need to examine how we have progressed from Liberal self-denial to Neoliberal fun and their implications for responsibility and accountability. Let us begin with Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden.” Imperialism, it tells us, is not really for the Self; it is for the Other.

---

<sup>11</sup> Mariner (2003) reports that the ten largest pharmaceutical companies made \$35.9 billion in 2002 alone.

### *The White Man's Burden*

“The White Man’s Burden,” published in February 1899 in *McClure’s Magazine*, exhorted the United States to take over where Spain could no longer rule: i.e., the Philippines. (Often, the poem’s subtitle is overlooked: “The United States and The Philippine Islands.”) The poem demarcated clear boundaries between the American Self and its Filipino Other. Indeed, the poem argued, the American Self has an obligation to colonize, civilize, and enlighten its Filipino Other. After all, the American Self, like its British counterpart, gained its privileges through a naturally endowed superiority. The Filipinos, in turn, had no role other than to emulate, as best as possible, the Anglo-American Self. Accordingly, the relationship between Self and Other could only be unilateral, hierarchical, authoritative (if not authoritarian), and predictable. In a word: imperial.

The poem began with a call (*Take up the White Man’s burden --*  
*Send forth the best ye breed --*) for civilizational duty (*Fill full the mouth of Famine/And bid the sickness cease*). But beware, it warned, for noblesse oblige costs dearly. First come the resentment and ingratitude of your subjects (*Your new-caught, sullen peoples*) who don’t know any better (*Half-devil and half-child*). Then you pay with blood, sweat, and tears (*Go mark them with your living, And mark them with your dead*).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the entire endeavor seems hopeless sometimes (*Watch sloth and heathen Folly/Bring all your hopes to nought*). But your rewards, when they come, are transcendental. Empire gives its followers a rare manhood (*Comes now, to search your manhood/Through all the*

---

<sup>12</sup> Kipling knew this price personally. His own son died in a foreign war.

*thankless years*) that is weathered by real experience with the world (*Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom*) and honors them for all time (*The judgment of your peers!*).

Theodore Roosevelt, then Vice-President and soon to be President, was so impressed with the poem that he sent a copy to his friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. It's "rather poor poetry," he commented, "but good sense from the expansion point of view."<sup>13</sup> And the US was interested in expansion. Ruling elites wanted the Philippines due to its proximity to China and its mythical markets, a much-needed antidote to economic downturns at the time. Colonialism was good for business.

The US won the Spanish-American War (1898) and paid Spain \$20 million for the privilege of seizing its territories. In so doing, the US reneged on its promise to grant independence to the Filipinos for aiding the Americans by fighting the Spanish from within. The Treaty of Paris ceded Spanish sovereignty over the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Cuba to US control.

At home, outraged critics of this new American expansionism and imperialism formed the Anti-Imperialist League in 1898. Its members, including Jane Adams, Andrew Carnegie, William James, and Mark Twain, among others, mushroomed to 30,000 and spanned 30 states.<sup>14</sup> They opposed US expansionism for a variety of reasons. Henry Labouchère highlighted imperialism's hypocrisy in his parody "The Brown Man's Burden" (1899). Yes, Labouchère mocked, "Compel [the brown man] to be free" and if he dares to protest,

*Then, in the name of freedom,*

---

<sup>13</sup> "'The White Man's Burden': Kipling's Hymn to U.S. Imperialism." (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5478/>).

<sup>14</sup> "Anti-Imperialist League, Collected Records, 1899-1919," Swarthmore Peace Collection. (<http://www.swarthmore.edu/Library/peace/CDGA.A-L/antiimperialistleague.htm>).

*Don't hesitate to shoot.*<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Howard S. Taylor (1899) bemoaned the price that the poor man has to pay, in body and treasure, for the rich man's wars:

*With vigor on her borders*

*And slow decay at home!*<sup>16</sup>

Let's not even go there, chastised E.A. Brininstool in "The White Woman's Burden" (1899). Until men recognize the burdens that white women have to bear from morning 'til dusk, they have nothing to complain about:

*If he had to mop up the kitchen,*

*And dress the kids as well,*

*And start the fire at 5 a.m.,*

*He might of his "burden" tell.*<sup>17</sup>

Mark Twain claimed that he "laughed until [his] sides ached." In annexing the Philippines, Twain noted, the US purchased territory that it could not possibly own to take dominion over a people over whom it had no rights. This act is comparable, he cracked, to "an American heiress buying a Duke or an Earl."<sup>18</sup>

But imperialism was serious business and deadly at that. In the Philippines, local resistance proved so fervent and widespread that US troops had to suppress it brutally before marching triumphantly into Manila to declare America's sovereignty over the islands. Note this description of US action in 1898 Manila. It recalls previous colonial wars from Vietnam and El Salvador to today's Abu Ghraib, Darfur, and Guantanamo:

---

<sup>15</sup> Labouchère, H. (1899) (<http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/labouche.html>).

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, H.S. (1899) (<http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/taylor.html>).

<sup>17</sup> Brininstool, E.A. (1899) ([http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/brininstool\\_kipling.html](http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/kipling/brininstool_kipling.html)).

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mark Twain, "The Funniest Thing," *Baltimore Sun*, 9 May 1907. ([http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/twain/mtws\\_stupendous\\_joke.html](http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/twain/mtws_stupendous_joke.html)).

Faced with a guerrilla struggle supported by the vast majority of the population, the U.S. military responded by resettling populations in concentration camps, burning down villages (Filipinos were sometimes forced to carry the petrol used in burning down their own homes), mass hangings and bayonetings of suspects, systematic raping of women and girls, and torture...According to official statistics...U.S. troops killed fifteen times as many Filipinos as they wounded. This lit [sic] with frequent reports by U.S. soldiers that wounded and captured Filipino combatants were summarily executed on the spot.<sup>19</sup>

US troops also battled Muslim Filipinos, known as Morns, in the South. In 1906, the US military massacred 900 Morns, including women and children, by trapping them in a volcanic crater on the island of Jolo and bombarding them with bullets for days. President Theodore Roosevelt immediately wired General Leonard Wood, commander of the massacre: "I congratulate you and the officers and men of your command upon the brilliant feat of arms wherein you and they so well upheld the honor of the American flag."<sup>20</sup>

Today, the US targets the Muslims (Moro) in the Philippines' southern region of Mindanao. Now linked with the terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda, they are under new scrutiny and control with increased US military aid and joint exercises with the Filipino government in Manila (Berrigan, Hartung, and Heffel 2005). America's decisive military victory in Iraq has convinced many ruling elites in Southeast Asia to stop negotiating with leaders of local insurgencies and resort, instead, to military extremes like "shock and

---

<sup>19</sup> "Kipling, The White Man's Burden, and US Imperialism," *Monthly Review* November 2003. ([http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1132/is\\_6\\_55/ai\\_111269066](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1132/is_6_55/ai_111269066)).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



awe” (Murphy 2003) or “preventive war” in Putin’s Russia regarding secessionist territories like Chechnya.

There is no Anti-Imperialist League today, however. Critics speak out in outrage, even within establishment circles (cf. Chomsky 2003, Mann 2003, Johnson 2004), but their voices are muted by a larger, more powerful, intellectual infrastructure composed of media and academic elites. This intellectual infrastructure ensures that Neoliberalism’s “seductions of empire” remain unquestioned and unexamined. Here, we see a distinct lack of attention to what imperialism or empire would mean to “the brown man” or “the poor man” or “the white woman,” not to mention “the brown woman”! Instead, both media and academic celebrities crow the virtues of empire, if not to excuse it as a fair, rational, system of “international rules” or cite the Other as incapable of understanding the cardinal virtues of Human Rights as defined by the Western, secular, and judicial Self.

#### NEOLIBERAL “BURDENS”

*The Economist* devoted a Special Report in its 14 August 2003 issue to the topic: “America and Empire.”<sup>21</sup> Is America, it asked, as the world’s only military and economic superpower now also an empire? The magazine concluded with a resounding “No” for two reasons: (1) the natives (in Iraq and Afghanistan) don’t like it (“please leave us to get on with our own affairs”) and (2) neither do Americans (“Freedom is in their blood; it is integral to their sense of themselves”).<sup>22</sup>

Here, *The Economist* confirms its Neoliberal stripes. When did natives ever welcome an occupying power? And since when did local resentment, even constant

---

<sup>21</sup> “America and Empire: Manifest Destiny Warmed Up?” *The Economist* 14 August 2003. ([http://www.economist.com/printedition/displayStory.cfm?Story\\_ID=1988940](http://www.economist.com/printedition/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=1988940)).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

insurgency, ever stop colonization? The magazine acknowledged that white settlers in America's thirteen colonies rebelled against British rule ("Americans know that empires lack democratic legitimacy. Indeed, they once had a tea party to prove it") but failed to recognize that those same settlers did the same to natives of the land they arrogantly depopulated as "the New World." As Michael Hunt demonstrated, American state-building was based historically on the annihilation, domination, and enslavement of the racialized, sexualized Other (Hunt 1987). Untold millions of native peoples were killed by a combination of wars, reneged treaties, dislocations, relocations, and, most unexpectedly, germs (Churchill 1998). The savagery described above regarding the Morn massacre in the Philippines was but a small sample of how the US got to be where it is today. To erase this history with a facile gesture toward the rhetoric of American democracy, claiming that it's in the "blood," constitutes irony of the highest and most grotesque order.

But these are familiar tactics. *The Economist* has long participated in a colonial narrative of the all-conquering, globe-straddling "captain of industry" ready to take (Third World) "virgin" economies and resources at will, making them "productive" in the image of the Western, capitalist Self (cf. Hooper 2001). Even in this Special Report, *The Economist* reveals its racism, sexism, and imperialism. It began by claiming that "a surprising number have welcomed the new role" of America as an imperial power. It named Max Boot, an Englishman transplanted to New York initially as editorial features editor of *The Wall Street Journal* and now Olin Senior Fellow in National Security Studies with the Council on Foreign Relations, a conservative think tank. The title of

Boot's 2002 book, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, was taken from a line in *The White Man's Burden* to underscore his support of this 19<sup>th</sup>-century approach to world affairs.

And the Neoliberal media couldn't get enough of this imperial talk:

[His book] received the Best Book of 2002 Award from the *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Los Angeles Times* and won the 2003 General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Award for the best nonfiction book pertaining to Marine Corps history...[In the book,] Boot contends that the Philippine War was "one of the most successful counterinsurgencies waged by a Western army in modern times" and declares that, "by the standards of the day, the conduct of U.S. soldiers was better than average for colonial wars." The U.S. imperial role in the Philippines...is thus being presented as a model for the kind of imperial role that Boot and other neoconservatives are now urging on the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Others whom *The Economist* cited as giving the idea of American imperialism "a remarkably warm reception" included Robert Cooper, a British diplomat; Michael Ignatieff, a Canadian transplanted to Boston as Director of the Center on Human Rights at Harvard University and now an elected member of the Canadian Parliament, and Niall Ferguson, a Scotsman also transplanted to Harvard. Cooper called for "a new kind of imperialism" modeled after the "post-modern European Union"; Ignatieff saw no alternative to imperialism if the rich and powerful seek to "save" the world from itself; and Ferguson has gruffly reminded the US of its imperial obligations, much like those undertaken by the British empire, which "'though not without blemish', may have been

---

<sup>23</sup> "Kipling, The White Man's Burden, and US Imperialism," *Monthly Review* November 2003 ([http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1132/is\\_6\\_55/ai\\_111269066](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1132/is_6_55/ai_111269066)).

the least bloody path to modernity for its subjects.”<sup>24</sup> Nowhere mentioned in the Special Report were any voices that did not belong to privileged white males or the Neoliberal mainstream. As for those subjected to empire, *The Economist* derided them as having “teething troubles” when they refused to accept US occupation of their homes and their countries.

Passions and desires for the Other continue to flame. Just as the magazine infantilized whole societies and peoples in this manner, so, too, did it sexualize power, especially for the US: “In short, the empire now proclaimed in America’s name is at best a dull duck, at worst a dead duck, unless it is to be a big strong drake that intends to throw its weight around for quite a while.”<sup>25</sup> Noah Feldman (2004), a senior advisor to the draft constitution in Iraq, clearly identifies with the latter. “Elections,” he has written, “can seduce with the promise of release” (Feldman 2004: 95). His explanation merits quoting at length:

Elections hold out the hope of successful consummation, the seed of democracy implanted and the door opened for subsequent withdrawal. In this troubling vision the occupied people grip the occupier in an embrace both pleasurable and terrifying. In the imagined “successful” scenario, the occupier builds and leaves. When things go wrong, he (sic) cannot get out but is sucked into what American vernacular calls “the quagmire” – a situation from which he cannot extract himself, but in which he cannot remain without suffering unmanly damage.

(Feldman 2004: 95)

---

<sup>24</sup> “America and Empire: Manifest Destiny Warmed Up?” *The Economist* 14 August 2003 ([http://www.economist.com/printedition/displayStory.cfm?Story\\_ID=1988940](http://www.economist.com/printedition/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=1988940)).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

To Feldman, then, *Madame Butterfly*'s love-'em-and-leave-'em Lt. Pinkerton is the model of "success." He bears no responsibility to Cho-cho san, the Japanese courtesan with whom he had a relationship and a son. As the opera goes, Pinkerton takes the son to be raised (properly) by him and his (white) wife back to America, leaving Cho-cho san the only honorable option for her (and a convenient one for Pinkerton): that is, to extinguish herself. There is no "burden" for the white man in Feldman's analysis, only pleasure followed by exploitation.

Interestingly, Feldman does not grant the same sense of satisfaction to the locals when it comes to elections.

From the perspective of the nation under occupation, elections seduce in a different sort of way. On one hand, they promise to give voice to the voiceless...In that same moment of self-creation...the nation being built can throw off the yoke of its occupier and declare its independence, thus breaking free of the humiliating status of being subordinated...On the other hand, people under nation building fear elections for the danger of what they may reveal. Fragmented results may show that there is no nation there at all, just a collection of divergent interest groups who lack the common vision to make a government that will endure. The election of undemocratic forces is also to be feared. (Feldman 2004: 95)

For the occupied, democracy is a masturbatory dream. The occupied would wake in sweaty disillusion to find no love there, after all, just more anxieties about one's own uncontrollable, negative urges.

Novelist and critic Arundhati Roy warns of a similar fate for India and Pakistan. The supine willingness of Indian and Pakistani leaders to win US contracts, aid, and approval, she comments, makes them seem “like two begums in the Bush – in the Sheikh Bush’s harem, you know, vying with each other for his attention.”<sup>26</sup> Roy’s criticisms recalls Mark Twain’s jibe of the US purchasing the Philippines from Spain. But unlike the US “socialite” buying a European aristocrat for status, the Indian and Pakistani “begums” must abide by what the American Sheikh dictates. It will mean, ultimately, more disciplining control for the master and less pleasure (independence, prosperity, security) for the begums.

All this talk of an American empire, some insist, misses the point. G. John Ikenberry (2004), a professor of international politics at Princeton University, writes that the US, together with other “advanced democracies” in alliance with China and Russia, pioneers a “democratic political order that has no name or historical antecedent” and is “built on bargains, diffuse reciprocity, and an array of intergovernmental institutions and ad hoc working relationships.”<sup>27</sup> This foundation in “cooperation and rules” has “limited and legitimated U.S. power.”<sup>28</sup> “When all is said and done,” Ikenberry concludes, “Americans are less interested in ruling the world than they are in creating a world of rules.”<sup>29</sup>

Ikenberry proceeds from a false premise. He presumes that rules are not instantiations of power relations in the first place even though the maker of rules always

---

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Arundhati Roy on “Democracy Now” with Amy Goodman, 3 March 2006 (<http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/03/03/151200>).

<sup>27</sup> See (<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20040301fareviewessay83212b/g-john-ikenberry/illusions-of-empire-defining-the-new-american-order.html>).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

has the final, authoritative word. And the purpose of rules is to render power relations natural, eternal, and unquestionable so that “order,” as defined by the rule-maker, prevails. That various actors could “bargain” in so-called international institutions changes neither the unequal context in which they must operate nor the unjust consequences that invariably result. The mere fact that the world’s majority – women and especially women of color<sup>30</sup> – have little or no say in either the formation of rules for international governance nor the institutions that implement them, yet are daily affected by them, exposes the hollow self-interest that trumpets “cooperation,” “rules,” and “institutions” alone as any kind of “democratic political order.”

Note, for example, how Western elites responded to Muslim outrage in 2005-2006 over the Danish cartoons. Because the Liberal social ontology proscribes any interrogation into its own cultural and historical specificities – the State of Nature is proclaimed and thereby universalized – ruling elites in the West could not acknowledge due grievance from the Muslim community in Denmark. They could not see that the publication of cartoons offensive to Muslim religion constituted, by analogy, to a slap in the face to someone slapped too often by the same party. Nowhere is there a sensibility among Western ruling elites that it is the *lack* of institutional redress, rather than the actual publication of these cartoons, that so incensed Denmark’s Muslim minority. Instead, ruling elites refrained dully on the Western, secular right to free speech. Muslims, they inferred, don’t understand given their tradition of religious censorship under medieval Islam. When counterparts elsewhere in Europe, the US, and United Kingdom supported these same Liberal sentiments, the Muslim minority in Denmark

---

<sup>30</sup> That US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, is a woman of color in service of status quo definitions and treatments of world politics does not represent a change. It is how we understand the world that matters, not our biological or genetic composition.

chose the only strategy that made sense: i.e., escape the narrow confines of the Liberal inter-state system and seek reinforcement from Islam's pre-Westphalian, transnational network. Tragically, lives were lost in the process. This struggle, though, is but the latest indication of how a Liberal social ontology fails world politics.

### CONCLUSION: The Other in Alterity

The foundational legacies of Hobbes and Locke work in tandem to secure the Neoliberal world order. Fear without property, as institutionalized by law, would manifest in Locke's warning about unfettered state power ("where law ends, tyranny begins"). Property without fear, in the form of moral or legal constraints, would realize Hobbes' nightmare scenario of wanton desire satiated at will and in anarchy ("warre of all against all"). Indeed, Hobbesian fear requires Lockean private property for the Leviathan to take effect (otherwise, why not stay with the absolute freedom offered by the State of Nature?), just as the Lockean right to property is premised on Hobbesian fear to keep the State of Nature at bay (otherwise, why suffer a Leviathan?). Neoliberalism updates this classical social ontology to have the Leviathan/world order safeguard property globally – redefined as land, labor, and market shares – precisely due to fear of the wanton masses locally.

The Self thus freezes its relations with the Other. Hobbes and Locke in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century were articulating a process already underway a century before, when merchants ships inadvertently encountered cultures, societies, and peoples previously unknown to the European Self:



When Vespucci speaks of a world he refers to the old notion of ecumene, of a portion of the Earth fit for human habitation. If he licitly designates the recently explored countries as a new world, it is because he intends to announce the effective finding of one of these other ecumenes (O’Gorman 1961: 34).

Vespucci did not consider the peoples of “the New World” as human; only Europe could stamp them so. In the 1500s, such anxiety about difference stemmed from Europe’s peripheral location to Islam. In “bursting the bounds within which Islam had confined it” (O’Gorman 1961: 90), Europe pushed its ontology of fear and property onto Others, transforming them into objects of and instruments for colonization, domination, exploitation, and humiliation. To justify these acts, Europe had to produce “texts of reason.” Even when these seemed to be about “dis-covery” (with emphasis on “covering”) rather than fear and domination for profit, they nonetheless punctuated the terms of relations between Self and Other as alterity, thereby fixing the identities of both Self and Other as irreconcilably opposed. These texts, along with newer ones produced today, make apparent that Eurocentrism (Amin 1989) still undergirds the Neoliberal approach to world politics.

So what’s a postcolonial state to do? Space prohibits a more detailed discussion at this point. Suffice it to say that we propose an alternative social ontology elsewhere. We call it Worldism.<sup>31</sup> It seeks not to counter or overthrow the Liberal social ontology of fear and property but rather show how it operates *in relation to* other traditions and legacies. Thus world politics comes from the entwinements between Self and Other, West and

---

<sup>31</sup> For more on Worldism, see Agathangelou and Ling (2005).

Rest, occupier and occupied, despite asymmetric capabilities and resources.<sup>32</sup> In *displacing* Liberalism as the only ontological game in town, Worldism moves world politics from a position of fixed hegemony to one of recognition and engagement that would lead, eventually, to transformation. This emancipatory stance, in turn, makes an obligatory demand: in acknowledging the multiple agencies that make our world, we must also accept our collective responsibility and accountability for it. The “burden” is not the white man’s alone.

---

<sup>32</sup> Yes, Spanish genocide annihilated the Incas and Aztecs as formal powers. But remnants of Incan and Aztec civilizations lived on through descendants who, despite the violence and destruction heaped upon them, still managed to integrate *indigènes* with *conquistador*. To see *indigènes* as victims only further dehumanizes them. Neither did the *conquistadors* remain immune to their relations with *indigènes*, nor should we perpetuate the myth of untouchable colonial power. Well-documented, for example, were the cries of “Shame!” that resonated from within, like those from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century priest-missionary-humanist, Bartolome de las Casas, haunting both Church and State in Spain even when wealth and power seemed divinely ordained. Similar observations apply to any colonized space, whether epistemic or geocultural, where the colonizers, in this sense, reaped fewer benefits from entwining multiple worlds than the colonized.

## REFERENCES

- Adorno, Max and Horkheimer, Theodor. (1979) *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. London: Verso.
- Agathangelou, A.M. and Ling, L.H.M. (forthcoming) *Seductions of Empire: Complicity, Desire, and Insecurity in Contemporary World Politics*.
- Agathangelou, A.M. and Ling, L.H.M. (2005) "Power and Play through Poisies: Reconstructing Self and Other in the 9/11 Commission Report." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33(3): 827-853.
- Banuri, Tariq. (1990) "Modernisation and its Discontents: A Cultural Perspective on the Theories of Development." In Frederique Apfel Marglin and Stephen A. Marglin (eds), *Dominating Knowledge*, 73-101. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Berrigan, Frida and Hartung, William D. with Heffel, Leslie (2005) *US Weapons at War 2005: Promoting Freedom or Fueling Conflict? U.S. Military Aid and Arms Transfers Since September 11*. New York: A World Policy Institute Special Report, New School University. June.  
(<http://www.worldpolicy.org/projects/arms/reports/wawjune2005.html#execsum>).
- Bull, Hedley. (1966) "Society and Anarchy in International Relations." In Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Relations*, pp. 35-50. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. (2003) *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- Churchill, Ward. (1998) *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas from 1492 to the Present*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Crawford, Neta S. (2000) "The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships." *International Security* 24(4): 116-156.
- Dienstag, Joshua Foa. (1996) "Serving God and Mammon: The Lockean Sympathy in Early American Political Thought." *American Political Science Review* 90(3) September: 497-511.
- Erlanger, Steven. (2006) "Western Envoy Threatens to Quit over Hamas Issue." *New York Times* 13 March (<http://www.ihl.com/articles/2006/03/12/news/mideast-5839320.php>)
- Feldman, Noah. (2004) *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fukuyama, Francis. (1989) "The End of History?" *The National Interest* (Summer): 3-18.

Held, David. (1995) *Democracy and the Global Order*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hirschman, Albert O. (1977) *The Passions and the Interests*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hooper, Charlotte. (2001) *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hunt, Michael. (1987) *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ikenberry, G. John. (2004) "Illusions of Empire: Defining the New American Order." *Foreign Affairs* March/April 83(2)  
(<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20040301fareviewessav83212b/g-john-ikenberry/illusions-of-empire-defining-the-new-american-order.html>)

Johnson, Chalmers. (2004) *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Keohane, Robert. (1984) *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

King, Gary, Keohane, Robert O., and Verba, Sidney. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mann, Michael. (2003) *Incoherent Empire*. New York: Verso.

Mehta, Uday S. (1997) "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion." In Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, 59-86.

Murphy, Dan. (2003) "SE Asia Tries 'Shock and Awe': Indonesia and the Philippines, Taking Cue from Iraq, Step Up Attacks on Insurgents." *Christian Science Monitor* 20 May. (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/wtc/analysis/2003/0520seasia.htm>).

Muthu, Sankar. (2003) *Enlightenment Against Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [B&N]

Olson, Mancur. (1993) "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development." *American Political Science Review* 87 (3): 567-576.

Pateman, Carole. (1988) *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Sakamoto, Y. (1991) "Introduction: the Global Context of Democratization." *Alternatives* 16(2): 119-127.

Singh, A. and B.A. Weisse. (1999) "The Asian Model: A Crisis Foretold?" *International Social Science Journal* June: 203-216.

Thakur, Ravni and Chung, Tan. (1998) "Enchantment and Disenchantment: A Sino-Indian Introspection." In Tan Chung (ed.), *Across the Himalayan Gap: An Indian Quest for Understanding China*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

Weber, Max. (1958) "The Spirit of Capitalism." *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Scribner's Press.  
(<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/WEBER/WeberCH2.html>)

Wendt, Alexander. (2005) "The State as Person in International Theory." *Review of International Studies* 30(2): 289-316.