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The "White But Not Quite Man's Burden": Disrupting the Apogee of Imperial Hegemony?

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Abstract

The victory of late capitalism and its supreme reign through intensified war have been triumphantly trumpeted in popular media, especially since 1989 after the fall of the former Soviet Union. These aspects do indeed need to be understood and explained and Khanna attempts, in the tradition of realism/pragmatism, to do so.

Keywords

Human rights, Capitalism, Globalization, Geopolitics

The "White but Not Quite Man's Burden": Disrupting the Apogee of Imperial Hegemony?

by Anna M. Agathangelou

The victory of late capitalism and its supreme reign through intensified war have been triumphantly trumpeted in popular media, especially since 1989 after the fall of the former Soviet Union. These aspects do indeed need to be understood and explained and Khanna attempts, in the tradition of realism/pragmatism, to do so. He begins by articulating "globalization" as the competition for resources and terrains of influence by the U.S., the E.U. and China. "Globalization" is a major modality through which "frenemies," as he calls them, attempt to integrate the world economy. Moreover, and in order to support his argument that the U.S. has to compete and play an exceptional role in world politics, he states "that globalization is not synonymous with Americanization" and that globalization "has eroded the American primacy." Khanna's interest is in articulating ways that the U.S. would remain a competitive power in this "geopolitical marketplace" and even reassume its exceptional and imperial role. To achieve his goal and political commitment, Khanna employs a few conceptual strategies. He articulates globalization as an "irreversible fact" of our times and that "the second world," or what he coins as the "swing states," is the ground for the struggle to secure a geopolitical order. This "call to arms" (or what Khanna calls a "Less Can be More" policy to-do list) to secure America's role as a competitive, exceptional and imperial actor focuses mostly on those whose primary interest is capitalist accumulation and profits, and the engendered political "models for success" to secure that relation. This strategy is what I call here "globalism." It is a "living material force" in the sense that it contributes toward the support of particular political commitments and interests.

Khanna quite accurately points to one of the *major contradictions* in world politics today: the rise in the rivalry between different imperialist powers that are engendering a dynamic of "cut-throat" competition and even outright hostility in their pursuit of power to support. This leads him to his central point that the apogee of the hegemony of the U.S. has arrived and, hence, the title of his piece "Waving Goodbye to Hegemony." Yet, assuming globalization is an irreversible process and a fact articulates a fantasy and mystifies a major tension that exists in world politics today, that is, the unfettered attempt to integrate the whole world into a global economy, and the attempt to generate a global political order to guide these relations. So, how do we proceed to understand this major tension and for what purpose? What is crucial is to first begin with "globalization." What is it?

"Globalization" as the term has been used cannot explain *shifts taking place within continuity of capital*. Khanna's articulation of "globalization" as a gesture to the changes in world politics hovers ambiguously between a *description* of the "geopolitical marketplace" and a *performative articulation*; thus establishing this geopolitical marketplace and the position of the U.S. within it as a given truth and obscuring that the world capitalist system has been changing dramatically.

I suggest, as others have done, to use "[globalism](#)" as a conceptual tool to help us understand these changes and their many contradictions that have emerged nationally and internationally. "Globalism" here refers to a series of structural strategies, including the production of ideas, and refers to the dismantling of the barriers against the "free" cross-border flows of money, commodities, and productive capital, the extensive privatization of state-enterprises, the

flexibilization of labor markets, and the development of lean production techniques. More so, globalism as a strategy has also been about the contestation of mega-capital and some imperial state powers in the world to restore capitalism in bureaucratic workers' states such as Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and China. These changes are demanding and leading to the creation of a new set-up with dramatic consequences for the "equilibrium" of forces between classes, genders and racialized peoples at the international, national, and communal levels.

Globalism is a strategy where mega-corporations plan and organize the buying of labor power, raw materials, the production and sale of commodities within a single all-encompassing strategic plan, albeit with much struggle and contestation by different peoples. The mega-capital interests such as re-stimulation of a higher rate of surplus value and profits, however, cannot be pursued in a fragmented economy. For capital to achieve this "international" move, it has to articulate and imagine these processes as "smooth" by concealing the class/gendered/racialized assault of international bourgeoisies against those peoples who have been struggling to make ends meet and protect their environments from such theft, including state buffer mechanisms. "Globalization" as an assumed fact and reality has disarmed peoples from engaging in struggles against these capitalist assaults on their positions.

Mega-capital's consolidation and its further extension and expansion geographically require a political order that does not set barriers against it and also secures its interests. Yet, the "state" still acts as a central site of class/gendered/racialized domination and inter-capitalist rivalry which challenges mega-capital's desire to dispense of it and/or create a political order for this "new" capitalist formation. Its different international organizations/regionalisms (i.e., UNHCR, the IMF, the WTO, NATO, the E.U.) carry out specific tasks of a "world government." The gaps generated with the fall of the former Soviet Union, etc., and the competition among different imperialist powers (and thus, the unfettered spread of their armies in the world) has intensified what I coined in another piece the "New World War Order," the articulated political order, that is the new system globalism is trying to establish.

In sum, beginning with the recognition that liberal capitalism and "Confucian capitalism" with their contingent political organizations (i.e., America's "coalition of the willing," Europe's consensus, and China's consultative style) are only two modalities through which capital relations can be integrated internationally. These relations have to be brought about instead of being accepted as given. To *grant this possibility* is a world apart from saying that this is the best and most viable way to think and do social relations. It is time for those of us who are interested in an alternative world to begin thinking, planning, and embodying it now. Such an alternative world is indeed necessary.

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