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Keith Woodward

Book Review

David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

Post-this or post-that, at the advent of the millennium or after 9/11, the stories go, the world has become fundamentally transformed. But from New York's ground zero to George W. Bush's zero hour for Iraq, everything points to a sclerotic paralysis at the Year Zero, the site of the *annunciation of change*. In spite of various declarations of policy change, constitutional change, or regime change, much of what has unfolded over the past few years has appeared at best to be a return to the same. Or worse, a renewal of both internal and external articulations of the coercive apparatuses of State power under the guises of the "Patriot Act" and "Homeland Security." Likewise, academics have recently been besotted with proclamations of the socio-economic newness of the world, from Hardt and Negri's (*Empire*) claim that Empire has replaced imperialism to a slew of contemporary neo-liberalist texts proclaiming the mutable accessibility of the world under techno-economic developments of globalization. *The New Imperialism* takes these claims to task by reexamining the spatio-economic relations of capitalist accumulation that have produced the current self-destructive climate of imperialism and exploitation.

In spite his title, Harvey is reluctant to divorce the present condition of new imperialism from the development of capitalism in the U.S. over the course of the last century. Rather, as he has done elsewhere (see Harvey, *Condition*), he opts to plot a course of crises and subsequent adjustments occurring within the global develop-

ment of capitalism. Thus, while his concept of imperialism is centered primarily upon the U.S., it is only within the context of global exchange and accumulation that imperialism generates its velocity. Harvey explains that, following the crises of overaccumulation that hit the capitalist world in 1973-75, there is a strong turn toward neo-liberalism within advanced capitalist societies attempting to reproduce "primitive" appropriation on a global scale. Accompanied by an intensified race for privatization and an increasingly abstract financialization of capital, primitive accumulation looks consistently outside of advanced capitalism for sites in which to alleviate overaccumulation and produce new debtors. Given its permanence as a capitalist practice, primitive accumulation becomes "accumulation by dispossession," a strategic technique producing:

a networked spatio-temporal world of financial flows of surplus capital with conglomerations of political and economic power at key nodal points (New York, London, Tokyo) seeking either to disperse and absorb the surpluses down productive paths more often than not in long-term projects across a variety of spaces (from Bangladesh to Brazil or China), or to use speculative power to rid the system of overaccumulation by the visitation of crises of devaluation upon vulnerable territories...Capitalism survives, therefore, not only through a series of spatio-temporal fixes that absorb the capital surpluses in productive and constructive ways, but also through the devaluation and destruction administered as corrective medicine to what is generally depicted as the fiscal profligacy of those who borrow. (Harvey, *New Imperialism*, xx)

Put another way, the financialization of capital constantly seeks out new sites, negotiated through State apparatuses, that it can deterritorialize as sites for the consumption of surpluses. Under this predatory process, debt proliferates, frequently followed by "forced devaluation" of labor and properties in poorer countries unable to maintain themselves under the weight of their own debt. Devalued properties can then be captured on the cheap by global organizations such as World Bank in order to amplify the wave of imperialist privatization. However, strategies of accumulation by dispossession draw competing imperialisms (e.g., China and the U.S.) increasingly toward conflicts and crises as resources and sites of exploitation are appropriated. A danger com-

pounded by the Bush administration's celebration of the coercive apparatus as a tool for the advancement of capitalism.

The intensity of this developing crisis of imperialism forces Harvey into a position that disallows any wholesale rejection of capitalism. Accumulation by dispossession has affinities with Marx's notion of primitive accumulation and Harvey aligns himself with Marx's oft-critiqued suggestion of the productive possibilities inherent in primitive accumulation. While he does not deny the presence of "new" forms of exploitation that accompany the insertion of capitalism, the intervention in so-called primitive communities also has the productive effect of drawing populations out of what Deleuze and Guattari call debt relations of "cruelty" (*Anti-Oedipus*). Obviously, such a reading depends upon a certain investment in progressive *movements from* and a denial of retrogressive *returns to* particular states of social being after capitalist reorganization of socio-spatial relations. Resistances organized against accumulation by dispossession have had equally productive effects by developing new forms of political organization (such as the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas) that reject strategies of abstraction into a party and instead form power blocs that remain within the State, thereby centralizing indigenous cultures.

Given this and the present crises of imperialism, Harvey espouses resistance not in the form of a rejection of capitalism in its entirety, but rather in the form of the creation of a "new" New Deal that will potentially stave off the crisis of increasingly violent imperialist global conflicts. While neo-liberalism developed through ever-expanding practices of accumulation through dispossession, the emergence of the neo-conservative bloc in the U.S. has coupled this economic strategy with increasingly violent strategies of coercion that function as a guarantor for the continued development of global economic dominance. Given the constantly-increasing centrality of Middle Eastern oil in both American and Chinese economies, the current, violent appropriation of Iraqi oil reserves by the U.S. threatens to further conflicts of global proportions. In the face of this, Harvey's new New Deal recommends some form of Keynesian redistribution that will effectively disrupt the aggressive territorial appropriation of the military-industrial complex.

Harvey's recommended utilization of capitalism for the transformation of the current state of imperialism does not necessarily reject the possibility of some eventual overthrow of capitalism itself. It does, however, reveal a marked transformation from the utopianism evident in his

Spaces of Hope. The escalating coercive violence of the Bush administration, combined with the massive scale of inter-imperialist competition invokes a certain caution in *The New Imperialism* that espouses a prior scaling-down of violence and exploitation before any broader revolutionary overthrow can be actualized. Curiously, it is here that Harvey finds himself most closely aligned with thinkers such as Hardt and Negri, who also foresee a path to liberation through capitalism and re-appropriation. What is often missing from both, however, is a certain scalar dexterity that allows for a certain picture of the effects of imperialism's/Empire's power on the ground, on bodies, and on everyday social life. Harvey is attentive to abstract effects upon "populations" and occasionally invokes resistance movements such as the Zapatistas, but these are often fleeting and remain locked in the broad scale of global abstraction, neglecting what Guattari and Negri refer to as the "human roots of communism" (131; see also Deleuze and Guattari, "Ritournelle" 355). This has frequently also been a critique of Hardt and Negri's concept of the "Multitude" (although they are apparently in the process of attempting to rectify that problem; see Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*). Further, this problem is compounded by the very real presences of figures such as Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld in Harvey's text, that amplify the absence of consideration of the affective domains of those suffering under exploitation – a concern central to early Marxist thought (Marx 84-98).

At the same time that he neglects the potential affects of imperialism on the ground, however, Harvey turns a needed eye to the question of imperialism at the level of the State apparatus. With the developing literatures on globalization and Empire, the State appears to have fallen almost entirely into the background. *The New Imperialism* suggests, on the contrary, that attention to the State cannot simply be discarded in favor of global organizations such as the World Bank. The material effects of the Bush administration certainly continue to promote the emersion of the globe in the flows of capitalism, but the dangers have now increased with the overt utilization of the coercive arm of the State apparatus. What is "new" begins to look disturbingly like the history of the 20th century: capitalism has effectively brought the State back in and, at the same time, it draws us ever-closer to global conflict.

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