

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Preoccupation with Occupation

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Neil Smith (2005), *The Endgame of Globalization*, New York: Routledge, x + 227 pages. ISBN 0-415-95012-0 (Hbk. \$27.95).

Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004), *Globalization or Empire?* New York: Routledge, xi + 196 pages. ISBN 0-415-9849-5 (Pbk. \$29.95).

Gary Dorrien (2004), *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana*, New York: Routledge, x + 298 pages. ISBN 0-415-94980-7 (Hbk. \$34.95).

We can't help it. The times we are living in cause our minds to be occupied, perhaps preoccupied, with the mess in Iraq. For those of us interested in trying to understand and analyse international affairs, the contemporary scene may be interpreted any number of ways and we find ourselves rapidly having to rethink ideas and concepts such as empire, geopolitics, neoliberalism, globalisation, neoconservatism, and hegemony. Are any of them useful analytically, as more than labels or black-boxed pseudo-explanations, in understanding the present circumstances? How do they relate, as (ideological) projects that are working in a myriad of ways, but most notably through violence? These are the sorts of huge and urgent questions taken up by the authors of the three books under review here. The three works under discussion are broadly in agreement that the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq can be explained in terms of American global ambition, while they differ in how they understand the nature and workings of this ambition and its implications.

This review considers two books published in 2004, those by Jan Nederveen Pieterse and by Gary Dorrien, together with one by Neil Smith

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that was published in 2005. All the books were published by Routledge, and all three focus their analytical lenses on the current US-led occupation of Iraq. The three books, though, reflect their authors' differing scholarly backgrounds and enthusiasms in interesting ways. Neil Smith has a disciplinary background in geography and is now the Distinguished Professor of Geography and Anthropology at the City of New York Graduate Center. In *The Endgame of Globalization* Smith brings to his consideration of the present epoch a breathtakingly broad and simultaneously deep understanding of American political thought, American foreign policy and geopolitics, twinned with an imaginative and synthetic Marxian understanding of contemporary globalising capitalism and its associated ideologies and social formations. Smith's book is written, I am guessing, for an audience that stretches beyond geography (and anthropology), beyond academe, and seeks to engage readers with its lively and sparingly footnoted assessment of the present era in terms of its continuities with the past. Jan Nederveen Pieterse is likely familiar to many interested in geopolitics, as he has written widely on globalisation, global cultures, international political economy, and development. He is Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and his book *Globalization or Empire?* is truly, as back cover blurb writer Michael Watts proclaims, a "tour de force" – integrating diverse literatures and formulating and addressing probing questions about the nature of present-day globalisation. The author of the third book under consideration here, Gary Dorrien, may be less familiar. He has recently taken up a high-profile appointment at Union Theological Seminary in New York City as the Reinhold Niebhuhr Professor of Social Ethics, but when *Imperial Designs* was written and published he was the Parfet Distinguished Professor at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. Dorrien's *Imperial Designs*, like his scholarship more generally, draws upon an impressively wide range of ideas and methods; including from history, philosophy, theology, and social theory. He traces the rise of unipolarist thinking in the US and investigates how unipolarist neoconservatives ended up determining US foreign policy in the George W. Bush administration, all the while formulating a multi-layered critique of the neocon position.

In order to give a good sense of what each book offers, I shall examine them in turn, before bringing up a couple of more general points that arise from considering the three books together. First, let me turn to Neil Smith's book, *The Endgame of Globalization*. This book appears to be a sort of essay book along the lines of David Harvey's recent books on neoliberalism (2005) or the "new imperialism" (2003); an interpretive narrative by an intellectual that offers an explanation for the current state of affairs. The format is slightly smaller than the average academic book, and the type is larger than is typical and it is not squeezed tightly onto the page, adding to the essay-like feel. However, looks are deceiving, for Smith packs an extraordinary amount into this apparently "little" book. To be sure, the

writing is clear and the points made in straightforward ways, but the reader quickly understands that the summations to which he or she is being treated are based on a rich empirical knowledge filtered through an acute analytic lens, which makes this a very meaty book.

The Endgame of Globalization traces the deep roots of the Iraq War in American liberalism. Smith argues that the present is not so much a new era as it is an intensification of, or a moment in, US globalism. American globalism itself is seen as an outcome of a capitalist political economy and a distinctly American liberal political tradition. Thus, for Smith, the present era can be understood more as a “deep continuity” (p. 11) in historical processes than as something new. Of the present, Smith writes: “It is not a “war on terrorism” so much as a war to finish off a larger and longer term project. War in Iraq should be comprehended as part of a US globalism that, on the one hand, is rooted in the eighteenth-century liberalism out of which the US emerged and, on the other, began to gain full expression in the early twentieth century” (p. viii). Smith, building upon his substantial knowledge of twentieth-century US foreign policy making (see Smith 2003), identifies two prior significant moments in US attempts to act upon the country’s global aspirations. After reviewing the eighteenth-century roots of American liberalism, Smith looks closely at the period from the last few years of the 1800s to the aftermath of World War One. He argues that Woodrow Wilson’s actions regarding the establishment of the League of Nations have to be understood as a partially successful attempt to instantiate a US globalism that was based not on direct territorial control of great swathes of the earth’s surface (i.e., it was not like the European imperialism of the late eighteenth century) but rather on more indirect or mediated political control paired with, significantly, control by US capital of key elements in the growing world economy. The second moment, according to Smith, is World War Two, and he stresses the US role in setting up the institutional architecture for the post-war world economy. Smith details the machinations over the founding of the United Nations, and he describes the US politicking at the Bretton Woods conference setting up the IMF and the World Bank. For Smith, both Wilson’s and Roosevelt’s attempts to shape the world in the interests of US capital were prevented from total success by diverse forces inside and outside the US itself. Nonetheless, in large part because of what each did manage to achieve at their respective “moments” in history, the US was able to assume an increasingly secure role as hegemon in political and economic terms. Smith then takes the reader through from the 1970s to the very recent past (say 2001), pointing out the usual economic and (geo)political shifts but stressing the continuities in the prosecution of US global ambition. Smith understands these decades as those of “globalization” which he sees as the integration and liberalisation of financial flows, the re-ordering of geographies of production, and the general rise of transnational capital – much of it US in origin. The matching ideology for globalisation

was/is neoliberalism, which for Smith, again, is very much an echo of old liberalism.

The last two chapters of the book (there are seven in all) concern events since 11 September 2001. For Smith, 9/11, which he recounts with clarity and poignancy, raised the curtain on the latest phase of globalisation a.k.a. US ambition, in which the ugly contradictions of an opportunistic and unilateralist “liberalism on a mission” (p. 162) are manifest in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. Under the slogans of freedom (“liberty is universal”), repression and brutality intensify. For Smith this is part of the present “broader imperial assertion” that is “operating through the ventricles of global economic, legal, and military liberalism” (p. 169) and that threatens to push the world’s population to conditions more like those Hobbes conjured up than those Locke and the present-day liberal apologists (and Ignatieff comes in for particular rebuke by Smith, pp. 170–176) say they can see arising from current US actions. So, Smith says, this third moment in US ambition is bound to fail, like its predecessors, and it could well leave behind it a more brutal world – even as it might be one more to the liking of US capital thanks to the “transparent opportunism” of the US’s post-9/11 strategy (p. 192) which has attempted to secure global space for neoliberal capitalist globalisation to continue. Of course none of this has been achieved without opposition, and Smith ends this book with a worried assessment of the rising tide of nationalism within the US itself; a nationalism that at once feeds the global project, but also undoes it from inside. Smith warns “If the Iraq war was viewed among its perpetrators as a step toward the endgame of a triumphant US globalization, it is turning into a different kind of endgame in which the nationalism within emerges to defeat its host” (p. 204).

Jan Nederveen Pieterse’s *Globalization or Empire?* is styled more for an academic audience, but it is not aimed at any a particular discipline. Rather, Nederveen Pieterse has written in a way that is broad-ranging and interdisciplinary, bringing together diverse theoretical and conceptual ideas. The book, he says, addresses “the obvious question”: “How does globalization relate to empire?” (p. v). He concludes, in broad agreement with Smith, that globalisation is the more historical process, whereas empire is a phase of that process. Throughout the book, Nederveen Pieterse poses questions and then proceeds to address them analytically – a narrative approach that is quite effective. For example, he asks, “Is the recent belligerent unilateralism in American policy just an extension of past policies or a fundamental change of dynamics?” (p. v). To address this question, Nederveen Pieterse delineates more recent globalisation (roughly 1980 until 2000) as a specific form of globalisation which he labels “neoliberal globalization” (p. 53) and spends much of the book detailing its origins, components, dynamics and recent transformation. In terms of origins, Nederveen Pieterse looks first not to the high statecraft of a Wilson or a Roosevelt (not that he would disagree

necessarily with Smith's treatment), nor to economic theory (the rise of Friedman and the Chicago School and so on), but to demographic and other material shifts in the US space economy towards the South. He argues that the US South with its low-tax, low-wage/high-exploitation economy, its racialised law-and-order traditions, its limited social services, and generally conservative disposition, became at once the locus of political power (in electoral terms) and the US's model for socio-economic organisation. "If the American South provided the material template, Chicago school economics provided the intellectual sheen" (p. 4), Nederveen Pieterse states. Despite the fact that Nederveen Pieterse does not entirely escape the charges of essentialising the South that he levels at others (pp. 5–6), his attempt to ground shifts in US political and economic policy in the uneven geography of its own polity and economy is most welcome and quite provocative. Nederveen Pieterse also stresses how the rise of Reagan and the prosecution of the Cold War by Reagan are key precursors to present US foreign policy (p. 24), a point that Dorrien also highlights in reminding us of the fairly obvious lineages in neoconservative influence.

Nederveen Pieterse's Chapter Four is where he fleshes out his identification of the present as a time during which neoliberal globalisation is morphing into a "hybrid formation of neoliberal empire; a *mélange* of political-military and economic unilateralism, an attempt to merge geopolitics with the aims and techniques of neoliberalism" (p. 41). A table presenting the features of neoliberal globalisation and neoliberal empire on page 53 is a particularly clear and effective example of the author's penchant for clarifying differences and similarities by setting them out in a table (although the table bears the wrong title – likely a copyeditor's oversight). In the subsequent two chapters Nederveen Pieterse widens the scope of inquiry to discuss the ways in which global inequalities and the poverty they intensify are part and parcel of neoliberal globalisation and also, now, of neoliberal empire. This approach, which is not unlike that worked out by John Agnew in his detailed analysis of American hegemony (2005, especially pages 173–188) is commendable for its refusal to allow the traditional partition of knowledge, with development studies on the one side and international political economy/geopolitics on the other, to stand. The emphasis on relating humans' well-being to neoliberal globalisation and now empire, is deepened in Chapter Six with a focus on conflict that discusses, for example, the emerging "development-security nexus" and its connections to the prevailing technologized permanent war doctrine" (p. 102). The closing chapters of *Globalization or Empire?* examine the role of American exceptionalism in the particular form and dynamics of neoliberal empire and argue that the US is seriously overstressing itself in political and economic senses, so much so that "The grand strategy of permanent war signals the beginning of the end of American power" (p. 159). Nederveen Pieterse sees the US's economy as unsustainable and riven with contradictions such that it will, he

predicts, be overtaken by differently organised and regulated (more multi-lateral) globalising capitalisms, based in Europe and Asia (pp. 152–158). Since this important argument is articulated only at the very end of the book it is not detailed, and appears in rather sketchy form, which is a shame.

Gary Dorrien's careful and critical studies of neoconservatism in the US hold a great deal of interest for anybody interested in geopolitical thought and practice. He has been studying neoconservatism in the US for some time, and authored *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* more than a decade ago. For this earlier project Dorrien interviewed major neoconservatives about their beliefs and politics and immersed himself in their writings. He therefore has a relatively long-term familiarity with neoconservatism and neoconservatives, and with their domestic and international agendas, and this shows throughout *Imperial Designs*.

Dorrien's book is a brilliant and detailed study of who the neoconservatives are, what they believe, and how they seized upon 9/11 to formulate the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration along their aggressive military unipolarist lines. As Dorrien summarises in his Introduction: "I ... argue that the entire Bush foreign policy team advocates some version of unipolarist ideology, that Cheney and Rumsfeld are committed to PNAC-style unipolarism and are closely associated with movement neocons, and that the Bush administration's determination to overthrow Iraq was rooted historically and ideologically in the neo-imperial ambitions of the neocons" (p. 3). His approach is historical, and in tracing the (unsteady) rise of neocons and their ideas and influence, he is at great pains to distinguish among them and also to show how those who are not commonly typed as neocons can and do easily ally themselves with certain varieties of neoconservative thought. This is most significant in the case of the George W. Bush administration and Dorrien does an excellent job of explaining how hard line conservatives like Cheney and Rumsfeld, and realist hawks (notably Rice) could join with those more likely to self-identify as neoconservatives, around what Dorrien identifies as US unipolarism (historical opportunism based on exceptionalism) combined with a "politics of perpetual war" (framed partly as a response to "terror") (p. 5). The analysis is based on close readings of a vast array of published (or leaked) or otherwise public statements by neocons themselves and the author's own previous and follow-up interviews and his correspondence with neocons.

Imperial Designs provides a detailed mapping of American neoconservatism as "an impulse or current of thought" (p. 16) with a complex set of people and institutions variously connected to it. The book is a work that I have already been using as a reference and it is especially valuable in getting a solid grasp on individual neocons and how they are situated in relation to other neocons on key issues. He shows how democratic

globalists (including people like Ben Wattenberg, Richard Perle, Michael Novak, Joshua Muravchik, Norman Podhoretz, and Charles Krauthammer), prodded by Krauthammer, moved towards a more realist and distinctly imperialist unipolarism (p. 114), which in turn could join forces with the vision of a new Pax Americana promulgated by right-wingers such as William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Paul Wolfowitz, Max Boot, and Laurence Kaplan, through key neocon forums like *The Weekly Standard* and the PNAC. Their various promotions of a unilateralist, militaristic, US foreign policy, focused on the Middle East (Iraq) but with the aim of consolidating American power globally, that once seemed too extreme to be taken up, have become American foreign policy since September 2001. How this happened is a complicated story and at times, I confess, I found it hard to keep track of these people, their machinations, and the nuances of their (changing) views. A few tables or graphics (a more literal mapping exercise, perhaps?) showing where people stood on key issues or how they were connected to key institutions and/or one another, would have helped me keep things straight.

In any event, by taking the neoconservatives seriously and by doing a ton of detailed empirical work, Dorrien has certainly provided us with a key guide to them and their beliefs. Beyond this though, the book is also a careful and deeply critical assessment of unipolarism and neoconservatism. In his concluding chapter (Six), Dorrien focuses on the totalising dreams of the unipolarists whose lists of countries to be changed by the application of US force can never end. He notes that a doctrine of permanent war will engender just that, and that such levels of sustained violence by the unipolar hegemon (the US) can only serve to undermine its own economic and political power – an argument not dissimilar in its outlines to those presented by Smith and Nederveen Pieterse.

Unlike Smith or Nederveen Pieterse, however, Dorrien does not frame the world in the terms of a basically Marxian or structuralist political economy. Rather, he is coming from *within* a type of American liberalism, seemingly advocating an ethically and religiously defined liberalism that most definitely sees itself as distinct from the neoliberalism that Smith describes as the apparently sole heir of liberalism. Dorrien, in his book, appears to be in rough agreement with Smith when he brings up what he calls the “natural tendency” of a hegemon to “regard the entire world as its geopolitical neighborhood” (p. 224) and Dorrien is, perhaps surprisingly, also likely in agreement with Smith regarding Smith’s overall assessment of (American) liberalism as easily becoming imperialist and thus finding common cause with much of neoconservatism’s imperial ambition (e.g., Smith pp. 40–45; Dorrien Chapter Six). However, Dorrien, I think, is still concerned to see meaningful difference between a unilateralist, militaristic hegemon and one that is multilateralist and peaceable (p. 257) and although he admits that hegemons tend to be imperialist and that liberal imperialism

is alive and well (p. 1 and Chapter Six), I got the sense that Dorrien himself sees possibilities for an “anti-imperialist” “progressive” international politics (p. 256), perhaps wishing for a “progressive realist” approach to international affairs. This is one that acknowledges the power of states pursuing their own national interests (the realist part), but values “collective security” that is not exactly guaranteed, but certainly made possible through international institutions such as international law. For Dorrien, international institutions (notably the UN) are “the fallible, indispensable means by which democratic principles are advanced in the international field” (p. 256). Pragmatically, Dorrien admits: “What passes for democracy in the twenty-first century is often very thin, as in the internationalist system. But it is better to have thin democracy and collective security than none at all, and it is not unrealistic to imagine a more effective international community” (p. 253).

It is intriguing to consider Nederveen Pieterse’s geographical description of the changing nature of mainstream US political sentiment (his version of the ‘rise of Dixie’ thesis) alongside Dorrien’s analysis of neoconservatism’s internal diversity and its connections with other strands in American political thought. How does neoconservatism, especially as it translates into a unipolarist foreign policy, relate to the key political position of US Christianity, especially of the sort that is credited with electoral significance and is often associated with the South? Specifically, I was hoping for more in-depth analyses of the connections between the (US) Christian right, and its various associated material, demographic and geopolitical geographies on the one hand, and the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration on the other. Nederveen Pieterse mentions Christian Zionism and fundamentalist Christianity a few times (pp. 23, 158) but leaves aside any discussion of how they impact US imperialism; Neil Smith does not address the role of the religious beliefs of much of the US electorate at all, despite the fact that they have been connected to American liberalism historically and are so now. I hoped that Dorrien might discuss the ways in which certain aspects of US Christianity – notably the widespread acceptance of millennialism – fed into domestic apparent acceptance of US-led violence in Iraq. Although his book has a few careful discussions of the relations between Zionism and neoconservatism – he is at pains to make it clear that he does not believe that “unipolarist ideology is some kind of conspiracy or a cover for hardline Zionism” (p. 3, see also pp. 197–198) – the maybe less direct connections between the foreign policy proclivities of the neocons and those favoured by, or acceptable to, the Christian right are not discussed at all. Yet I cannot help but wonder about the tremendous popularity of millennialism among Christians (especially, but not only, in the US South) and its connections to neoconservative policy recommendations for the Middle East. Even as we might be skeptical of Kevin Phillips’ description of the US as a theocracy, he is surely onto something when he

notes the incredible extent to which the Republican Party has become “Southern dominated” and “biblically driven” (Phillips 2006). Scholars have only recently begun to examine the nature and influence of US Christian fundamentalism in foreign policy making. In so-called ‘end times’ understandings of the world, violence and war in the Middle East are easily seen as inevitable and even desirable, since they are understood as at once signaling and hastening the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (McAlister 2003a, 2003b; Harvey 2005, p. 191; Sparke 2005, p. 266). The Christian publisher Tyndale reports sales of over 40 million (yes, that’s 40 *million*) copies of the books and associated products (CDs, videos and soon to be a computer game) from the *Left Behind* fiction series by Timothy La Haye and Jerry Jenkins. Books from the *Left Behind* series have appeared high on the annual *New York Times* Bestseller lists each year since 2000 (Johnson 2006; see also Lampman 2002), and the wide acceptance of end *times* logic by US voters must play in somehow to the geopolitics of *endgame*.

A second area that I wish had been further explored by the authors, perhaps especially by Smith and Nederveen Pieterse with their more political economy approach, is that of the financial position of the US. Specifically, there could have been a lot more critical analysis of the implications of the US being (in Pieterse’s words) a “deficit empire.” To be sure, Smith emphasises the role of finance generally in globalisation, and of the financial position of the US and its currency from Bretton Woods through the 1980s (pp. 126–136), but he gives much shorter shrift to the current situation, although he calls it “unsustainable” (p. 200) preferring to argue that it is US nationalism that will be the undoing of its global ambition this time around. But what about the nitty-gritty of the rising price of oil (and other energy resources like coal)? How will consistently rising prices for oil factor into the future of the deficit empire? Nederveen Pieterse does not address this issue specifically, but he does point to the macroeconomic risks of huge military expenditures, the difficulties “Enronitis” presents for US legitimacy (pp. 146–149) and he warns that, in part due to the possibility that states like China could become less interested in buying the official debt of the US, “a profound re-ordering of the world economy” is “in the cards” (pp. 150–152), but he fails to really spell out how or why this might occur. While I am not after prediction for its own sake, I do think it must be possible to consider or imagine a range of future scenarios *based upon the dynamics the authors identify*. Plainly, the military-imperial adventures of the US are largely sponsored by Asian states, including China. What happens if for any number of reasons the foreign sponsors decide to park their surpluses in other currencies? While some economists may argue this is an unlikely scenario, plenty of others point to it as more or less a future certainty (Eichengreen 2004, 2006). It is very possible that the undoing of US global ambition will be in the world of treasury bills and interest rates as well as in the cells of Guantánamo.

I raise these two issues: the role of widespread religious beliefs among the US populace in the formulation of contemporary US foreign policy, and the possible implications of global macroeconomic imbalances for the ‘imperial designs’ of the US, not as if I am pointing out huge gaps or flaws in the analyses these three books give. Rather, I bring them up because the analyses presented stimulated them, and to learn and be stimulated and provoked – in potentially productive ways – is what I hope for from books I read. Tackling themes as enormous as globalisation, empire and the new Pax Americana is bound to leave readers wanting more on this or that issue. However, each of these authors is to be congratulated for taking the risk of putting their vast and differing empirical knowledges to work in the service of providing “big picture” treatments of the contemporary situation. There are plenty of books out there that claim to offer plausible and critical analyses of the horrible global political situation we are in, but unlike so many, these three do not disappoint. They are significant and important contributions to the urgent project of analysing the present geopolitics of permanent war; of invasion and occupation.

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