

# Provincializing America

## Imperialism, Capitalism, and Counterhegemony in the Twenty-first Century

**Bruce M. Knauft**

The global eminence of the United States is diminishing relative to non-Western economic, political, and cultural formations. Despite its unprecedented military superiority, its compromised recent attempts to assert dominance through armed occupation and economic pressure underscore the growing importance of non-Western cultures and political economics. Amid the proliferation and permutation of neoliberalism abroad—including alternative forms of capitalist development and political and religious self-determination—American efforts to extend its hegemony in the Gramscian sense are opposed by national and transnational self-assertion, states of insurgency, and capitalist competition. Dynamics of resistance and resurgence in various world areas rival and recast American political, economic, and cultural influence. Understanding these emergent processes, which portend the provincialization of America, will be pivotal for sociocultural anthropology in the twenty-first century. Comprehending new developments will require fresh combinations of an anthropological perspective with comparative political economy, international relations, the ethnography of the state, geographies of cultural resistance, and networks of transnational, national, and subnational influence.

Recent concern with U.S. imperialism raises key questions for anthropology concerning geopolitics, power, and cultural reactions across world areas. Critically examining these issues, this paper foregrounds the frequently neglected relationship between cultural influence, the political economy of U.S. imposition, and counterhegemony. Recent scholarly assessments of American imperialism<sup>1</sup> bring to light but also conflate or confuse four issues of critical inquiry: (1) whether the contemporary United States is in fact an empire in one or another sense of the term; (2) what type and intensity of critique—or praise and justification—the United States should be subject to as a preeminent global power; (3) the nature of American influence abroad and the regional, national, or local response to it, whether it be compliance, resentment, or opposition; and (4) what the current trends of power, economy, and cultural influence portend for the United States vis-à-vis other world areas.

This paper develops a framework through which these questions can begin to be addressed in meaningful relationship to what Lutz (2006, 593) calls “empire in the details,” including cultural anthropologists’ emphasis on person-cen-

tered and contextual understanding to “provide nuance and correction for the world-systemic abstractions or elite political particularities that make up much recent theorizing on U.S. imperialism.” Stoler (2006a, 142) suggests that greater understanding is needed of “both the kinds of new agents of empire that are emergent and the kinds of new subjects this empire is producing.” These concerns reflect the continuing challenge to articulate our understanding of large-scale trends and forces with the experience of their impact and the human agency through which they are constituted and to which they respond (Knauft 2006; Ortner 2006). In the study of empire and American imperialism in particular, the gap between these levels remains large. Having pursued primary ethnography elsewhere (e.g., Knauft 2002b, 2005), I bridge here from the other side, as it were, to address patterns of imperialism not sufficiently to connect them in ethnographic detail but through a broad perspective with selected examples. My goal is to contribute both critical understanding of American imperialism and cultural insight concerning its impact in various world regions and ethnographic contexts, prominently including trends that counteract or resist it. My treatment points in an ethnographic direction from a structural and compar-

**Bruce M. Knauft** is Samuel C. Dobbs Professor of Anthropology and executive director of the Institute for Comparative and International Studies at Emory University (1385 Oxford Rd, Atlanta, GA 30322, U.S.A. [bruce.knauft@emory.edu]) This paper was submitted 31 IX 05 and accepted 27 III 07.

1. The relation of “America” as a nation to the “United States” as a state government—and to other countries and regions in the Americas—is highly contested. As heuristic essentialisms, these terms include diverse in-country and international interests and diverse, sometimes contradictory U.S. government actions.

ative vantage point. Linking these optics is crucial if anthropologists are to more fully and critically engage public as well as academic debates concerning American imperialism in the world today (see, e.g., Lutz 2001, 2006; Stoler 2006*a, b*; Smith 2003, 2005; Friedman 2001; Sahlins 2002; Harvey 2003*a, b*, 2005, 2006; Arrighi 2003, 2005) and, in the process, appreciate the increasing potential and significance of non-Western anthropologies (e.g., Ribeiro and Escobar 2006; cf. Nugent 2002).

These connections call for the examination of dynamics of cultural reaction or resistance that are typically neglected in political, military, and economic analyses. In wider current scholarship, the first issue identified above—whether the contemporary United States is an empire—is now increasingly superseded by narrow views of the third issue—delimited assessments of specific U.S. policies and interventions. In the process, cultural dimensions of complicity, resistance, or counterhegemony in non-Western areas are often ignored. As a result, the second issue—the scholarly critique of U.S. power and dominance—is often minimized or effaced by analyses grounded in historicism, relativism, or the cost-benefit analysis of specific foreign policies. A more culturally informed consideration of the fourth issue, concerning geopolitical and cultural trajectories, brings crucial relations of inequality, structural tension, and change or transformation into sharper focus.

A fresh consideration of hegemony in the Gramscian sense helps illuminate the partial and limited nature of American international influence and the twenty-first-century relation between features often considered in isolation: the global intensification of capitalism, the global solidification of the nation-state system, anti-American resistance expressed through nationalism, religiosity, ethnicity, and long-distance subnational forms of identity, and the bloody assertion of U.S. and allied military power overseas. None of these features is reducible to cultural influences or resistance to American power and influence, but neither can they be effectively analyzed or understood apart from their dynamics. Anthropological perspectives on intercultural culture (e.g., Ong 2006*a*; J. Ferguson 2006; Mahmood 2005) are increasingly appropriate and important to the disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and public scholarly understanding of geopolitics, political economy, and imperialism. They also reveal processes whereby American influence is constrained and provincialized.

Viewing these combinatorial dynamics heuristically through the lens of the United States as a state agent and actor counterbalances the tendency to consider empire or imperialism in general or abstract terms (e.g., Hardt and Negri 2000) or to separate non-Western oppositions and countermovements from the power and political economy of the global dominant (e.g., Huntington 1996). This analysis proceeds from the politicoeconomic and military trajectory of the United States in an era of global capitalism to consider cultural dynamics. It articulates features of American imperialism with counterhegemony in the Gramscian sense. I do not attempt to evaluate specific foreign policy strategies of current or recent American

presidential administrations,<sup>2</sup> and I do not provide detailed analyses of specific world-area or national responses to American assertions of international influence and power. The goal is rather to consider the structural and practical features of neo-imperialism in relation to cultural developments and illustrative responses in various world regions. This analysis foreshadows the reformulation of academic understandings of geopolitics to take the cultural as well as the political and economic importance of non-Western world regions more fully into account. The importance of this approach is underscored by the twenty-first-century provincialization of the United States and the development of alternative and international anthropologies.

## Empire, Neo-empire, Postempire

In recent years, a veritable industry of scholarship has debated, critiqued, and otherwise assessed the notion of American empire (Merry 2005; Mann 2003; Ferguson 2004; Harvey 2003*a*; Gaddis 2004; Wallerstein 2003; Wood 2003*a*; Johnson 2004*b*; Bacevich 2002; Bello 2005; Khalidi 2004; Smith 2003; cf. Hardt and Negri 2000). As Cooper (2004, 272) has noted, however, “The *naming* of empire as a form of power to be embraced or feared in the present and future contributes little to political debate.” To call the United States an empire is tantamount to questioning its self-identified values of liberty, freedom, and self-determination—seeing these as ideologies against a realpolitik of military intervention, political dominance, and international profiteering. “Empire” connotes subjugation, domination, and dispossession; the Latin *imperare* means “to command,” especially militarily. By contrast, referring to the United States as one nation-state among many foregrounds its self-perceived republicanism and support of self-determination.

Within the United States, assertions of empire have not always been so circumspect. President James Polk, for example, opined that the American war with Mexico opened up a whole new empire for the United States, and Henry Cabot Lodge exulted before the Spanish-American War of 1898 in “a record of conquest, colonization, and expansion unequalled by any people in the Nineteenth Century” (quoted in Connelly 2006, 26).<sup>3</sup> But in the contemporary American mass media, considering the United States as an empire is a political red flag unless the account is laced with excuses, justifications, and disregard of the human cost (e.g., Ignatieff

2. Concerning the current administration of George W. Bush, see Bacevich (2002), Clarke (2004), Daalder and Lindsay (2003), Phillips (2004), Suskind (2004), Woodward (2002, 2004, 2006), Hersh (2004), Ricks (2005); for a comparative assessment, see Kakutani (2006).

3. See, in a late-twentieth-century context, the 1997 Statement of Principles for the New American Century, by Dick Cheney, I. Lewis Libby, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Jeb Bush, Dan Quayle, William Bennett, Elliot Abrams, and others (PNAC 1997; cf. 2000). This statement calls for the aggressive use of American military force so that the United States can “accept responsibility for America’s unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.” <http://www.newamericancentury.org>; cf. Wolfowitz (1992).

2003). Imperial self-designations are more openly and sometimes more appreciatively discussed in Britain and may be approvingly attributed to the United States, as in the work of the British imperial historian and public intellectual Niall Ferguson (2001, 2002, 2004). Among American experts on U.S. foreign policy such as Gaddis (2004, 107), history justifies the international ambitions and interventions of the United States as an “empire of liberty,” using imperial force to achieve noble goals of international freedom.<sup>4</sup> Against this perception is the criticism of U.S. interventions abroad by a large cadre of senior world-systems theorists, public intellectuals, Democratic foreign policy scholars, and political geographers (see Wallerstein 2003; Harvey 2003a; Panitch and Leys 2003b; Johnson 2004a, 2004b; Chomsky 2006; Cohen 2005; Hirsch 2003). Especially since the American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it has often been suggested (e.g., by Panitch and Leys in the opening sentence of *The New Imperial Challenge*) that “American empire is no longer concealed” (2003a, 1). The conclusion is that American militarism overseas is needless, harsh, and ultimately fruitless.

Proponents of American exceptionalism suggest, in contrast, that, as a nation founded on democracy and freedom, the United States has been unshackled by aristocracy or territorial confinement and that its social liberty prevents it from abandoning equality for aristocracy or republic for empire (e.g., Lipset 1997; cf., Bender 2006; Pieterse 2004, chap. 8). Historical scholarship reveals, however, that empires justify claims to dominance by asserting unique status, special contribution to humanity, or an unprecedented if not divine mandate (Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore 2006; cf. Mann 1986). Imperialism travels under the sign of exceptional values and the purpose of improving, uplifting, or civilizing other peoples. In the context of the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, assertions of American exceptionalism and those of American imperialism stand in mutual opposition. Allegedly more objective are arguments based on fine-grained information and analyses, especially concerning foreign policy and diplomacy (e.g., Daalder and Lindsay 2003; Brzezinski 2004; cf. Mead 2004; Nye 2004). These analyses provide valuable case studies concerning the calculus of international relations, but they are limited to an uncritical understanding of specific events, tactics, and strategies rather than exposing larger trends, structures, and trajectories. The relationship among these three perspectives is changing as historical accounts provide temporal and comparative context for recent assertions of American power overseas (e.g., Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore 2006; Maier 2006). It is increasingly evident that the contemporary United States is not an empire in the sense of directly controlling or territorially incorporating geo-

graphically peripheral peoples.<sup>5</sup> However, this narrow question becomes less interesting as political economies of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century imperialism are examined more closely.

## Political Economy, Capitalism, Militarism

The growing power and influence of the United States during the twentieth century is closely associated with the spread of neoliberal capitalism, the increasing military superiority of the United States, and the extension of American politico-economic and political influence by international financial, political, and economic organizations. Though ideologically separated, political economy and militarism are integrally rather than contingently related. Though September 11, 2001, is often taken as a turning point, the United States has intervened militarily against 24 countries since the end of World War II, an average of one country every two-and-a-half years. In the past two decades this intervention has included military operations against El Salvador, Nicaragua, Libya, Grenada, Iran, Panama, Haiti, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq and proxy interventions and “black-bag” wars ranging across parts of Latin America and extending to countries such as the Philippines. These incursions have typically attempted to topple political regimes or, alternatively, repress political resistance.

In American government discourse, the link between U.S. military objectives and American economic interests is typically played down, as with the relationship between the U.S. invasion of Iraq and access to Iraqi oil (see Harvey 2003a). These connections were often made more explicit during the earlier part of the twentieth century, especially in Latin America, which had been claimed by U.S. presidents as a special sphere of American influence since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 (Rosenberg 1999). Over the decades, parts of Latin America and especially Central America have provided test cases and training grounds for aggressive assertion of U.S. political and economic interests overseas, even by means of armed intervention or proxy insurgency (Grandin 2006).<sup>6</sup> U.S. interventions in Latin America have seldom been opposed by other major world powers (cf. Smith 1994).

In these and other cases, the line between military and politicoeconomic objectives is hard to draw. Though the United States differs from classic or colonial empires such as ancient Rome or Victorian Britain in its lack of formal or colonial control over foreign lands, prior empires had their own ebb and flow between indirect control, vassalage, tribute, economic exploitation, formalized rule, and what Stoler (2006a) terms “degrees of imperial sovereignty” (see also

4. For appreciative larger analyses of recent U.S. interventions abroad, see Boot (2002), Pollack (2002), Perle and Frum (2003), and Bacevich (2002); cf. Mead (2004).

5. Concerning definitions of empire, see Doyle (1986, 19), Maier (2006, 24–25), Steinmatz (2006), Mann (1986, chap. 5); contrast Ferguson (2004, 8–13).

6. Grandin (2006, 143–58) also documents the articulation of these developments with political and popular culture in the United States, including the relationship between American neoconservatism and Christian fundamentalism.

Steinmetz 2006; Garnsey and Saller 1987; Whittaker 1994). Combinations of economic exploitation with spotty or selective political control are evident in Portuguese influence during the sixteenth century and Dutch imperialism during the eighteenth. Beyond direct colonialism, this pattern is evident during the mid-nineteenth century in the Opium Wars and other military incursions that “opened up” East Asia to Western trade and national government and in the U.S. incursions associated with and facilitated by the Spanish-American War. Spreading with the intensification of global capitalism, these trends range from what Gallagher and Robinson (1953) call the mid-nineteenth-century British “imperialism of free trade” to what Wood (2003a) calls “an empire of capital” for the contemporary United States.

Absence of formal American control over the political sovereignty of other countries is consistent with capitalist neo-imperialism, dependence on transnational contracts, nation-state enforcement, and transnational organizations and the neoliberal development industry (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000). During the cold war era, as the leader of the “free world” economy and its financial infrastructure, the United States asserted international economic dominance through the Bretton Woods agreement on monetary policy, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and then the World Trade Association (WTO) (Hudson 2003). Over the decades, these organizations have furthered American and more generally Western interests via international monetary and currency-exchange policy and by alternately ameliorating and abetting national debt crises, including those in Mexico in 1995, Southeast Asia in 1987–90, and Argentina in 2000–2001. Because of its superpower status, the United States is immune from such sanctions, though the IMF (2004) has reported that American debt to foreign countries amounts to approximately 40% of the U.S. economy—a situation that in other countries would court harsh IMF sanctions.<sup>7</sup>

Politically, the nation-state system of ostensible sovereignty that has become global during the twentieth century is a strong condition rather than a declining feature of American imperialism (contrast Guéhenno 2000; Appadurai 1996). International standards for economic contracts, banking, credit, and repayment have promulgated, manipulated, and enforced neoliberal capitalism and its benefits. Especially since 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union, the connection between

global capitalism and nation-state sovereignty has become the geopolitical analogue to the relationship ascribed by Marx to capitalism, free markets, and free labor. In both cases, an emphasis on freedom and liberty structures differential enrichment and obfuscates relations of dominance and inequality both between countries and within them (Harvey 2005, 2006). The end of classic imperialism in Europe and Japan following World War II has marked not the end of imperialism but its evolution through new patterns of American influence and control (Steinmetz 2006; Maier 2006).

## Imperial History

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, American expansion was clearly evident in the westward expansion of the continental United States through warfare and decimation or violent displacement of resident peoples, including the taking of Native American lands and the annexation of almost half of Mexico. Increasingly, however, American territory expanded through economic contract and purchase; the United States bought Florida from Spain, Alaska from Russia, Upper California and the Gadsden Purchase from Mexico, and the enormous Louisiana Purchase from France. No other major power in world history has acquired so large a portion of its territory under the imprimatur of economic transaction. This imprimatur elides the core connection between the cultural power of an ostensibly free economic contract and state-mediated killing and coercion, American expropriation and capitalist profiteering, and the dispossession of indigenous and other resident peoples.

Since its final major burst of imperial expansion during the Spanish-American War, however, the United States has gained surprisingly little territory, and the long-term results of the 1898 war were themselves equivocal. The Philippines were acquired for \$20 million and later granted independence, though they remained in a neocolonial relation to the United States (Go and Foster 2003; cf. Lutz 2006). American influence in independent Cuba was eventually supplanted by revolutionary opposition, and Cuba remains the staunchest enemy of the United States in the Western Hemisphere. Puerto Rico was retained by the United States but has consistently rejected statehood and remains an American commonwealth territory, with Spanish still the dominant language. The difference between these late imperial acquisitions and earlier ones is underscored by the much stronger Americanization, notwithstanding continued cultural hybridity, of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado as integral parts of the United States.

During the twentieth century, the United States played a major or dominant role in breaking up empires in Eurasia, including the German, Japanese, Soviet, Ottoman, and even European colonial imperial systems. Though it was the main beneficiary of these breakups, it gained surprisingly little new territory in the bargain, even from its great victories in World Wars I and II (mostly small if strategic islands in the Pacific

7. David Harvey (2003b, 79) suggests, “Any other country in the world that exhibited the macroeconomic condition of the U.S. economy would by now have been subjected to ruthless austerity and structural adjustment procedures by the IMF. But, as Gowan (1999, 123) remarks, ‘Washington’s capacity to manipulate the dollar price and to exploit Wall Street’s international financial dominance enabled the U.S. authorities to avoid doing what other states have had to do: watch the balance of payments; adjust the domestic economy to ensure high levels of domestic savings and investment; watch levels of public and private indebtedness; and ensure an effective domestic system of financial intermediation to ensure the strong development of the domestic productive sector.’”

Ocean). The twentieth-century ascendancy of the United States as the preeminent world power is not associated with territorial expansion (Anderson 2002). The benefits of this pattern during and after the cold war underscore Lieven's (2000, 41) remark that "the lesson of Soviet history is that empire does pay in today's world."<sup>8</sup> This maxim is thrown into relief by the exceptions that prove the rule—the four attempts that the United States has made since 1950 to invade and effectively control a major foreign country (one with more than 20 million people), including Korea during the 1950s, Viet Nam during the 1960s, and, more recently, Afghanistan and Iraq. In none of these cases did the United States attempt to officially control or annex the country, instead attempting to control it unofficially through political compliance and free economic access. At best equivocal and at worst calamitous, all these incursions have been costly in human killing and suffering as well as economically. The war in Iraq is currently estimated to have cost more than half a million lives<sup>9</sup> and is projected to cost the United States more than a trillion dollars when entitlements to veterans are included, while anticipated profits from Iraqi oil have proven chimerical (Blimes 2005; Glanz and Worth 2006; Glanz 2007).

Militarily, these developments pose a paradox. The United States has not only the most powerful armed force in the world but a larger advantage over its rivals in armament, technology, and military training than any empire in world history. Why have major American invasions of foreign countries during the past 60 years been so fraught, ineffectual, and widely criticized both at home and abroad? Mann (2003) attributes U.S. military problems to the incompetence of recent administrations, and Ferguson (2004) suggests that the history and ideology of American republicanism, populism, and isolationism make Americans reluctant to assume the mantle of imperial power. But beneath these factors lie larger tensions between militarism, capitalism, politics, and cultures of resistance.

Capitalist success depends increasingly on flexible accumulation, niche marketing, and what may be called the niche politics that accompany the speed and volume of global communication (Harvey 1989). This makes economic interest harder to establish or manage through the blunt use of military force against nations whose sovereignty is formally maintained. Like galleons facing clipper ships, set-piece forces against guerrillas, or modern armies opposed by insurgents, large-scale militarism confronts the limits of its own scale and bureaucracy. Military victory is itself compromised by flexible symbiosis between production and consumption in various world areas, making punishment of adversaries a self-con-

flicted process. For the United States this problem is magnified by its dependence on both cheap imported commodities and foreign natural resources such as oil. The superpower is thus caught between increasing demands for political subtlety and the scale of its military infrastructure. Though the geopolitical superiority of the United States is ensured for the foreseeable future and though the United States spends as much on its military as the rest of the world's countries combined, the "end of empire" in the classic sense renders problematic the effective use of force to serve U.S. interests (cf. Doyle 1986, chap. 14; Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore 2006). This irony underscores the increasing geopolitical significance of alternative means of social and cultural influence and highlights the relevance of sociocultural anthropology.

## Hegemony at Issue

Given the inefficiency and cost of coercion, empires have invariably cultivated ideological persuasion and cultural influence to buttress military dominance, political eminence, and economic control. As Maier (2006, 65) puts it, "Empires rule by virtue of the prestige they radiate as well as by their military might. They are likely to collapse if they have to resort to force alone." This Weberian truism rises to a higher power when imperial influence cannot be established by territorial acquisition or formal rule (cf. Weber 1958). Hegemony in the Gramscian sense—the extent to which American influence leads to the willing adoption or tacit acceptance of American values, lifestyle, ideals of success, and political leadership—thus becomes increasingly important. Hegemony in this sense—willing participation in American-style institutions and activities and acceptance of U.S. oversight without direct military control—is what the United States desires but is failing to achieve in Iraq and Afghanistan. In these cases, American invasion has produced resentment rather than compliance—a case of dominance without hegemony more pronounced than Guha's (1997) influential account of British India.

Though world-systems and foreign policy analysts conceptualize "hegemony" as preeminent state power or control, this use overlooks the ideological and cultural values that shape not just local and national but international, interregional, and intercontinental relations. Cultural factors have arguably grown more important as the international system of nation-states has precluded imperial expansion through conquest or annexation. Active civic compliance by subject populations is at least as pivotal for contemporary imperialism as it was for ancient Rome, China, the Ottomans, the Mughals, or colonial Europe. The truism is affirmed that desires for betterment are key to both state compliance and imperial success.

For more than a century, anthropologists from Morgan (1974 [1877]) to Lowie (1927), Kroeber (1948), and especially Wolf (1959, 1969, 1982, 1999), among many others, have been concerned with broad dimensions of empire or civilization in relation to culture. But for much more of this period the-

8. Political expansion through territorial annexation has become increasingly difficult for all countries. Since 1950, extremely few nations have added significantly to their territory, and those that have (such as Israel) have faced protracted struggles.

9. Specific figures are contested, but detailed statistical projections suggest that 601,000 Iraqis died in war-related violence between March 2003 and July 2006 (Burnham et al. 2006).

oretical and methodological divisions have separated rather than bridged smaller-scale and larger-scale analysis. In the light of challenges to modernist anthropology and the groundswell of interest in global or transnational connections, however, anthropologists are now increasingly exploring middle grounds of connection across such divides (see Knauff 2006).

This analysis pursues a middle ground between the critical cultural evocation of Comaroff and Comaroff (e.g., 2001*a*) and the class-dominated politicoeconomic determinism of Harvey (e.g., 1989, 2005, 2006). Neoliberal formations provide a point of connection and agreement in this regard, among other things in the tensions that surround the widespread desire for economic development through entrepreneurial enterprise and self-determination.<sup>10</sup> Though neoliberalism has been analyzed as a political strategy of upper classes and elite regimes (Harvey 2005, 2006; Ong 1999, 2006*a*) and as a cultural concomitant to millennial capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001*b*), relationships between political economy, culture, and American imperialism have been less frequently considered.

In political terms, the perspective of this analysis can be contrasted to Nye's (1990, 2004) notion of "soft power." As the complement of military force and explicit economic coercion, soft power "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies," especially under conditions in which attraction leads to acquiescence (Nye 2004, x, 6). Nye foregrounds examples in which the presumed global attractiveness of cultural emphasis on human rights, democracy, and successful economic development did or did not result in international compliance with American agendas and policies. This framework fails to examine both the motivated process by which aspects of American culture are selectively incorporated into political policy and the reciprocal process whereby American values and policies are accommodated, transformed, or resisted.

By contrast, Gramsci's (1971, 210) germinal notion of hegemony is at once more processual and more culturally grounded:

Situations of conflict between "represented and representatives" reverberate . . . throughout the State organism . . . How are they created in the first place? . . . The content is the crisis of the ruling class's hegemony, which occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested or forcibly extracted the consent of the broad masses (war, for example), or because huge masses (especially of peasants and petit-bourgeois intellectuals) have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward de-

mands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A "crisis of authority" is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State.

This formulation focuses attention on how ideologies now associated with capitalist development, neoliberalism, and American imperial influence are selectively adopted, recast, subverted, or opposed by peoples in different world regions, nations, and locales. In anthropological terms, hegemony may be characterized as "cultural dispositions and social institutions that predispose consent to (if not compliance with) politically repressive regimes" (Knauff 1996, 187). This usage—hegemony as a lived system of values and meanings in a context of dominance and subordination—draws on the Gramscian formulations of Raymond Williams (1977, 10) and Stuart Hall (1986). Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, 20) suggest that hegemony may be tantamount to culture plus power. But, as Crehan (2002, 172) notes, such usage easily becomes "hegemony lite," auguring what Abu-Lughod (1990) calls the "romance of resistance" and what Ortner (2006, chap. 2) calls "resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal."

Whereas hegemony for Crehan (2002, 199) should foreground class relations and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, 25) suggest that hegemony is a naturalized worldview that, "having hidden itself in orthodoxy, no more appears as ideology at all," I return to Gramsci's original connection between hegemony and counterhegemony in the specific context of the crisis of state authority. As Roseberry (1994, 360–61) suggests, we can consider hegemony "not to understand consent but to understand struggle, the ways in which the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate populations . . . are shaped by the process of domination itself." In the present case, this is the international crisis of U.S. governmentality (cf. Foucault 1991) and the geopolitical regime of neoliberalism that it both embodies and enforces. This formulation calls our attention to the fact that superordinate structures of domination and control both impact and are responded to by marginalized peoples.

As James Ferguson (2006, chap. 4) suggests, topologies of domination increasingly combine vertical impositions of organizational power with capitalist exploitations around and outside this power and, in the process, open new spaces for transnational and subnational resistance. Chatterjee (2004) calls such spaces the political society of groups outside the restricted purview of civil society. These complementary processes are strongly if not intrinsically connected. For instance, Ong (2006*a*, 4) shows that neoliberal technologies depend on excluding some areas and groups from neoliberal development and that these trends "have multiplied possibilities for moral claims and values assigned to various human categories." One result is what she (2006*b*, 242) calls "experiments in freedom" that include "the pursuit of individual freedom as well as the violent realization of particularistic and exclu-

10. Neoliberalism can be defined as a doctrine which holds that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (Harvey 2005, 2).

sivist traditions.” At the other end of the spectrum, poor, ethnically marginalized, or other outsiders confront power through grassroots movements and organizations that “dispense violence as well as justice with impunity—criminal gangs, political movements, or quasi-autonomous police forces that each try to assert their claims to sovereignty” (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 36). These opposed alternatives are mediated by what Ong (1999, chap. 8) calls “zones of graduated sovereignty,” through which states privilege or constrain neoliberalism to empower or marginalize constituent areas or groups on a sliding scale.

Similar dynamics occur on a larger level internationally in the graduated imperialism of neoliberal order, including degrees of American neo-imperial sovereignty in different world areas (Stoler 2006a). Reciprocally, the motivated gap between national self-determination, international neoliberalism, and excluded others offers new possibilities for resistance not only from “below” but also laterally and, looping through transnationalism, media effects, and threats to confidence in a world order, from the top as well. As James Ferguson (2006, 109) states,

The globalization of politics is not a one-way street. If relations of rule and systems of exploitation have become transnationalist, so have forms of resistance—along lines not only of race and class . . . but also of gender, sexuality, and so on. Gramsci’s brilliant topographic imagination may be a guide to this new political world, but only if we are willing to update our maps.

This broad awareness expands received understandings of “the southern question” (Gramsci 1971) in relation to rebellions, revolts, and social movements of resistance in various world areas, including insurgencies against British colonialism (Guha 1997, 1999), the making of the British working class (Thompson 1963), everyday forms of peasant resistance in Southeast Asia (Scott 1985; cf. 1990), struggles for liberation from colonial rule (Fanon 1965), so-called primitive rebels in Europe (Hobsbawm 1959), peasant wars of the twentieth century (Wolf 1969), and Melanesian cargo cults (Worsley 1968), to name just a few. Contemporary work articulates the legacy of these issues with nuanced understanding of refractory subjectivities (see, e.g., Taussig 1987, 1992, 1996, 2004; Tsing 1993, 2004; Ong 1987, 1999, 2006a; and Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1993, 1997; cf. Nash 2004).

At issue here is the extent to which alternative sensibilities coalesce into cultural, national, or transnational movements of struggle against neoliberalism in general and American imperialism in particular. In different world areas the response takes different forms, including Islamic fundamentalism and anti-American insurgency in the Middle East, the political “lean to the left” championed by Hugo Chávez in Latin America, so-called Asian values and Confucian capitalism in Eastern Asia, and the refractory politics of illiberal autocracy or warlordism in Africa. These trends articulate with what Anderson (1998) calls “long-distance nationalism” and comple-

ment what Rose (1999, 49) calls “government at a distance”—decentralized modes of neo-imperial power that depend on loose networks of social agency and action (see Ong 2006b, 236).

As global neoliberalism and U.S. power have increased since the cold war, so have self-conscious and resistant constructions and assertions of ethnic, national, and religious identity in various world areas. Not coincidentally, the Weberian iron cage of capitalist instrumentality is increasing across the world at the same time as reenchanting experience proliferates through religious, national, ethnic, and other cultural formations (cf. Weber 2002). Hence the apparent paradox that globalization, including the spread of cultural images, identities, and ideologies, proceeds apace with reified assertions of cultural if not charismatic identity. In the context of American neoconservatism and neo-imperialism, including “The New American Century” and George W. Bush’s assertion that “our nation has been chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world,” it is increasingly easy for local, subnational, national, or transnational movements to find larger resonance and linkage if not coherence against the negative definition of neoliberal and specifically American interests and policies (e.g., Ali 1990). In comparative terms, as discussed by Porter (2006), the explicit global mandate of American imperialism is highly distinctive and can galvanize diffuse sensibilities and disparate struggles that thus acquire larger significance as antiliberal or explicitly anti-American.

## Forms of Opposition

What are the principal forms of opposition that confront neoliberalism in general and American interests in particular? What impact do these developments have on the political and economic interests of the United States and on American use of military power? For present purposes, three broad dynamics of anti-American counterhegemony may be considered: self-determination, including political self-determination via democracy, national, subnational, and transnational opposition via terrorism or insurgency, and alternative forms of capitalism. Borrowing strongly from neoliberalism itself, these forms overlap and hardly exhaust the ways in which emergent “structures of feeling” (cf. Williams 1977) combine with political and economic dynamics to potentiate a “crisis of authority” for the United States, not to mention the neoliberal capitalism that it epitomizes. A broader issue is the complementary and sometimes dialectical relationship between American imperialism, alternative versions of neoliberalism, and the proliferation of subnational, national, and transnational counterhegemonies.<sup>11</sup>

11. Beyond the scope of this analysis is the key role played by regional or subimperial powers in different world areas.

*Self-Determination*

In the era of human rights, global communication, and appeals for personal and collective agency, movements and motives for self-determination draw upon conditions of neoliberal inequality to develop in new ways. Nash (2007, 437) suggests that “recent decades have witnessed the emergence of novel networks of association in the civil domain that have expanded the parameters of political engagement for poor and marginal groups.” Some of these movements have little to do with opposing neoliberalism or the United States per se, but local or regional movements may spread quickly through opposition to larger powers and associated ideologies. Polarization increases when opposition meets the threat or reality of reprisals.

A case in point is what Toth (2004) describes as “local Islam gone global”—the transnational transformation of local Islamic militancy through a “clash of fundamentalisms” (Ali 1990). What began as parochial movements of the Egyptian Sa’id became the roots of global al-Qa’ida. In Islamic piety movements, Middle Eastern women expand and authenticate propriety and religious commitment through outward and inward recommitment to Islam, including veiling and strict obedience to Muslim dicta and also female-centered instruction and careful Koranic interpretation (Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2005; cf. Hale 1996; Joseph 2000). These subjective and religious goals oppose the immorality, atheism, consumerism, and promiscuity associated with the West (Deeb 2006, 23–24). Mahmood’s (2005, 44) interlocutor Hajja Samira puts it this way:

Look around in our society and ask yourselves: who do you emulate? We emulate the Westerners, the secularists, and the Christians: we smoke like they do, we eat like they do, our books and media are full of pictures that are obscene. . . . We are Muslims in name, but our acts are not those of Muslims. Our sight, dress, drink, and food should also be for the love of God and out of love for Him. They will tell you that this way of [Islamic] life is uncivilized; don’t listen to them because you know that real civilization for we Muslims is closeness to God.

Not narrowly political, these commitments oppose neoliberal and American values. This opposition intensifies when Shi’ia women associated with Hezbollah provide relief services, support, and shelter for victims and fighters against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon or when Sunni women oppose the repression of fundamentalist Islamic movements in Egypt. As Deeb (2006, chaps. 4, 6) notes, Islamic women’s jihad is literally a “struggle.” If this includes struggle to overcome poverty, to provide social welfare, and to be an upright Muslim, it also includes struggle against political oppression. The shifting connection between religious or social struggle and political struggle that is antineoliberal or anti-American is key

to understanding the relationship between social movements, “resistance,” and anti-American counterhegemony.

In South America, this transition can be seen in the anti-American “lean to the left” in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, Bolivia under Evo Morales, and Ecuador under Rafael Correa (Hakim 2006; Castaneda 2006; see Lomnitz 2007). Here, capitalist corporate interests and the policies of the United States under the presidency of George W. Bush provide targets for national and regional opposition that draw variously upon socialist ideology, populism, and the rights of indigenous peoples. A poignant example that emerges from a long history of populist nationalism and anti-imperialism in Mexico (Nugent 1998) is the Zapatista movement, which surprised national security forces by seizing towns in the eastern and central highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994—the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect. Combining emphasis on land reform, organic democracy, and socialism and appeals to the international community, Zapatista women’s and men’s civil society groups forced the Mexican government to withdraw its hard-line imposition of neoliberal policies concerning land, trade, and state governance (Nash 2007; Stephen 2002). Novel use of transnational publicity and the media by the Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos and campaigns of indigenous support and resistance in neighboring Guatemala (Nelson 1999; cf. Keck and Sikkink 1998) created new networks of resistance and opposition against neoliberal and U.S.-associated policies. More generally, the long history of American neo-imperialism in Latin America breeds resistance that readily congeals as opposition to U.S. policies, interests, and interventions (Grandin 2006).

The spread of democracy in a global system of democratic nation-states should in principle benefit the United States as the preeminent proponent and beneficiary of the international state system. But democratic nationalism can recast or subvert American interests at the same time and sometimes precisely because it opens up markets to capitalism. Pursuit of American-style economic development is crosscut by insistence that the *specific* path of development be determined nationally (Gaonkar 2007). Modern nationalism provides a strong barrier against imperial annexation of new territory (see Calhoun 1997, 2007; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1990). In the process, the genie of democratic nationalism has escaped from its Euro-American bottle.

Unsurprisingly, national self-determination is not necessarily supported by the United States in other world areas, though it remains an official goal. The U.S. government currently opposes duly elected regimes in Iran, Palestine, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Russia while strongly supporting autocratic regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. American collusion with autocracy has been especially strong in Saudi Arabia, one of the most politically repressed countries in the world but also the world’s largest supplier of oil, and in Pakistan, the most potentially unstable nation to possess



a significant nuclear arsenal.<sup>12</sup> What the United States supports is not so much a system of *nation*-states, in which national publics determine government and policy, but a system of *nation-states*, in which government control is conducive to formalized international agreements, neoliberal economy, and American influence. States that attempt to subvert or restrict capitalist transaction—so-called rogue states such as Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Venezuela, and previously Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan—can be “legitimate” targets of U.S. aggression.

Ostensibly democratic processes have been adopted even by Maoist rebels in Nepal and autocratic regimes such as that of the former Saddam Hussein, but more legitimate democracies also oppose Western influence and American interests. In recent years, largely democratic elections in Bahrain, Morocco, Turkey, Pakistan, Palestine, and Iran have all produced legislative bodies significantly more Islamist than those that preceded them. The same outcome would likely result, if allowed, in Egypt, Algeria, and oil-rich Saudi Arabia.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, elections in Russia and parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe enshrine communist-leaning governments. The Russian autocrat Vladimir Putin currently enjoys domestic approval ratings above 70% and that of Hugo Chávez is 63%. In 1997 the warlord Charles Taylor won an internationally certified election in Liberia running on the slogan “He killed my Pa, he killed my Ma, I’ll vote for him!” Adolf Hitler was also democratically elected. Zakaria (2003) dubs this general trend “illiberal democracy,” and Chua (2002) analyzes how “exporting democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability” (cf. Mann 2007). More generally, American-style constitutionalism has not homogenized or imperialized alternative subjectivities (cf. Hardt and Negri 2002, 2004 and see critiques by Cooper 2004; Arrighi 2003; Wood 2003*b*; Rofel 2002); instead, it harbors a resurgence of cross-national, national, and subnational political orientations that often oppose the United States.

In Africa, these dynamics are illustrated in Liberia, which has in recent years combined paranationalism, warlordism, economic exploitation, the flagrant flouting of international norms, opposition by the United States, and different kinds of democracy. More than a century of American-associated dominance in Liberia was followed after 1980 by nearly a quarter-century of violence punctuated by horrific civil war (see Levitt 2005; Ellis 1999, 2001, 2005; Maran 2005; Sawyer

2005).<sup>14</sup> Beginning as a populist-nationalist insurrection in late 1989, the resistance led by Charles Taylor subverted both national and international order by controlling and contracting the lucrative export of diamonds, timber, rubber, and other resources to Western agents and companies across much of Liberia and neighboring countries from the early 1990s to 2003 (Reno 1999). Educated in the United States and trained in rebel tactics in Libya, Taylor drew on West African notions of spiritual-mystical efficacy and violent empowerment (Ellis 1999; cf. Mbembe 1992, 2001; Appadurai 2006). Controlling most of the country but failing to conquer the nation’s capital, he was elected president in 1997 by a large majority of the exhausted and war-torn populace. But international powers including the United States, Britain, and France fueled armed insurrections from neighboring countries that opposed him, and he responded by stoking rearguard insurgencies and helping spread civil war to Sierra Leone. Terrified civilians were caught in the middle as marauding gangs of young men from opposing sides killed, raped, and looted almost all of Liberia. An estimated 250,000 of Liberia’s 3 million people were killed, half or more of its women raped, the vast bulk of the remainder forced to flee internationally or internally, and quality-of-life indicators reduced to among the lowest in the world.

Circumstances were resolved to international satisfaction in 2003 when Taylor resigned and was later arrested by international authorities led by the United States and charged with war crimes in Sierra Leone for which he is currently on trial in The Hague. Liberia is now a country in international receivership headed by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a former World Bank executive and the first female head of an African state. From the United States, the UN, the European Union, and a wide range of international nongovernmental organizations, in 2007 it may receive the largest amount of international aid per capita in the world—many times more than the projected national budget of \$120-some million. The United States is by far the largest contributor; directly and via sign-off requirements for individual Liberian expenditures, it and its allies exercise both direct organizational and effective fiscal control over the Liberian legal system, armed forces, social services, and infrastructure.

This history illustrates cultural threats to, economic subversions of, and American-led reinscriptions of neoliberal order. Even in a geopolitically marginal nation in one of the world’s most economically undeveloped regions, opposition

12. On Middle East rulers in relation to the United States see Aburish (1994), Khalidi (2004), and Ali (2002). On Saudi Arabia, see Unger (2004), Baer (2003*a*, 20; 2003 *b*), Aburish (1997), and Fandy (1999). On the continuing strategic importance of Saudi oil, see Mouawad (2005) and Maass (2005).

13. A popular cartoon sums up this Middle Eastern trend: Condoleezza Rice asks a group of Arab politicians if they favor democracy; they all raise their hands. Then one of them turns to the others and asks if Rice should leave so that they can make their own decisions democratically; they all raise their hands.

14. Published accounts are supplemented by information I obtained during professional trips to Liberia in January and June 2007 under the auspices of Emory University and the Institute for Comparative and International Studies. Interviews with a range of officials, rural villagers, and John T. Richardson, the former national security adviser to Charles Taylor, provided additional details. I thank Martha Carey for facilitating contact with Richardson, Richardson himself for his perspective, Thomas Crick of the Carter Center, and Jean-Hervé Jezequel of Emory University for collaboration during portions of the January trip.

to nation-state neoliberalism and to American political interests poses significant problems and financial costs to the United States and its allies, including the cost of rebuilding the country. As the world's self-appointed policeman, the United States cannot ignore threats to the international order on which its supremacy is predicated. Resistance to American-style control may be far from humanistic and may complicate our notions of counterhegemony, but these complexities haunt American dominance and neoliberal state norms. From this perspective, the global distribution of "failed states"—nations assessed as unstable, illegitimate, and without security, human rights, or neoliberal economic development—charts resistance to neoliberal world order and the failure of global neo-empire.<sup>15</sup>

### *States of Insurgency*

Threats to international order and to the United States increase as anti-Americanism is coupled with economic or strategic leverage. Rebellions and revolts have typically plagued states or empires. These subversions have often been managed through territorial control, economic co-optation of leaders or strongmen, indirect rule, and cultural inducement. Against this backdrop, the recent success of insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan against the overwhelming military superiority of the United States is striking. The social and cultural significance of what were initially only tiny counterstrikes was unprecedented, and so was the military power used in a vain effort to prevent them. Visual imagery, the global mass media, and the Internet generated symbolic and psychological victories from singular acts of violence. Over time, computers, e-mail, cell phones, camcorders, and related technologies afforded insurgents the ability to plan, coordinate, and execute attacks, to change, adapt, and relocate them, and to publicize their results. As Pape (2005) documents, sacrificial terrorism has been especially effective against neoliberal regimes, which depend on civil society and public confidence in security. The more neoliberal the state, the more easily it can be disrupted by small acts of violent insurgency. Notwithstanding and even because of the massive scale and scope of U.S. military power, its Achilles' heel is its inability to combat resistance that is not territorial, not linked to a Westphalian competition between sovereign nation-states, and not even dependent on military victory for success. As in Viet Nam, the United States can ultimately prevail in every military encounter and still lose the war.

Violent insurgencies against the United States tend to be illegible in cultural as well as operational terms (cf. Scott 1998). Archetypal here is suicide terrorism, in which subversion is ontological as well as cultural and political. A Western

political economy of life as *bios*—the organizational management of bodies, risk, and pain—is fundamentally subverted by the explosive and intentional sacrifice of life as *zoe*, including the resistant use of life itself in its most basic, raw, and ultimately dismembered form (cf. Agamben 1998; Bloom 2005).

Insurgency operates more formally and with greater potential for economic control through state contravention of Euro-American standards of neoliberal governance. The results can be especially poignant when illiberal governments control major resources such as oil. Friedman (2006) notes a largely inverse correlation between the price of oil and measures of economic and political freedom in nations such as Russia, Iran, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nigeria, Sudan, and several countries in Central Asia (cf. Ross 2001).<sup>16</sup> As the price of petroleum increases, so does international license for autocracy, anticapitalist nationalism, and disregard for neoliberal rights in oil-rich countries. Unmentioned by Friedman, perhaps because it has been a close ally of the United States, is Saudi Arabia, which is both the world's largest oil producer and among the most illiberal political regimes in the world.

Collectively, states of insurgency and "rogue" forms of nationalism, especially among petrostates, oppose neoliberalism in general and American leadership in particular. Historical precedents are key to understanding these relationships. In Russia, resistance to the United States draws upon the oppositional and frequently violent historical relationship between Russian and Western imperialism, including the cold war. Demoted from an equivalent superpower to an imperial also-ran, Russia is deeply skeptical of American interests. In Iran, Western support of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi after World War II included British and American backing of a coup against the democratically elected prime minister of Iran in 1953 when he attempted to nationalize the oil industry. Pro-American rule by the shah came to an end in 1979 with the Shi'a revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, during which Americans from the U.S. embassy were taken hostage. The link between Iranian political and religious authority, on the one hand, and anti-Americanism, on the other, persists to the present day, notwithstanding the moderate proclivities of many Iranians. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez's populist socialism is fueled not only by rising oil prices and burgeoning national revenue but by long-standing anger against American dollar diplomacy and, more specifically, attempts by the United States to keep Chávez from assuming power following his democratic election (Bartley and O'Briain 2002). More recently, the election of socialist Evo Morales in gas-rich Bolivia reflects a social and political movement that links indigenous rights, support for cocoa farmers, antielitism, national control of the Bolivian gas and oil industry, and anti-Americanism.

15. In the "Failed States Index 2006," the 20 nations listed as "critical" include Iraq, Afghanistan, North Korea, Burma, Yemen, Pakistan, Nepal, Haiti, Bangladesh, and 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Liberia (see *Foreign Policy* 2006). See Chomsky's (2007) polemical counter-assertion that the United States is itself a failed democratic state.

16. Not coincidentally, all these nations are ranked as moderately or severely at risk of state failure in the "Failed States Index 2006" (*Foreign Policy* 2006).

Collectively, petrostate nationalism draws on diverse national and cultural legacies that the United States is at pains to understand or counter. The larger threat is that parastatal and petronational insurgencies will merge, as they threaten to do in Iran, Iraq, and other parts of the Middle East, across Andean countries, and across parts of Central Asia with Russia (see Glanz and Worth 2006; Hakim 2006; Castañeda 2006; *Economist* 2006; Associated Press 2007). Though this problem is not currently sufficient to threaten U.S. global eminence, it constitutes a major drain on American resources.

In recent years, a number of cultural anthropologists have drawn upon the work of Benjamin (1969), Schmitt (2005), and Agamben (1998, 2005) to examine how autocracy is exercised by the United States and others through states of emergency and exception (e.g., Ong 2006a; Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Stoler 2006a). To complement this important focus, more attention may be given to states of insurgency, including the relationship between national and both parastatal and transnational opposition to neoliberalism in general and the United States and its proxies and allies such as Israel in particular. States of insurgency variously articulate revolts or rebellions with subaltern aspirations for self-determination, opposition to neoliberalism, nationalism, and anti-Americanism. A larger issue is the degree to which forms of insurgency will coalesce as anti-American counterhegemony within and across world regions.

### *Capitalist Competition*

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, neoliberal capitalism has become increasingly global and culturally influential. Aspirations to economic development based on capitalist profit making and private enterprise are deeply reflected in the aspirations and the economic plans of most nations.<sup>17</sup> In some areas, including much of Africa and economically marginal parts of other world regions (e.g., Ferguson 1999, 2006; Knauff 2002b), ideologies of economic betterment through entrepreneurial enterprise are growing in the absence of objective improvement or its realistic future possibility. In other non-Western areas, including parts of Latin America, South Asia, and East Asia, capitalist development has increased appreciably and sometimes dramatically. While less developed regions and locales continue to provide the United States and other developed countries with profitable raw materials and markets for Western goods and services, areas such as East Asia compete successfully with American preeminence in commodity production, international trade, and profit making. Thus insurgent threats to the United States in south-

western Asia and threats from petrostates in the Middle East, Latin America, and Russia are complemented by burgeoning capitalist competition from South and East Asia, especially China. Capitalism in non-Western terms increasingly threatens to beat the United States at its own economic game.

As East Asian commodity production mushroomed during the past half century, American worries that Japan would outstrip the United States were supplanted by concerns about the Chinese juggernaut. The capitalist growth of the world's largest and remaining communist country is as ironic as it has been explosive. China's growing trade surplus, \$14.5 billion per month, is larger than that of any country in recorded history (Barboza 2006). Since 2000, the Chinese contribution to global GDP growth has been almost twice as large as that of the next three largest emerging economies combined. China has passed Japan as the largest holder of foreign currency in history, exceeding \$1 trillion by the end of 2006 (Bradsher 2006). Along with India, Brazil, and the former Soviet Union, China has in recent years doubled the wage-labor force of the entire world. As Sutcliffe (2003, 262) notes, if trends of the past 20 years are maintained, the United States will soon be replaced by China as the world's largest economy. As suggested by the *Economist* (2005, 11 and 63), global monetary policy is increasingly set in Beijing: "Over the coming years, developed countries' inflation and interest rates, wages, profits, oil and even house prices could increasingly be 'made in China.'" Prominent but less widely noted is the groundswell of aspiration, upheaval, and misery of millions of Chinese as they enter or attempt to enter the wage-labor economy (e.g., Zhang 2001; Chen et al. 2001; cf. Rofel 1999). Though world-historical comparisons are only suggestive, cultural as well as economic turmoil in China evokes, à la E. P. Thompson (1963), the making of the Chinese working class.

Economic resurgence in East Asia (e.g., Frank 1998; Arrighi, Hamashita, and Selden 2003) has been complemented by the relative decline of U.S. commodity production and exports. Since the early 1970s, American profits have relied increasingly on the globalization of Western financial interests—what Harvey (1989, 2003a) terms a "spatial fix" that compensated for the falling profits of domestic production with increased financial intervention and manipulation of international markets, trade, financing, and monetary policy (Hudson 2003). During the 1990s, global finance dovetailed with attempts to virtualize parts of the American economy—the inflating bubble of the dot.com revolution. At the same time, crises such as that in Southeast Asia during the late 1990s were abetted by IMF policies that pushed businesses and banks toward collapse, after which they could be repurchased internationally at reduced prices (Harvey 2005, chap. 4). During this period of "globalization," capitalism spread across a unipolar world dominated by United States, but commodity production and associated profits continued to shift to other world areas, especially East Asia.

From a world-historical perspective, these developments selectively parallel the decline of previous world powers. Ar-

17. A larger issue is the Western and distinctively American ideal of progress that includes personal actualization, political self-determination, and economic development via wage labor and capitalist enterprise. A legacy of Western modernity since the late eighteenth century, these notions of what it means to be modern proliferate across the world while being refracted through various cultural lenses (see Knauff 2002a; Gaonkar 1999; Mitchell 2000).

righi (1994) documents that a number of modern empires, among them Victorian England in the late nineteenth century, increasingly shifted from productive enterprise to financial control overseas at the same time that rival powers were experiencing increased economic productivity, exports, and profit. In each instance, financial expansion on the part of the dominant power provided only a short period of imperial revival. This surge of externally derived profit making “has never been the expression of renewed capabilities of that regime to generate a new round of material expansion of the capitalist world-economy. On the contrary, it has always been the expression of an escalating competitive and power struggle that was about to precipitate the terminal crisis of the regime” (Arrighi 1994, 238). In an analysis published at the height of the dot.com bubble, Arrighi (Arrighi and Silver 1999, 272; cf. Arrighi 2003, 2005) concluded,

The global financial expansion of the last twenty years or so is neither a new stage of world capitalism nor the harbinger of a “coming hegemony of global markets.” Rather, it is the clearest sign that we are in the midst of a hegemonic crisis. As such, the expansion can be expected to be a temporary phenomenon that will end more or less catastrophically. . . . It is common for world powers on the precipice to lash out in wars of external aggression in futile attempts to forestall their descent.

Wallerstein suggests in *The Decline of American Power* that “the real question is not whether U.S. hegemony is waning but whether the United States can devise a way to descend gracefully, with minimum damage to the world, and to itself” (2003, 27; cf. 1995, 1999). Harvey (2003a, 207) suggests that America’s surge toward militarism may “appear as a last desperate move by the U.S. to preserve its global dominance at all costs.” Like Wallerstein, he dates the productive crisis of the United States to the early 1970s. More broadly, Niall Ferguson (2006) suggests that the major wars of the twentieth century, now continuing under American aegis, reflect the general decline of the West. Given its unrivaled military power, America’s potential to wreak global havoc is unprecedented. But symbiosis between production and consumption in different world areas makes it increasingly difficult for competition between world powers to remain a zero-sum game, much less one subject to military resolution. Any attempt by China or Japan to damage the American economy by undercutting the U.S. dollar would imperil their own exports and economies. Beneath the drumbeat of American anxiety concerning Chinese economic growth and nationalism (Shenkar 2004; Fishman 2005; Prestowitz 2005; Gries 2004) lies the relation between growing East Asian commodity production, South Asian service production, and burgeoning American commodity and service consumption. This symbiotic relation between production and consumption outstrips analyses of Asian resurgence that assume a simple ascendance of some world powers and regions at the expense of others.

In cultural terms, East Asian developments demand a nu-

anced understanding of domestic organization, familial connections, extended kinship and business exchange relations, and what Yanagisako (2002, 7) terms “sentiments as forces of production.” At present, this understanding is poised for development in various Asian contexts by cultural anthropologists (see Rofel 1999, 2007; Yang 1994; Ong 1999, 2006a). Cultural relations of desire and motivation, transaction, obligation, and sociality inform production and consumption and provide the basis for Asian business and political relationships. These cultural issues are not simply local. Indeed, they greatly affect whether global capitalism as inflected by the increasing impact of East Asia and other regions is destined for catastrophic instability (Wallerstein 1999), a tumultuous shift to Asian preeminence (Arrighi, Hamashita, and Selden 2003; Arrighi 2005; see Shambaugh 2005), or a symbiosis of major world powers including the United States on a reduced scale.

The demise of capitalism has been predicted by leftist scholars since Marx, from the 1840s to the present (Heilbrunn 2005), but capitalism has continued to grow and spread. In Asia, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union, the critique of capitalism falls on deaf ears. For 500 years, Western powers and cultures dominated the expansion, control, and profits of a global political economy. These are now shifting to transnational elites and to Asia. This change can hardly be smooth and is more than symbiotic. As Arrighi, Hamashita, and Selden (2003, 9) note, “the resurgence of East Asia does not involve a return to earlier forms of regional interdependence and interaction. Rather, it involves the emergence of forms of regional integration that originate as much from the legacy of the indigenous tribute-trade system and other forms of intra-East Asian interaction as from the legacy of the clash/encounter with the European-centered modern world system.”

## Pressures

American hegemony is increasingly challenged by political and social self-determination in different world areas, states of insurgency, and new forms and intensities of capitalist competition. To these are added problems internal to the United States, particularly the staggering national debt, fueled by American consumer spending, trade deficits, low rates of domestic saving, and the burgeoning increase of sacrosanct entitlements such as social security and health. American dependence on foreign economies is exacerbated by the enormous cost of its armed forces and the seeming political impossibility of raising domestic taxes, controlling or reducing government entitlement programs, reducing commodity imports, increasing domestic saving, or cutting military expenditures.<sup>18</sup> These problems increase American dependence on

18. Harvey (2003b, 79) suggests that U.S. deficits “cannot continue to spiral out of control indefinitely, and the ability and willingness of others, primarily in Asia, to fund them to the tune of \$2.3 billion a day at current rates, is not inexhaustible.” Even the IMF has warned that “the United States is running up a foreign debt of such record-breaking proportions

foreign creditors and their commodities, including oil, and increase the disparity between America's military superiority and its economic weakness and relative decline.

Will these factors produce a perfect storm of American and geoeconomic decline? Future developments are not predictable from structural factors; deeper analysis of subjective forces and cultural dynamics across different scales of understanding is crucial. This applies especially to the ethnography of American imperialism and its alters in various world areas, including practical features of governance, militarism, international organization, and neoliberal economy and resistance and opposition. Will the United States support multilateral policies and capitalist symbiosis even as it declines economically? Or will it polarize in further enmity against competing economies and states of insurgency? Failing empires often engage in brutal but futile attempts to regain dominance. The problems with its persisting in its present course, including the growing cost and limited effectiveness of its military interventions and their negative impact on domestic expenditures and commodity production, underscore the importance of understanding the assertion of U.S. interests overseas, including both their politicoeconomic and their religious underpinnings. At least as important are cultural responses and resistances. As Joffe (2006) puts it,

Hundreds of millions of people around the world wear, listen, eat, drink, watch, and dance American, but they do not identify these accouterments of their daily lives with America. A Yankees cap is the epitome of things American, but it hardly signifies knowledge of, let alone affection for, the team from New York or America as such. . . . If the relationship is not neutral, it is one of repulsion rather than attraction.

Amid global capitalism, the spread of democracy, and strong admiration for American technology, sentiments in various world regions oppose American interests as much as or more than they support them (Hollander 1995, 2004; Ross and Ross 2004). The 2002 Pew global survey found that the proportion of those who thought that the spread of American ideas and customs was a bad thing ranged from 50% in Britain to more than 60% in Brazil, Germany, Russia, Mexico, Senegal, South Korea, and Tanzania, more than 70% in France, Indonesia, Turkey, Argentina, and Bolivia, and more than 80% in Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2002). Opposition to the United States was particularly great concerning American moral, religious, domestic, and kin-based values. These attitudes and their counterhegemonic implications are insufficiently considered, appreciated, or understood in the bulk of existing geopolitical, politicoeconomic, or foreign policy analyses and in the anthropological literature.

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that it threatens the financial stability of the global economy" (Becker and Andrews 2004; see IMF 2004).

## Provincializing America

The relation between American neo-imperialism and cultural formations in other regions, countries, and locales is pivotal not only for geopolitical futures but also for conceptual and practical issues that anthropologists increasingly face. These include the growing global importance of non-Western voices and non-Western anthropologies (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006). Critically appreciating and facilitating these potentials calls for deeper understanding of economic, military, political, and cultural factors and forces both comparatively and in specific world areas, transnational connections, and subnational articulations. These dynamics connect and are underpinned by cultural configurations of alternative capitalist economies and modes of insurgency that merit better documentation and analysis.

These developments expose the limits of this analysis, which has focused on geoeconomic, political, and cultural features of American imperialism in relation to broad forms of counterhegemony. Insufficient attention has been paid to local cultural dynamics (in the United States as well as elsewhere) regional powers, the G8 nations, and mega-regional dynamics. All of these expose the inadequacy of an American-centered perspective and underscore the importance of ethnographic complements. It remains inarguable that the United States emerged as the world's preeminent economic, political, and military power during the twentieth century and that it has been both the preeminent proponent and the preeminent beneficiary of economic neoliberalism and the global nation-state system, but this situation is changing significantly. For cultural anthropologists, this shift calls attention to the gap between our understanding of international political economy and a culturally sensitive understanding of hegemonic and counterhegemonic forms and formations in the United States and elsewhere.

Whereas global political economy has long been studied through the lens of Western history, it now opens to alternative cultural perspectives. These concern the analysis of production, finance, and consumption in non-Western contexts and the influence of alternative subjective, political, and economic processes on dominant forms of international power. The critical insights of subaltern studies and other humanities perspectives that have decentered and recast the assumptions associated with Euro-American modernity (e.g., Chakrabarty 2000, 2002; Guha 2002; cf. Pandey 2006; Ho 2004) can be drawn upon and rethought to comprehend both American imperialism and the increasing significance of non-Western cultural and politicoeconomic formations.

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## Comments

### Ibrahim Abdullah

Department of History and African Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone (ibdullah@gmail.com). 19 VII 07

Nearly 40 years ago, a conversation took place in *Current Anthropology* that was centered on the nature of the discipline of anthropology and the responsibility of the anthropologist. The conversation occurred in the context of U.S. intervention in South East Asia and the war in Indo-China, specifically Cambodia and Viet Nam. The principal interlocutors in that conversation—Gerald D. Berreman (1968), Gutorm Gjessing (1968), and Kathleen Gough (1968)—were unequivocal about the complicity of their discipline, anthropology, in the imperial enterprise, and they urged anthropologists to desist from interpreting the “non-Western” world from the standpoint of Western hegemonic values. Declaring anthropology the “child of Western imperialism,” Gough proposed an anthropology of the oppressed—decentering the West?—that would privilege the struggle of the peoples without history against Western but primarily American imperialism. Her call for a revisionist anthropology echoed earlier rumblings (Maquet 1964; Lévi-Strauss 1966; Worsley 1966). The centrality of the imperial idea and its enemies (Thornton 1968) to the discipline and practice of anthropology demands a rethinking not only of anthropology as currently constituted/practiced but also its othering of different peoples and cultures as non-Western. It is this failure to problematize anthropology and its invention of “non-Western” peoples without history that is missing in Knauff’s seminal intervention.

Knauff’s intervention at a time when the United States is involved in a major war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the global war on terror—a perfect cover for U.S. military aggression overseas?—foregrounds the troubled history of anthropology as a child of imperialism, and his historicization of U.S. imperialism bears all the hallmarks of the historic tension between the subject and object of research in anthropology and the meaning and significance of an ethnographic mode in which “native subjects” are sidelined to become visible, accorded agency, only through the voice of the hegemonic re-

searcher from the West. The important question of who speaks for the “native” is neither posed nor answered. Are we to interpret the waning influence of the United States in global economic matters as an issue only because “non-Western economic, political, and cultural formations” are on the rise? Why should the imminent provincialization of America be one of the “pivotal . . . conceptual and practical issues that anthropologists increasingly face”?<sup>1</sup> Or is it necessary to come to terms with anthropological knowledge produced outside the hegemonic West only because there is an imminent shift in the global political economy? Such demands are coming rather too late in the day; post-colonial scholars in the non-Western world have long labored to decenter the West, to chart an alternative knowledge independent of the West, and to document the multiple trajectories that are the products of imperialism in the periphery.<sup>2</sup>

Anthropology, cultural anthropology to be specific, may have lost the “Indian,” the “tribal African,” and the “aborigine.” Yet the continued use of categories such as Western/non-Western, traditional/modern, secular/religious affirms a hierarchy and specificity that denies their historical interaction premised on violence. Such erasures unsettle the present, making it possible to exclude “non-Western” peoples without history from a modernist project that is constructed as “Western.” By inventing the Western/non-Western as binary opposites, anthropologists continue to reproduce a script in which only the victors are visible: Africans have made no contribution to the emergence and development of the West. The homogenization of alternative subjectivities and the continued reproduction of alterity are inarguably foundational to anthropology as a discipline. The challenge is neither to bring Western and non-Western anthropologies into a conversation nor to take a “middle ground” between radical political economy and critical cultural evocation. Creating a meaningful intellectual space for a polyversal discourse that decenters everything precisely because it takes the “elsewheres” (non-Western?) seriously in framing global and, by implication, local narratives might be an ideal starting point in a context in which anthropology and anthropologists are seemingly compromised (Eisenstein 2004).

The “growing global importance of non-Western voices and non-Western anthropologies” is not only a demand for inclusion but more importantly a call for a polyversal discourse anchored in a radical rethinking of agency and subjectivity. If the traumatized citizens of Liberia elected Charles Taylor president in spite of all he allegedly did—“He killed my Pa, he killed my Ma, I’ll vote for him”—what role did they play in ousting him from power? Or are we granting agency to

1. Chakrabarty (2000) originally framed the issue of provincialization with reference to the production of historical knowledge/narrative. It was a call to decenter Europe and, by implication, America.

2. More than two generations of scholars have struggled to disengage their scholarship from Western forms/formulations. For Africa see Mafeje (1996, n.d.), Depelchin (2005), and Mudimbe (1987).

subalterns, conscious historical agents, with one hand only to take it away with the other? These questions are necessary because the narrative on Liberia ending in the “reinscriptions of neoliberal order” reads like a top-down movement in which the inhabitants of the country, agents of history, have no voice. It is as if external agencies (the global?)—the United States and to a lesser extent France and Britain—were the sole determining factors in the lives of the Liberian people. Thus they “fueled armed insurrections from neighboring countries” until the crisis was “resolved to international satisfaction in 2003.” Subverting alterity and granting voice to the voiceless are key to the project of provincializing anthropology (America?) and embracing a polyversal discourse.

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### Karel Arnaut

Department of African Languages and Cultures, University of Ghent, Ghent, Belgium (karel.arnaut@ugent.be). 11 VII 07

One of the driving ideas behind Knauft’s paper boils down to the suggestion that U.S. world hegemony is irreversibly unravelling. As does Knauft, Giovanni Arrighi, promoting this idea, draws on the concept of hegemony to refer to the capacity of the United States “to mobilize consent and cooperation internationally.” This he links to the degree of credibility of the United States’s claim to serve general—that is international, collective—interests (Arrighi 2005, 33; see also Arrighi and Silver 2001). An important difference between the two writers is that Arrighi focuses mainly on the counterhegemonic forces exerted by “strong” actors—“Eurasia” or China (Arrighi 2005, 34; 74–78)—while Knauft also looks at counterhegemonic dynamics instigated in myriad ways by relatively “weak” actors: marginalized groups, social movements, and peripheral nation-states all around the world.

Knauft considers these “glocal” counterhegemonic dynamics under the rubric of “provincializing America.” Partly in contrast to the Europe-as-discursive-formation that we know from Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Knauft’s “America” is above all a geopolitical unit. Nonetheless, his “America” is more than Arrighi’s “United States.” It is also a locus of imperial desires and neoliberal ideas from within and a fashionable target of resistance and frustrations from outside. Likewise, Knauft’s concept of hegemony is much broader than Arrighi’s “credibility,” which is basically at play in international relations (among nation-states, governments, and ruling elites). In contrast, the hegemony which Knauft encounters behind the armour of American worldwide “coercion” covers a much broader range of relations from direct control and influence (e.g. through dollar diplomacy) to the group-based aspirations or global imaginations that numberless people around the globe articulate with reference to “America.”

Given these observations, the main questions which occupy

me in this paper concern the analytical productivity of broadening the concept of hegemony and choosing to speak of “America” rather than “the United States.” Furthermore, I wonder how these conceptual reshuffles are helpful in elucidating the alleged “provincialization.”

As I understand (and very much appreciate) it, Knauft makes a formidable attempt to introduce to a public of anthropologists a series of geopolitical and geoeconomic phenomena in a conceptual constellation of “empire” and “(counter)hegemony” that so far have been more the concern of political scientists. In the process, however, these concepts are somewhat redefined with what I see as questionable effects. The (neo-)empire “America” becomes a rather coherent and somewhat opaque set of intentions and values. In the end, anthropologists may ask whether “United States” is not preferable because it is more easily deconstructed as an assemblage of diverse interests, inequalities, etc. In response to Knauft’s first footnote, I am not so much worried about the essentialism of “America” as about the fact that it may become ethnographically elusive. Additionally, the absence of internal diversity and contradiction within “America” is perhaps related to the fact that the “provincialization” is seen almost exclusively as a process initiated from outside.

The same external viewpoint (and “internal” blind spots) can be found in the way Knauft uses “hegemony.” Although Gramsci’s concept of (cultural) hegemony directs much attention to the way the “hegemon” elicits consensus by way of apparently non-ideological apparatuses and institutions (religion, science, etc.), Knauft hardly pays any attention to the literature on “America”-based scientific endeavours whose universalist claims are unveiled as “imperialist reason” (Bourdieu 1999) or situated in processes of global neoliberal governmentality (e.g., Goldman 2001). Instead, he chooses to wield his erudition in examining an impressively wide variety of religious movements, forms of (ethno)nationalism, and emerging economic configurations. However, sometimes it is not entirely clear how and to what an extent these counter U.S. hegemony. To give only one example, I doubt that the Liberian civil war is best (or at all) characterized as an instance of “cultural threats to, economic subversions of, and American-led reinscriptions of neoliberal order.”

Ultimately, the effect of viewing a worldwide variety of conflicts, movements, and economic dynamics through the lens of American hegemony may be counterproductive to the notion of the “provincialization of America” while having the undesired effect of positing “America” as *the* global common denominator. This makes me look back with a certain nostalgia to Bayart (1993), who uses Gramsci’s “hegemony” and Foucault’s “episteme” to make ethnographic space for probing the distinctiveness of several counterhegemonic cultural manifestations and collective strategies within emerging/declining African states. But perhaps all this reflects my uncertainty over which side of the slope “America” finds itself on these days.

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**Jennifer L. Bailey**

Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway (jennifer.bailey@svt.ntnu.no). 6 VII 07

Knauff is at his best when documenting the neglect of culture in trendy analyses of American imperialism, in identifying the dynamics and forms of “cultural reaction or resistance” to American hegemony that threaten to provincialize the United States, and in making the case for the role of anthropologists in understanding these. America’s imperial history is, however, old news, treated here as shocked revelation.

By “provincialization” Knauff means the demotion of the United States to a more humble role in the world. This term is better employed in its meaning of “profoundly unknowledgeable about the world beyond,” for this is much what he documents.

As Knauff recognizes, America’s inward focus is in part the congenital disease of the hegemon, the dominant power of the world system. Here he draws upon Gramsci to emphasize the importance of legitimacy in maintaining power relationships. This is an important although hardly a new insight. Various writers, from Lasswell (1936) to Fanon (1965), have recognized the crucial psychological component that distinguishes “power” from “force”; the contributions of Gramsci (1971) and Foucault (1973) revealed the role of ideology in maintaining established authority. Torbjørn Knutsen (1999) employed Gramsci in emphasizing the potency of normative power for a succession of hegemonies, of which the United States is merely the latest. The hegemon sits astride its international system, its lack of interest in others’ cultures mandated by its trademark senses of self-confidence and mission. Its interest is only the big strategic picture, and it maintains its dominance by a complex mixture of respect, fear, and strength. When respect and fear decline, military strength becomes a liability; its maintenance and use rob the hegemon of its remaining asset, strength. The resort to force is a sign of weakness; the invasion of Iraq was always a remarkable display of the decay of U.S. power and certain to invite more trouble rather than less. The currently fashionable Nye (2004) and his “soft power” are indeed paler versions of this thinking, although, oddly, they do call for the knowledge of and respect for others that Knauff seems to advocate.

As many have documented, America’s provincialism pre-dates its rise to hegemonic status. It is deeply rooted in the notion of American exceptionalism shared by the right and the left. The United States has always been “above.” While Knauff recognizes this, he does not probe its implications. Even American progressives have supported unilateral intervention abroad for noble reasons such as resisting tyranny and spreading democracy. American exceptionalism makes it particularly difficult for Americans of all political convictions to listen to others; America’s dominant discourses remain highly provincial.

This provincialism is deeply tragic. As a nation of immigrants, the United States should have reservoirs of knowledge for understanding the world that few could match. Perhaps the pressure to assimilate was so great that this richness was lost. Here anthropologists have a special role in restoring to the United States what the process of Americanization has lost. Anthropologists can help Americans learn to live with the rest of the world. But this role is a perilous one: anthropologists can also enable attempts to restore U.S. hegemony.

Because the hegemon defines the world system, its decline may also mean the reworking of that system. While today’s system safeguards capitalism, it has also slowly built legitimacy in some quarters for an expanding menu of human rights. What will their fate be in a new system dominated by capitalist but nonliberal and non-Western powers? How can we fashion a system that embodies the best of the West and the rest? Here anthropologists can make a major contribution.

Knauff incisively points out that the spread of capitalism, particularly to Asia, that the United States has done so much to promote now threatens to overwhelm the United States. Capitalism in the end is not a national force but an impersonal, international one. At the same time, this stage of capitalism, globalization as Americanization, has indeed provoked forces of resistance abroad. In sketching these reactions, Knauff demonstrates just how widespread this is. But globalization has also generated forces of resistance within the United States. The Christian right has rebelled against U.S. culture. Like the Israelites of old, these Christians locate their nation’s troubles in its alienation from God. Ironically, by their struggle to rededicate the nation to Protestant Christianity, they further erode the United States’s greatest source of power abroad: the ability to appear as the legitimate champion of universal, liberal values. Equally ironically, while they acknowledge the threat posed by liberal internationalists to America’s special position (the specter of “world government”), they embrace the greatest single force that has produced the culture they dislike, capitalism. The resulting Christian capitalism can only intensify international resistance and strengthen identity politics everywhere.

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**Gregory Feldman**

Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, 1984 West Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z2 (gfeld@interchange.ubc.ca). 29 VI 07

This welcome article is aimed at repositioning anthropological research in light of declining U.S. power on the world stage. Knauff reviews the work of a long list of influential scholars of contemporary empire and American supremacy to assess the implications of the United States’s shrinking reach. His objective is to illuminate the way in which anthropological studies can show how U.S. power is now being challenged, manipulated, checked, and hence “provincialized.” He finds three emerging dynamics that “will be pivotal for sociocultural



anthropology in the twenty-first century”: the rise of rival capitalist power, transnational resistance through terrorism or support for insurgencies, and political self-determination through democratic processes that yield anti-U.S. regimes. Knauft deserves praise for extensively engaging the political scientists, geographers, economists, and historians who lead the debate about U.S. power and empire in general. Anthropologists tend to limit their use of this work to setting the ethnographic context or, conversely, critiquing it for lacking ethnographic specificity. Knauft seeks a middle ground between the grander political-economic explanations of domination and culturalist explanations involving negotiation with power structures. He uses Gramsci’s notion of the “crisis of the state” to capture the agonistic relationship between the state and the subaltern within a single analytical field.

Knauft opens numerous avenues for investigation and debate. I will explore some methodological issues that warrant more attention in light of the immense changes that he describes. My suggestion is that we go farther in positioning anthropologists to explain the economic, military, and political processes that connect U.S. policy elites and non-American actors in new power relations. Knauft is certainly alert to this issue, but he refrains from showing how it could be done and ultimately adopts a familiar approach to studying what he calls a new world order—providing a counterpoint to policy makers’ own abstract explanations of social reality and highlighting resistance, variation, agency, etc. Of course, this remains an important contribution, but how does it help us occupy the middle ground between local variation and broader structures at which Knauft rightly aims? How does it highlight the changing relationships between defensively postured American technocrats and emboldened “non-Western” actors? Despite our best intentions, might this approach inadvertently leave anthropology in the “local,” the “non-Western,” and the idiosyncratic? As Wallerstein (2002, 455, 459–60) warns, we would then reproduce the academy’s antiquarian division of labor and limit the collective knowledge produced. Therefore, the pivotal questions I draw from Knauft’s analysis are (1) How do we fully operationalize the Gramscian model without suffering from such divisions? and (2) How might ethnographic research be transformed in the process?

These questions strike at the issues of where and how anthropologists should do their work. Along with studies of resistance, there is much insight to be gained from investigating the production of geopolitical models, even if it entails rethinking of familiar ethnographic methods. These models are the templates that inform policy makers’ efforts (Ferguson 1994; Malkki 1995, 505; Feldman 2005), but anthropologists too often consider them political science’s turf or mere background to “on-the-ground” realities. The point here is not to overestimate policy makers’ ability to convert their abstractions into material reality. Rather, it is to appreciate that such abstractions are both products of social reality and key agents in composing new realities in the very ways in which they

are appropriated, resisted, or internalized. Ethnographies of the provincialization of U.S. power should also “localize” the constitutive policy practices that effect changes in global power relations (cf. Wedel 1998), revealing the instability of current power regimes and the possibility of reconfiguring that power from within the institutions that drive it.

Knauft clearly recognizes this point, but its full consideration would enhance his argument. Perhaps the challenge for twenty-first-century anthropology is explicitly methodological: the further development of an ethnography of the non-localizable policy processes that connect the technocrats of empire and their “target populations” around the world (Marcus 1995; Shore and Wright 1997). This may require reevaluation of what counts as ethnographic location and fieldwork and of anthropology’s relationship with other disciplines (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 38). Examining policy processes might help us abandon references to scale (micro/macro, specific/general, local/global) that obscure power relations between differently positioned actors from peasants to presidents. Knauft moves us in the right direction to deal with this challenge. The long-term impact of his contribution should extend beyond its intelligent assessment of the shifting interface between U.S. power and resistance to it to the new methods necessary to study that interface as creatively as possible.

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#### David Hardiman

Department of History, University of Warwick, Coventry CV47AL, UK (d.hardiman@warwick.ac.uk). 3 VII 07

Knauft provides an excellent discussion of modern U.S. imperialism, which he is not afraid to name as such. He shows very powerfully how in the modern world the U.S.A. exerts “dominance without hegemony.” He offers many acute observations on this process, for example, his insight that Western biopower and its organizational management of bodies, risk, and pain are profoundly subverted at an ideological level by the self-sacrifice of the suicide bomber.

In my brief comment, I would like to focus on one aspect of the future that I feel is not given due weight in the analysis, and that is the huge question mark that hangs over the ecological sustainability of modern capitalist development. Knauft argues that there is unlikely to be a collapse of capitalism in the foreseeable future; rather, capitalism is being reproduced in new ways and strengthened by the newly emerging major capitalist economies of Asia. This, I feel, fails to take into account the problem of natural resources—which is where the most profound challenge to industrial capitalism and its consumerist culture is most likely to come from in the next century. Marx believed that the unsustainable exploitation of human resources would provide the antithesis to capitalist development, but, as James O’ Connor (1998) has pointed out, it is more likely the unsustainable and profligate use of natural resources that will more than anything

else lead to its terminal crisis. In the short term there will be growing conflict and instability caused by competition for resources such as oil. In the long term, who knows? The whole world system could collapse, leading to the emergence of local power groupings. These might correspond to existing points of resistance (local warlords, insurgents, and so on). Knauff provides a chilling description of the rise of warlords and gang culture in Liberia and more widely in West Africa. In this case, the U.S.A. and its allies have been able to provide and police some sort of resolution. In the future, this may no longer be the case. The Liberian tragedy—and those in Sierra Leone, the Congo, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, and elsewhere—may be the real foretaste of what would happen in a possible global meltdown caused by the collapse of the major capitalist economies.

To avert this bleak scenario, the immediate task must be to create an international governmental system that will strictly ration, manage, and conserve natural resources. This needs to be a democratic structure, with majority voting and no powers of veto for the most powerful individual states—an arrangement that makes a mockery of much international governance as it exists today. Beyond this, we need new visions of the future—utopias?—that enshrine sustainability and stability over and above market competition, with its need for constant movement and culture of entrepreneurial risk, and the idea that progress and national well-being rest largely on economic growth. In this respect the “alternative cultural perspective” (in Knauff’s words) that anthropology is so attuned to may be helpful in pinpointing such possible alternatives. We may open ourselves to voices that are at present marginalized by their subalternity, voices that both dissent from hegemonic cultures and values and envisage, in their own way and on their own terms, other futures. Knauff has used his anthropological training to excellent effect in understanding cultures of resistance to American hegemony; what, I suggest, is needed also is an awareness of such grounded alternatives.

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## Reply

I thank the commentators and begin reflexively by critiquing the sociology of academic discourse concerning American imperialism. My paper received replies from five commentators, none of whom is in an anthropology department or based in the United States. This fact encourages me to sharpen my provocation. Where are cultural anthropologists, and American cultural anthropologists in particular, when it comes to major published consideration and critique of American imperialism? Anthropologists in general and those in the United States in particular are well known for critical if not scathing analyses of American imperialism and American foreign policy—informally. But in contrast to the period of the Vietnam War, as is appropriately highlighted by Abdullah, today these

criticisms often go unspoken in public. Retreating to innuendo and particularism, indirection and indecision, American cultural anthropologists are more comfortable with the fragment and the implication, with irony and cleverness, than with clear, frontal, and systematic critique of the power structures within which we live and through which our collective society and government exert domination and create destruction and death.

Of course there are exceptions, and cultural anthropologists, who tend toward exceptionalism, will be the first to stress them. American cultural anthropologists courageous enough to address and critically publish on American militarism have been subject to public and professional harassment and reportedly even death threats. Those addressing issues of Islamism with nuance and appreciation are easily subject to government scrutiny or worse. In the wake of 9/11, many anthropological journals published special issues that cultivated or championed perspectives on the attacks and the ensuing American “war on terror” that were contrary to mainstream perspectives. Published accounts by cultural anthropologists about a host of topics are laced with implication and irony concerning American assertions of power and dominance. Yet cultural anthropologists, especially in the United States, seldom publish systematic and direct analyses or critiques of American neo-imperialism. When it comes to this key issue, in which, as Abdullah notes, Americans are complicitous, the gap between contributions to in-house newsletters like *Anthropology News* and the publication of major scholarly books and articles is very large. This latter ground has increasingly been ceded to political scientists, political geographers, historians, and scholars of public policy and public affairs. This was not the case during the Vietnam War. Why is it the case now?

Perhaps the problem is my own. Perhaps “American imperialism,” like other nominalisms that cultural anthropologists debunk, is only a fiction. The topic calls for nuanced delineation of concrete actors, agents, agencies, and circumstances, as I emphasized at the outset, and my ethnographic corpus reflects my own deep resonance with this agenda. But particulars connect with broader patterns, including, in the present case, that thing commonly called “the United States” and that thing commonly called “imperialism.” For more than a century anthropology has complemented specific cultural and local perspectives with broad-scale models of structure and organization, power and privilege, and societies and “civilizations” or empires. This combined dynamic has given it special critical power as well as cultural depth. But the broader side of social and cultural anthropology, notwithstanding the work of Eric Wolf and others, has received less and less attention since the field’s symbolic turn during the 1960s. Sociocultural anthropology is left strong in implication but weak in declaration, strong in nuance but weak in structure, rife with sensibility but begging for systemic analysis. How can we have an impact on the world or even on many of our students unless we balance the strength of understanding local knowledge with models for character-

izing, analyzing, and critiquing the larger systems and structures around us? The point is not to choose one of these over the other but to combine them.

Concerning American neo-imperialism, my commentators help move us in this direction. The historian of subalternity Hardiman suggests freshly that we broaden our perspective to consider resource scarcity and its key relation to imperial survival and world system crises. In this regard, anthropologists can be encouraged to analyze climate change in specific relation to imperialism, as Davis (2002) has done for what he calls the Victorian holocaust. At present, neo-imperialism and global warming are obviously related to the politics and consumption of nonrenewable resources such as oil. Easterbrook (2007) projects the gains and losses of geoeconomic power that are likely due to global warming. Though devilishly complex, these patterns suggest that northern-latitude countries such as Russia, Canada, and the nations of Scandinavia will be relatively advantaged whereas poor agriculturalists and pastoralists of Africa will become yet more deeply immiserated by drought and desertification. The increasing exploitation of high-latitude as well as low-latitude petroleum and gas reserves will increase both North-South wealth disparities and global hydrocarbon emissions. Amid these trends, the booming Chinese economy's response to its own crises of environmental degradation and pollution (see, e.g., Kahn and Yardley 2007) will increasingly influence geopolitical, economic, and climatological relations between East Asia and the rest of the world.

Several comments critique the reification of American imperialism and call for more specific investigation of networks, agents, and agencies of power and resistance in the developing world (Abdullah) and in the United States, including the Christian right (Bailey) and policy makers (Feldman). As broad-level concepts, I think "American imperialism" and "U.S. neo-empire" retain strong heuristic and tactical value, but in specific application they require refinement through nuanced ethnography. Both these vantage points are crucial. Bailey sees a danger that nuanced ethnography by itself may "inadvertently leave anthropology in the 'local,' the 'non-Western,' and the idiosyncratic," while Abdullah points to the risk that large-scale analyses will reify alterity and homogenize alternative subjectivities. Though I am accused of both sins, at least by implication, I think that the answer lies in bringing these vantage points together. As Chakrabarty (2000) emphasizes, non-Western histories can neither fully escape the West nor be reduced to it. I disagree with Bailey's assertion that critically analyzing the United States as such relegates one to the naive rediscovery that it has been and continues to be imperial. The point is to refine this time-worn understanding with information on what kind of neo-empire the United States is becoming, how this imperialism is similar to and different from its predecessors, and what happens to imperial relations in different world areas as they become increasingly central to, symbiotic with, and influenced by national, intranational, and transnational structures of political

organization and economic operation. I do not identify with Abdullah's call for "a polyversal discourse that decenters everything." As I have said, we need greater emphasis on non-Western perspectives, prominently including those that derive from subaltern and postcolonial studies, but recovered counter-voices need to be analyzed vis-à-vis larger patterns of political and economic domination.

In the spirit of Alexis de Tocqueville's 1835 analysis of intra-American imperialism (2003, chap. 18), my non-American respondents point to the need to address culture and domination within the United States. I alluded to this need in my paper but did not have space to consider the issue at length. Bailey mentions the role of the Christian right. Anthropological work such as Harding's *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (2000) is important here, as is, on American imperialism in Latin America, Grandin's *Empire's Workshop* (2006). Like "U.S. imperialism," terms such as "the Christian right" or "neoconservatism," while useful as large-scale referents, need to be refined through fine-grained ethnography. Given the dynamic nature of American popular and political culture, the situation may look significantly different after another cycle of U.S. national elections. On the whole, views that are mindful of political economic and historical context provide broader and more enduring insights. Given the practical gap of several years between first fieldwork and the publication of associated books and articles, however, contextual analysis may be out of date by the time it appears.

My final remarks concern hegemony and culture. Arnaut, following Arrighi, emphasizes great-power dynamics and questions my assertion that the Liberian civil war was a threat to American neoliberal order abroad. By contrast, Abdullah emphasizes local dynamics and suggests that pointing to strong international intervention in Liberia neglects the culture and agency of Liberians themselves. Obviously, great-power imposition and subaltern counteragency are dynamically if not directly related to each other. This relationship forms the central focus of my paper. The threat posed to the United States and other nations by Liberia during the 1990s was both structural and cultural—an alternative modality of power and economy that defied both the political economic and the cultural organization of the international state system. The United States is at pains to allow such regimes to survive, wherever they occur. The cultural dimensions of such thorns-in-the-international-side can both cause and result from external threat and intervention.

The larger goal should be to bridge our understandings of great power with understandings of oppositional responses. In the process, cultural understandings articulate with developments that travel under the sign of politics and economy. At present, contributions by cultural anthropologists are marginal to prevailing analyses of American foreign affairs, political economy, and imperial trajectory, including their relation to political and cultural developments in particular world areas. I thank the respondents for suggesting ways to

illuminate these contested terrains of power and culture. I encourage cultural anthropologists to do the same.

—Bruce M. Knauft

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