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Publication Date

2005-03-01

IMPERIAL VIBRATIONS, 9/11, AND THE ORDEAL OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq by Derek Gregory

Blackwell, 2004, 367 pp., \$27.95 (pb)

Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism by Zachary Lockman, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 308 pp, \$65.00 (hard); \$22.99 (pb)

Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Path in the Middle East by Rashid Khalidi, Beacon Press, 2004, 223 pp, \$23.00 (hard)

Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror by Mahmood Mamdani, Pantheon Books, 2004, 304 pp., \$24.00 (hard)

It was Nietzsche, habitually prophetic, who proclaimed in *Beyond Good and Evil* [date?][1886] that “[t]he time for petty politics is over; the very next century will bring the fight for the domination of the earth—the compulsion to large-scale politics.” Perhaps, as suggestive as the **arresting prophecy**, [unclear] was Nietzsche's error in thinking that the geopolitical shift would come in the 20th century. True, there were two momentous wars in that century, called ‘world wars’ by historians and statesmen, but these are better understood as intra-regional struggles for the control of Europe (though admittedly with wider global implications, especially for the colonial dimension of international relations). The labeling of these struggles as ‘world’ wars was mainly expressive of the

reigning Eurocentric worldview.

But who can doubt the accuracy of Nietzsche's admonition as descriptive of the 21st century? Surely, even before the 9/11 attacks, it was evident to many observers that what was most frequently labeled 'globalization' involved the world as a whole, whether understood as a new world order shaped by neoliberal ideology, or as an American global empire operating on behalf of and in collaboration with transnational market forces, a combination of corporate and financial power reinforced and actualized by a global media. And since 9/11, the earlier obscurity of the global domination project seems to have virtually disappeared, allowing even the once discredited self-serving discourses on the benevolence of empire to make their unapologetic comeback in mainstream circles. Of course, American difficulties associated with the troubled occupation of Iraq make the foreign policy debate more heated, raising particularly issues as to whether Iraqi resistance is a bump on the road to American global empire or a roadblock that may lead to the redesign of American grand strategy. It is possible that if the 2004 presidential elections had gone Kerry's way there may have been some kind of reversion to the sort of Clintonesque approach to foreign policy taken during the 1990s, stressing neoliberal globalization, talking more about human rights and less about evil and war. This may still turn out to be the case, sooner or later, if the Iraq War drags on and on in bloody fashion.

No matter how these issues are understood, it seems clear that the Middle East has become for the 21st century what Europe was in the 20th, **that is, the pivot of geopolitical struggle for world domination, the regional site where the most dangerous risks of strategic warfare are at their highest. -add a qualifying phrase, something to convey HOW they are similar since the differences are so striking: maybe as objects of struggles for control?]** Indeed, it is Europe that has recently adopted an anti-imperial moderating voice critical of

American global leadership. This European critical stance is mocked by neoconservative ideologues as the 'old Europe.' Properly understood, it is the European call for a geopolitics deferential to international law and the United Nations that is really expressive of a 'new Europe.' This is not the "new Europe" of EU enlargement undertaken after the cold war to include countries formerly in the Soviet bloc, but of a political consciousness that seeks for the sake of its own interests to moderate conflict and contain the American imperial appetite and restrain war making impulses. This European perspective is by no means monolithic, and is as yet in an exploratory mode, undecided and in disagreement about how far to push a challenge to American leadership. Europe remains generally subordinate to the American approach to global security, lacking the strategic assets to pursue a truly independent world role.

Nowhere is this subordination more obvious than in the Middle East. For this reason, the mild European dissents from key American policies in the region lack geopolitical weight. It is here that American priorities with respect to support for Israel continue to doom the Palestinians to the cruel realities of prolonged occupation, along with the persistent erection of obstacles blocking Palestinian self-determination, without encountering a *serious* European challenge. It is here in the Middle East that the American semi-secular crusade on behalf of 'freedom' has turned the cities of Iraq into wastelands of death and devastation, while the rest of the world waits and wonders. It is here that the control of energy reserves and prices is likely to determine the course of the world economy for at least the next twenty years, and it is the American approach that alone is important in challenging anti-Western currents of opinion. It is here that the viability of Washington's grand strategy of global domination is being tested by the strength of nationalist and cultural/religious resistance, while Europe comments from the sidelines. And it is here that the American public has been subjected to a propaganda onslaught to the effect

that the sole purpose of U.S. military presence in the Middle East is to defeat 'terrorism,' which itself is explicitly linked to Islamic extremism, as epitomized by the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in 2001. The Europeans generally do not believe this propaganda, but lack the means to contest it meaningfully. According to President Bush, it is only the extermination of these anti-American Islamic networks that can bring peace and security to the world, and until that (in fact unrealizable) end has been achieved, the region and the world will necessarily have to be treated as a borderless war zone. Such prospects are dismal and dangerous, if not altogether apocalyptic, in their implications. At the very least, we need to comprehend the gravity of this situation as it bears upon the peoples of the Middle East, America, and the world.

EMPIRE AND ORIENTALISM

The four books under review here need to be considered against this broader background. Each makes a distinct contribution to a better grasp of the situation confronting the world since 9/11. Each is critical of and exceedingly worried by American behavior. Each is influenced by the writings and outlook of Edward Said. Each is convinced that America has unrealizable imperial ambitions that are intensifying the distress of the Middle East peoples, particularly the Palestinians, and dangerously inflaming further anti-American resentments among Muslims everywhere, especially in Arab countries. Each is convinced that the history of the Middle East needs to be taken into account in assessing the contemporary situation. And each believes that Orientalist views of the region and its problems have shaped perceptions of leaders and citizens, exerting a deforming effect on the American capacity to think clearly about policy, action, goals. But beyond these similarities, each author takes on the issues in an innovative and illuminating scholarly manner, and these four books can and should be read as complements to one another. Yet despite these commonalities,

there is surprisingly little overlap.

It is easiest, perhaps, to begin with Rashid Khalidi's *Resurrecting Empire*. It is meant for the non-specialist, covering mostly familiar ground in a clear style and displaying an impressive command of the subject-matter of imperial ambition in the Middle East.

Khalidi's historical baseline for comprehending the present is the period immediately after World War I. That was the period when the British and French successfully rejected Woodrow Wilson's half-hearted efforts to insist that the principles of self-determination be applied to the peoples previously ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Khalidi argues that the American effort to fill the imperial shoes of the British and French in the region was misguided from the outset, and nowhere more so than with respect to the Israel/Palestine conflict. There is a sensible chapter devoted to the conflict, criticizing as self-defeating the approach taken by Israel and Washington. Khalidi proposes that future diplomatic efforts should not defer discussion of the core issues of land, Jerusalem, refugees, and water until the last stage of negotiations. Moreover, Israel must be induced to freeze, if not reverse, its provocative actions with respect to the underlying contested issues, with the construction and expansion of settlements being treated as radically inconsistent with a search for a solution that has any prospect of being acceptable to the Palestinians.

On the broader issues of American empire, Khalidi reflects critically on the scale and grandiosity of the vision that he considers “in many ways unprecedented in human history.” (p.153). He looks at the failures of past colonial efforts to pacify the region, as well as at American frustrations experienced during the cold war, to draw his major geopolitical lesson, which is a counsel of restraint: “If this is a lesson in anything, it is in the limitations of raw power, and in the capacity of stubborn local realities to dissipate even the most vivid ideological projections” (p.175). The tone of Khalidi's book is one of loyal opposition,

giving a friendly warning to the power wielders in Washington on the basis of his academic knowledge. The text produced by Khalidi upholds his belief that there exists on vital matters of national concern, “a central duty of academics and other experts . . . to address the general public clearly and intelligently” (p. x).

Perhaps--but only perhaps--Khalidi is unconsciously trying to counter the efforts of Fouad Ajami to present himself as an American of Arab lineage who backs to the hilt the American imperial project, doing so with tiresome consistency on mainstream TV, often in prime time. Ajami has the annoying habit of using the second person plural `we' when referring to the U.S. Government actions and policies, as if there is no distance between official Washington and the citizenry, the academy, and of course, himself. (And the sad truth is, with regard to himself, that there really *is* little distance!) Khalidi tells us that he is writing from the standpoint of “Americans concerned for our country.” As such, “we should pay careful attention to its recent history in particular. We ignore it at our peril” (p.xiv). He also reminds us in the introduction that he came of age “as an American” (p.x) in the Vietnam Era. It is obvious that Khalidi wants to be perceived as a non-alienated American citizen with no axe to grind, and is proposing what is best for the country.

Is this kind of reassurance really necessary as protective covering or to reach that elusive centrist audience? I doubt it, and find the self-consciousness of Khalidi's presentation of self somewhat demeaning, defensive, and I hope, unnecessary. A seeming cageyness is also exhibited by the book's dedication to Edward Said that strikes me as overly discreet: “To EWS.” In fairness, such matters of presentation may be nothing more than an expression of personal style. More worryingly, it may derive from a widely shared sense of discomfort about being an Arab-American male at this time, which would be a sad mockery of Bush's constant harping on the virtues of American `freedom.' I

would not normally resort to such personal observations about an author, but here I believe that Khalidi's text does reveal something disturbing about the intellectual climate that has taken hold in the post-9/11 atmosphere in America: namely, the suddenly precariousness of dialogue and inter-civilizational relations that underpin and help shape some of the more influential thought purportedly drawn from history and politics. Let me add that I am not implying that Khalidi tailors his argument to conform to or please the anti-terrorist consensus. Rather, and quite the contrary, it may be that because his scholarly acuity and political engagement lead him to adopt an oppositional posture on the main lines American policy toward the Middle East, including on Israel/Palestine, there may be an unconscious need to couple criticism with words designed to provide patriotic reassurance.

Khalidi believes that American society can come to understand political reality to the extent necessary to act intelligently and humanely if it can brush aside the influence of pressure groups so as to be able to perceive, with the benefit of an awareness of anti-colonial nationalism in the Arab world during the 20th century, the dangers and fallacies of a 'resurrecting empire' project. To reach this awareness, American leaders and the public must first realize how the policy being justified in the name of 'anti-terrorism' is seen elsewhere in the world, especially the Middle East: as a colonizing project driven by oil, Israel, and strategic goals of regional domination. This project, argues Khalidi, is certain to fail, imposing tragedy and catastrophe on both the perpetrators and the victimized peoples seeking to survive in the midst of bloody struggle.

While Khalidi presents political reality in the Middle East as filtered through a historically conditioned geopolitics, Zachery Lockman is preoccupied with the influence of ideologically loaded interpretative filters provided by the prevailing modes of scholarly interpretation that have long distorted our perceptions of the region

and its civilization. He argues that the policy makers cannot act constructively in relation to Islam and the Middle East until they free themselves of the “Orientalist” paradigms of interpretation that appear to validate perceptions of the Islamic other as an implacable and barbaric enemy. *Contending Visions of the Middle East* is a sophisticated, lucidly presented account of what Lockman labels as “the politics of knowledge” (p. 3). It seeks to uncover the deep roots of Orientalism, contending that the clash between Islam and the West began in earnest over nine hundred years ago, specifically in 1095 when the First Crusade was launched in response to Pope Urban II's call to Christians “to unite, mobilize and attack the `enemies of God.” (p. 27) The related contention is that from this time onward, “Islam occupied a unique (though never simple) place in the imaginations of western Europeans . . . that it was Europe's `other' in a special sense” (p. 36). Islam was regarded as “the dangerous enemy right next door, the usurper which had seized the Holy Land as well as many other lands in which Christianity once flourished, and which continued to constitute a threat to Christendom” (p. 37).

Lockman seeks to expose the ideological roots of Orientalism as constituted by a combination of Western civilizational self-esteem (at the expense of others) and a simplistic view of Islam in essentialist terms of degenerate otherness. The civilizational outlook of the West was originally shaped in ancient Greece that assessed the world in terms of a fundamental dualism between the civilized self and the barbaric other. Such a dualism later was adopted by Europe in general and applied to Islam, which was portrayed by scholarly discourse as an unchanging essence fostering `Oriental despotism' producing uniformly oppressive political arrangements. It also featured an “Islamic mind,” or an “Arab mind,” which was irrational and illogical, as contrasted with the “Western mind,” which was rational and coherent.

The reader is then taken on an intellectual tour through the

scholarly landscape that marks the evolution of this Orientalist perception, giving detailed attention to the work of H.A.R. Gibb and Bernard Lewis, which he labels “late Orientalism.” Lewis is portrayed convincingly as a scholar who used his erudition dangerously as an ideological tool to promote his inflammatory insistence on ‘a clash of civilizations’ (anticipating Huntington’s notorious social scientific argument built around the same phrase). The Islamic world was viewed as opposed to all that was modern, and as irremediably autocratic in state/society relations. For Lockman, the Lewis outlook, formulated more than twenty years before the 9/11 attacks, involved the standard view of Islam as a unitary civilization without important internal tensions. Under this view, the Islamic resurgence, coupled with the “failed encounter with modernity,” produced rage and extremism among the Arab masses, thereby posing “a serious threat to the ‘Judeo-Christian’ West” (p. 175).

Lockman shows how the torch of engagement in the Middle East gradually passed from Europe to the United States, especially after 1945, paralleling the transfer of colonialist identity. He also shows how the academy responded by developing area studies as an expedient mode of comprehension often closely linked to policymakers. In this period, the inter-civilizational aspects of the relationship were subordinated to a preoccupation with Soviet-sponsored socialism as the main threat to Western strategic interests, which included an overt emphasis on oil. Capitalist development, perceived as the benevolent alternative to socialism, was coupled with advocacy of modernization as a positive way to combine the interest of the Middle East with the strategic goals of the United States in its rivalry with the Soviet Union. The establishment of Israel, according to Lockman, complicated the picture, producing tensions between Arab countries and America that at first were treated as a diversionary sideshow to the geopolitical struggle pitting East against West. Israel, almost from the beginning, was seen as vindicating Washington’s approach by

its prowess in wars and by “making the desert bloom.”

At the same time, argues Lockman, the cultural level of criticism in the Middle East was gathering momentum as a force of indigenous resistance to the American approach to the region, particularly its support of Israel that morphed into a strategic partnership in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Days War. During that war, Israel emerged as a regional powerhouse capable of being a huge strategic asset in the pursuit of American goals in the Middle East, and not just a strategic burden shouldered because of liberal guilt about the failures of liberal democracies to do anything to stop the Holocaust combined with the impact of ethnic politics at home.

It was within this atmosphere of growing Arab anger and frustration that Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which demonstrated through reliance on cultural texts that the centuries-old civilizational essentialism of Orientalism as applied to Islam and the Arab world validated the colonial project, produced such shock waves when it appeared in 1978. (Interestingly, in light of the enormous and almost immediate impact of the book worldwide, its very appearance involved swimming against a strong current of dogmatic opinion. I remember Edward telling me that twenty-two publishers--I recall this number--had rejected the manuscript before Pantheon took it on.) Lockman does a fine job of situating Said's devastating attack on Orientalism within the larger narrative of interpretative scholarship hostile to the Islamic world. He considers the main criticisms of Said's work in an informative and balanced manner, acknowledging that the argumentation was at times exaggerated and one-sided, at others elusive and opaque. And while depicting the fruitful turns in academic studies on the region due to Said's influence, he also reports the rather vicious infighting, especially after 9/11, associated with the nasty efforts of Daniel Pipes and Martin Kramer to inject a McCarthyist element into the study of the Middle East in American universities by

stimulating witch hunts directed at professors insidiously portrayed as anti-Israeli or even anti-Semitic.

Lockman presents himself as dedicated to the humane and responsible uses of knowledge as the basis of a more appropriate politics. He ends the book by reaffirming his central message that as Americans we no longer can “afford not to know, if we ever could. The costs of historical amnesia, willful ignorance, and crude misunderstandings about the rest of the world and our place in it pervade American society, culture and politics and only likely to rise, and it is the innocent here and abroad who will by and large pay the price.” (p.272) It is a call to redeem the politics of knowledge from those who would lead society astray with hidden imperialist agendas or misleading readings of civilizational essentialism. Such a call from within seems appropriate given the way the Bush administration has mobilized willing academic accomplices such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami to explain its crusading commitment to moving forward on the path of warfare and imperial geopolitics in the aftermath of 9/11.

COLONIALISM REDUX

In many ways, Mahmood Mamdani brilliantly--and more argumentatively-- supplements Lockman's scholarly assessment of Orientalism. Mamdani is influenced by and sympathetic to Said's approach, but focuses his attention on what he calls “Culture Talk.” Though less essentialist than traditional Orientalist discourse, “culture talk” tries to divide and conquer by suggesting that Western ideologues, in working out a response to 9/11, have divided the world between Bad Muslims, who adhere to anti-modernist modes of thought and action, and “Good Muslims,” who are eager and willing to do what is necessary to reach the promised land of modernity.

A weakness in Mamdani’s argument is a lack of clarity as to

whether he is criticizing culture talk as such, or merely its abuse by those seeking to pursue a political project. Such a project in this instance is to polarize the Muslim world as either Bad Muslim extremists or Good Muslim West-leaning, modernizing moderates. [Not clear: isn't it "culture talk" itself-or the ideologues tht practice it, that divide/s the world?] Bad Muslims are responsible for the attacks and must be destroyed, while Good Muslims endeavor to restructure the Islamic world for the benefit of **other** Good Muslims. Mamdani takes creative issue with the prevailing narrative of 9/11 as the work of 'Islamic Terrorists,' insisting that such a narrative usefully absolves the West and the United States of the need for self-scrutiny. Such denial is helpful in assuring American leaders that market capitalism and the exercise of state power in its geopolitical modes of domination have no share in responsibility for the attacks. According to Mamdani, willingness to consider such alternative explanations could lead to policy adjustments, which in turn could enable the American political imagination to conceive of responses other than a dysfunctional recourse to recurrent warfare against unprotected and vulnerable societies. Mamdani usefully distinguishes between two strands of Culture Talk utilized in the anti-Muslim discourse adopted by mainstream of American thought. The first is that Islamic peoples are headed for modernity but are traveling on a slower train. The second is that the train itself is heading for a different destination and is driven by an anti-modern engineer unaware that the rails end just beyond the next curve. It is this second strand, "productive of fear and preemptive police or military action" (p.18), that Mamdani argues has been adopted by the U.S. government to justify the conduct of its global war on terrorism. The essence of this approach, if the Muslim adversary cannot be induced to join us in the making of the modern world, the only option is to embark on a war of extermination. A crucial argument made by Mamdani is that Washington will never find a solution to the 9/11 challenge so long as it attributes the violence of that day to "a racial or cultural affliction" of the other,

and by so doing fails “to understand that both forms of contemporary terrorism [ours and theirs] were forged in an environment of impunity created by state terror during the Cold War.” (p. 255) In a manner that recalls Tariq Ali's *Clash of Fundamentalisms*, Mamdani perceives a symmetry **of outlook as** between the fundamentalist thought patterns, prescriptions, moral certitude, and totalizing imagery of George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden.

Mamdani regards the underlying fallibility of American goals in the Middle East as deriving from its unconditional commitment to Israel, “the Achilles' heel of American liberalism” (p. 240). At the same time, he believes in the theoretical possibility that openness of democratic discussion could lead to an adjustment to the Islamic world: “So long as democracy is a living reality at home, democratic empires are potentially self-correcting” (p. 239). But even leaving aside questions of whether democracy is still ‘a living reality at home’ in the light of the recent reelection of Bush, the reaffirmation of the Patriot Act, the passivity of the Democratic Party, and Alberto Gonzales's confirmation as Attorney General, Mamdani's faintly optimistic note is not sustained. He notes with respect to the Achilles' heel of U.S. policy on Israel that there exists “not even the trace of public debate” (p. 241). In this regard, he compares the settler realities of Israeli Jews with the American settlers who first occupied the lands of North America, with both waves of settlers resorting to criminality in their treatment of the ‘natives,’ and with both rationalizing their own presence as constitutive of ‘the nation’ entitled to uphold its security against all claimants. **As Mamdani makes clear, it is this settler mentality that has frequently been used by the West to solve problems within its domestic contours at the expense of an externally located native population (e.g. Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Africa). [who is talking in this last sentence, you or Mamdani?]**

By way of policy reform, Mamdani seems to be proposing an

acceptance of the discipline of international law as a constraint on the United States. This would imply a willingness to reverse the course embarked upon since 9/11, which has been consistently invoked as a justification for acting outside the framework of law. The argument here is partly ethical, partly practical. Mamdani reminds us that Americans should have learned from Vietnam that military superiority is no assurance of political victory. In central respects, this lesson is being retaught in Iraq, where the deceptively easy battlefield success has been followed by deepening nationalist resistance. The book ends on a somewhat Orphic note: "America cannot occupy the world. It has to learn to live in it" (p. 260). But how? 9/11 made the imperial dream of the neocons into a viable project. What will make the humane dream of genuine globalists dedicated to peace and justice come true? There are clues throughout Mamdani's engaging study, but no politics of transformation or coherent plan of recommended action.

While all four books under review here make a major contribution to a better understanding of America's relationship to the Middle East, the originality and profundity of Derek Gregory's *The Colonial Present* puts it at the top of my list. In a significant respect, Mamdani's approach links with that espoused by Gregory in his truly extraordinary volume: both emphasize the U.S. claim of being exempt from the limits on its behavior imposed by international law and common morality. It is this invocation of a state of exception, and with it an ethos of impunity for transgressing even the most basic norms of international law, that leads Gregory to accept the illuminating relevance of Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* to designate humans totally unprotected by any concept of right or status and who can be killed or abused at will. Provocatively, Gregory insists that America is conducting its response to 9/11 within this space of exception, treating "Taliban fighters and al-Qaeda terrorists, Afghan refugees and civilians" as *homines sacri* (p. 63). The reference here is obviously to the indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets and,

more vividly, to the manner of confinement and interrogation, which includes the invention of designations ('enemy combatants'), procedures (secret military commissions to assess criminal liability), and non-places (Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay, which is subject to the law of neither United States nor Cuba). Gregory's "space of exception" also involves the systemic and repeated reliance on collective punishment against 'the enemy,' a designation made possible by essentialized thinking that fails to acknowledge individual diversity and choice.

The main **thrust** [thrust?] of Gregory's book is to insist that it is delusion to comment on world order as if the colonial era were over and could be assessed from a post-colonial standpoint. Using the modes of control relied upon by the United States and Israel to impose their will upon Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, Gregory shows in vivid detail that each of these war zones embodies an ongoing colonialist relationship between occupiers and indigenous populations. No punches are pulled in developing the overall argument: "The Zionist dream of uniting the diaspora in a Jewish state was by its very nature a colonial project. In a gesture that has been repeated time and time again since the European conquest of the New World, the discourse of modern Zionism constructed Palestine as a space empty of its native Arab population." (p.78) Zionism in this regard functions for Gregory as a root metaphor for the overall character of the colonial present. In each of these settings—Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine--the familiar dualism is conveyed of barbaric destroyers from the desert arrayed against the forces of civilization conceived as builders and modernizers. Gregory's approach, like that of the other authors, is informed by Edward Said's work on Orientalism; like them, too, he repudiates the apologists for the colonial present, including Lewis, Huntington, and Ajami. Gregory's formulation here is worth quoting: "To them, the Islamic world—in the singular—was degenerate, a throwback to feudalism, and hence incapable of reaching an accommodation with the modern world (no less

singular, but prototypically American)” (p. 58). This is what Gregory aptly calls “Orientalism with a vengeance” (p. 58).

Part of what makes this book valuable, beyond its explicit concerns, is Gregory's gift for theorizing in ways that give the reader enduring tools for understanding the unfolding world order, a globality that defies the traditional interpretative categories of international relations. Gregory's sophistication as a political geographer is put to excellent use, especially in his description of `imaginative cartographies' (e.g., p. 117), the places and non-places depicted by the colonial mind at its worst as spaces without rules where `killing fields' can be established. [omit? yes]. In this vein Gregory does not hesitate to connect Israel's occupation of the West Bank and America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with each other and, more dramatically, with the chilling recall of Nazi atrocity and mentality (see pp. 117-43). The chapter on the Israeli occupation of Palestine is uncompromising in its critique of the behavior of an occupying power and as a model for American behavior toward its adversaries since 9/11.

Gregory's geographical imagination is illuminating. His contrast between the territorializing of an essentially non-territorial enemy in the terror war with the `aggressive deterritorializing' of the world economy, thereby liberating market forces to wreck havoc on various communities around the world, is of the utmost importance in grasping the changing nature of world order. In the end, Gregory gives a dark reading to the trends associated with the colonial present that are the preoccupation of his book. He contends that the American project, properly understood, is totalizing in its situating the entire world within the imaginative borders of its empire. Part of the reason it can do this is its elimination of any sense of an `outside' that has traditionally set limits on the reach of aspirants to world empire (p. 255).

If Gregory offers a note of hope, it comes at the very end of his

book in the form of a signpost pointing to a more benevolent future and calling for “the destruction of the architectures of enmity that have been produced and have been sustained by those dreadful events [the 9/11 attacks]” (p. 262). And finally, “it will be necessary to explore other spatializations and other topologies, and to turn our imaginative geographies into geographical imaginations that can enlarge and enhance our sense of the world and enable us to situate ourselves within it with care, concern, and humility.” (p.262). Like Mamdani, Gregory counsels that America will have to learn how, in Derrida's words, ‘to live together well’ in this turbulent world of the 21st century--if it is to live at all! This will require a far stronger sense of human solidarity and spirit of geopolitical humility than have hitherto been demonstrated. For this to be possible, a surge of inventiveness will be required to devise new categories for construing and adjusting to an unfolding world order that is best understood as transitional and beset by contradictory tendencies.

There is a common message and motif in these fine books, and that is that the path of empire is littered with corpses and will end in mass burials. Further, dividing the world along civilizational lines of friends and enemies leads to self-destructive authoritarianism at home and fierce wars abroad. Will we have the wisdom, imagination, and strength to construct a sustainable imaginative geography that replaces the nightmares of exterminationist scenarios and grandiose visions of global empire with a quest for ‘humane governance’? These questions are posed by these authors in sweepingly general language, but also are depicted by them on the ground by reference to frighteningly concrete imagery of violence and destruction. And so we are wisely instructed!

For the most comprehensive rationalization of empire as a positive political phenomenon that could properly underpin American geopolitics see Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004); this builds on Ferguson's earlier study *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002)

The most articulate expression of this perspective is to be found in Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

Gregory also makes this comparison in the context of responding to violence generated by the violent occupation of national spaces: “Until these differences [of circumstance] are recognized, Bush and Sharon will continue to fight their mirror wars with impunity—believing like bin Laden and the others like him—in the indiscriminate categorization of whole populations and on the indiscriminate violence against them.” (p.143)

Particularly instructive in the context of Africa, especially Liberia, is Ikechi Mgbeoji, *Collective Insecurity: The Liberian Crisis, Unilateralism & Global Order* (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2003).

For the full exposition of these ideas see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

For documentation and commentary, see Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War of Terror* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2004).

The Gregory dedication is straightforward: “To the memory of Edward Said.” It is Said's impact on all four of these books,

diverse in so many other respects, that conveys to a reader the critical perspective they share with respect to America's engagement with Middle East realities, as well as with the wider Islamic and Third World realities.

My own effort to grasp these realities is contained *The Declining World Order: America's Imperial Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

For an earlier argument along these lines see Richard Falk, *On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1995).