

GOOD INTENTIONS



Montréal, Québec, Canada
2014

GOOD INTENTIONS

Norms and Practices of Imperial Humanitarianism

The New Imperialism, Volume 4

Edited by
Maximilian C. Forte



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Front cover image: According to the official caption, this is US Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Porfirio Nino, from Maritime Civil Affairs Team 104, who practices speaking Kinyarwanda, one of the official languages of Rwanda, during a civil observation mission in Bunyamanza, Rwanda, August 7, 2009. (DoD photo by Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist Jon E. McMillan, US Navy. Public domain.) This particular photograph was also used as the lead image for a 2011 presentation by AFRICOM titled, "United States Africa Command: The First Three Years". On the image the following words were superimposed: "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngamantu' I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours.~ Zulu proverb"

Back cover image: According to the official caption, these are US Airmen assigned to the 23rd Equipment Maintenance Squadron, 75th Aircraft Maintenance Unit "downloading" an A-10C Thunderbolt II aircraft during an operational readiness exercise at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, August 4, 2009. (DoD photo by Airman 1st Class Joshua Green, US Air Force. Public domain.)

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PREFACE

How do “good intentions” pave the road for empire? There is some confusion, especially in North America, that reflects the dominant ideological charter for interventionism abroad and increased moral regulation at home (that is, politics masked as morality), with one result being increased militarization in order to forever be at the ready to intervene. The confusion is deliberate by those doing the work of mystification, feigned by those who spin multiple simultaneous contradictions in order to distract and distort, and innocent on the part of those who trust experts and authorities. The confusion in question has multiple facets that take the form of various myths and inaccuracies: a) that the intentions are good, and thus they justify all actions taken, while expressions of anti-interventionism are to be judged as born of malice and ill-will; b) that the motivations have little to do with protecting or enhancing corporate power and neoliberal socio-economic restructuring; c) that our violence is civilized, while the violence of others is barbaric; d) that our political systems are democracies, while regimes rule others; e) that there really is no imperialism, and if there is then it is both eternal and a fundamental part of an unchanging human nature; f) that we must never stand idly by while others suffer (except, I would interject, for when it is suitable to our leaders, especially when we commit atrocities); g) that there is no basic, underlying political uniformity within our dominant political and media institutions; h) that we practice good governance, both transparent and accountable, without pandering to private interests; and, i) that we encourage and tolerate a broad range of views, and do not narrow down discourse to a select few allowable perspectives. These myths and a few more form part of the orthodoxy of what is now a post-liberal society.

It is thus with honour and pleasure that I present the salutary works of advanced research students who have

dedicated themselves to questioning these dominant “truths,” and who are also willing to share their work to better inform a wider public. The chapters presented here, in what is already the fourth volume in this series, stemmed from a seminar on the New Imperialism, offered in 2014 in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Concordia University in Montreal. Chapters went through several stages of planning, drafting and revision, and reflect theoretical, analytical, and empirical mastery of their respective subjects. Taken together, the chapters have multiple, valuable considerations and revelations to offer the reader.

Whether it is iatrogenic violence, voluntourism, the misappropriation of gay rights, or NGOs serving as the Trojan Horses of US dominance and neoliberal social reengineering, contributors to this volume expose and analyze the many ways in which the new imperialism involves partitioning the world into tutors and wards, saviours and victims. Underlying the seduction of imperial elite-lore are established modes of socialization and enculturation, ranging from the elaborate and persistent demonization of chief opponents of US empire to the lionization of military actors commonly rendered as heroes. Also scrutinized in this volume are the domestic social and political costs, reaching as far as the displacement of urban populations to make way for the expansion of the informatic industries of empire, paving the way for the unprecedented dominance of corporations in our daily lives.

A final question lingers in the background throughout this volume. How much longer will we continue to buy into projects proclaiming “good intentions”?