

workers to remain impartial. The media and 'poverty porn' create a greater call from the masses for change in other countries that commit cruel human rights violations or those countries with civil rights abuses. Such calls for political change emanate from the West, but are they always welcomed, or are they rather liberal conceptions forced upon other countries? As this book shows, the line that separates humanitarian organizations from politics has become increasingly blurred, and there remain many unanswered questions.

The objective of the book, then, is to emphasize the questions that surround humanitarianism. Barnett and Weiss have created an exceptional assemblage of scholarly insight into the complex nature of humanitarianism. They draw on the weakness of humanitarianism's ontological structure and how it complicates the constant desire to build an industry out of humanitarian organizations. In a more interconnected, globalised world, people are bombarded with images from around the world, and humanitarianism has undergone an immense transformation as a result. While the book offers a few propositions for improvement, it is certainly not a handbook for a 'perfect' humanitarian organization. However, what it does do is dizzy its reader with a variety of important questions. If it is Barnett and Weiss' main objective to spur a scholarly stampede over the various elements of the subject, I think this book will succeed. Equally, the book is composed in a way that might be useful to the practitioner. It is certainly not meant only for the academic and is an intensely critical and interesting read for anyone fascinated by humanitarianism and humanitarian organizations.

## Imperialism, Human Rights and War

A Review of *Humanitarian Imperialism; Using Human Rights to Sell War* by Jean Bricmont. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006, pp. 176, ISBN: 1-58367-147-1, Pbk £15.95

By Sarah MacKenzie.

Jean Bricmont is professor of theoretical physics, and therefore perhaps not the most likely of authors for a publication concerned with the subject of human rights and the political intentions of the U.S. However, this does make for a rather interesting perspective. Bricmont's book is not based on the science of politics; the author himself is well aware that the book might benefit from some quantitative elements. It is largely an expression of the author's conviction that American foreign policy has

been aggressive and imperialistic, backed up eloquently with a series of examples from history and quotes from relevant actors. By couching his argument in historical evaluations, Bricmont does not place the blame for U.S. expansionism on one leader or government, but on the wider culture of capitalist imperialism. Bricmont puts across an argument that America must practice what it preaches, it must discontinue what he calls 'imperial domination' (p. 163), or he warns that the U.S. may bring about its own downfall and that the fall of American supremacy may end with a mushroom cloud of nuclear warfare.

Since Bricmont has no academic training in the subject of politics or human rights, the book has a fearless honesty, not restricted by the pressure for 'unbiased' argument that one might find in political science publications. He suggests that most of the Western world, but primarily the U.S., takes only a very selective reading of history, and that they tend to forget the lessons that should have been learned from the past (notably Vietnam and Korea). He denounces American arrogance and supremacy and likens their actions to those of European colonialism and to the "Holy Alliance nearly two centuries ago" (p. 7). The author acknowledges that the book is written from a European perspective in the preface, and he constantly challenges the view that the U.S. system of capitalist democracy is the model to which all other nation states should conform. The book criticises the acts of the U.S. and other Western states, by showing them to be hypocritical in nature, and uses their own ideas of right and wrong, their own concepts of democracy and human rights to do so. Most importantly, Bricmont scrutinizes the concept of 'humanitarian intervention' and demonstrates how 'human rights' have been abused to further an imperialistic agenda.

Humanitarian Imperialism is a very interesting read, and the author puts across his views eloquently with much support from carefully chosen sources. Altogether it raises many uncomfortable questions as to our right to impose Western ideologies on other nation-states, Bricmont fails to explain how conflict could or should be prevented in the future. He does suggest in his concluding chapter that "what the world needs today ... would be an observatory to report on imperialism" (p. 159), but he does not explain how this might work, or which nation would lead such an organisation. There is of course the United Nations, whose main aim is similar to the 'imperialism watch' that Bricmont desires, but the UN is ostensibly controlled by the U.S. and other powerful members. A main weakness is that the book skims over the ideological origins of capitalist imperialism and fails to address its philosophical underpinnings.

In short, this book is extremely thought provoking and it is a good starting point for anyone looking for a powerful critique of American foreign policy. Yet the ideas ought to be developed further. Bricmont's work should be read in conjunction with material that addresses other aspects of the issues, particularly to enable a move

from description and critique to constructive action to solve today's global problems.

## World Society and Conflict

Ann Hironaka. *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005, pp. 204, ISBN 13: 978-0-674-01532-6, £36.95.

Stephan Stetter (ed.) *Territorial Conflicts in World Society: Modern Systems Theory, International Relations and Conflict Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009, pp. 256, ISBN: 978-0-415-54360-6, £23.50 (Pbk).

By Didem Buhari-Gulmez

An important part of contemporary conflict studies is concerned with understanding why conflicts emerge and persist. Many explanations are limited, though, in the sense that they stay within the materialistic realm and overlook the systemic processes underlying the self-activation of social conflicts. Both Hironaka's *Neverending Wars: the International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War*, representing the Stanford School, and Stephan Stetter's edited volume *Territorial Conflicts in World Society: Modern Systems Theory, International Relations and Conflict Studies* suggest shifting the focus from an actor-oriented approach that primarily considers the individual motives and interests of the conflicting parties to analyzing conflicts from a world society perspective.

The world society approaches suggested by these works is not to be confused with the developing constructivist scholarship studying the regulative impact of specific norms on domestic decision-making. They do not limit their focus to particular norms and instead conceptualize an international structure that is ontologically prior to states. Hence, they differ from the English School, which investigates the role of a 'society of states' that is capable of granting international legitimacy. World society involves a systemic unit that sets not only normative but also cognitive standards and thus, the very limits of political agency.

There are, however, significant differences between the two macro-sociological approaches. The Stanford School draws upon the sociological institutionalist work by John Meyer and his research team at Stanford University starting from the 1970s. This scholarship focuses on the increasing organizational