

Catherine Besteman, *Militarized Global Apartheid*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
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The first page of the introduction made me very sceptical, as sentences like “the emergent new world order”, a “militarized form of global apartheid”, or “a new form of imperialism – security imperialism”, indicated that I was about to read another book of “big wor(l)ds” and global analysis without any focus on the local – a book of abstract notions that were simply left hanging, a book on global structures without people. When I finished the introduction, I was sure my first judgement had been premature, and when I finished the book I was fascinated.

While it certainly is a book of “big worlds”, analysing global regimes and processes, it is also a book written from the point of view of an anthropologist, and it is indeed global in the sense that it takes examples from literally all over the world to ground its arguments. In this sense, it is by no means a book that minimises the importance of the local. On the contrary, the local contexts are those providing the material at hand to build the global arguments.

It is also a book of “big words”. Nonetheless these are by no means abstract or vague, as they are thoroughly analysed, grounded, and their usage is clearly justified. For example, the term “apartheid” is not used as a metaphor, as we often see it, but there is sound analysis of its key elements as it unfolded in South Africa and on how these key elements are today taking shape on a global scale. As Besteman argues:

While terms like imperialism, globalization, and transnationalism have been helpful for highlighting many important dimensions of these global processes, the term apartheid shifts the frame to capture the use of race and nativist language to structure mobility, belonging, class inequality, elimination, and extermination, as well as the relevance of

border controls and the hierarchical modes of excluding or incorporating racially delineated people into a polity for labor exploitation. (p.8)

Similarly the concept of “race” is analysed as a structure and a process, as both specific to localities and global in scope, as iterative and constantly reinvented, as rooted in the history of European imperial expansion and the development of capitalism (p.8). These complicated and often hard to grasp concepts are elaborated in a simple but by no means simplistic way – a task that presupposes not only deep knowledge but also clarity of thinking.

The first chapter, “Belonging”, underlines through different examples – ranging in time and space from the white settler colonialism of the US to the Trump period, from the British dominions to the Schengen Agreement, from Israel to East Asian countries and the Gulf states – that belonging and nationalist identity formation have been crafted on race, white supremacy, and ancestral purity. One point that I would highlight in this chapter, as it is relevant to many current discussions on race, is the ways racialisation is not conceived as a given and completed process in specific localities, but as a flexible social category, as constantly reinvented in relation to migration and securitisation policies.

The second chapter, “Plunder”, argues that the global North has engaged in a number of practices that have made life in the global South insecure and, in some places in Africa and Latin America, for example, unsustainable, centring the analysis on the set of assumptions about “which part of the world has the right to determine the conditions of life in another part of the world” (p.41). Plunder does not take one form, but is analysed as a set of different, though often interrelated practices – from military interventions to structural adjustment programmes by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; from corporations seeking to extract profitable resources to unfair trade agreements like NAFTA and land expropriation – often by using debt to gain control over the land and resources of the indebted countries.

Chapter three, “Containment”, drawing mainly from examples in the EU, US, Canada, Australia, and Israel, analyses the security apparatus which, like apartheid, dehumanises racialised others through border controls (expanding way beyond national borderlines), refugee laws, detention, and deportation. Emphasis is placed to the role of the security complex that profits from bordering, detention, and deportation.

The fourth chapter is on “Labor”. While, in recent years, migration has been increasingly analysed as a cultural “problem”, and a lot of research focuses on language, religion, education, inclusion or exclusion, acceptance or not of the “different”, it remains crucial to focus attention on the economic role of migration. In this chapter, the author provides a thorough analysis of guest worker programmes, from the Bracero Program that brought almost five million Mexicans to the US from 1942 to 1964, to Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SWAP) that started in 1966 (p.86-87), to the training programmes for care workers from the Philippines and Indonesia (p.91-92). However, more attention is given to guest worker programs as a way “to create and maintain a disposable labor force from the global South” (p.99), than to the complicated nexus of bordering, migration, and labour. From this perspective, one could spot the multiple and often contradictory systems that selectively and partially include migrants by creating multiple different legal statuses. From the undocumented to asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants, or guest workers, all these statuses connect to differential access to rights, thus creating multiple exclusions, antagonisms, and hierarchies among workers (De Genova and Roy 2020).

The fifth chapter, “Militarization”, analyses the militarised security apparatus built to maintain the racialised hierarchies of labour and mobility. Besteman underlines that the contemporary global securitisation of space is expanding to new forms of imperialism – what she calls “security imperialism”. Security imperialism does not only function domestically but also racialises and incarcerates people across borders, either through a particular logic such as

Islamophobia or white supremacy, or through surveillance technologies that identify risky bodies long before they reach the border. The author places emphasis on how biometrics, as a technology of identification, is now practised across the global North through the UK's e-Border programme, the EU's Smart Borders, Australia's Advanced Passenger Processing, and the Smart Border Declaration between Canada and the US (p.110). It is highlighted that similar technologies are in place in many countries of the global South, targeting either their own population, as for example in China (p.111-112), or marginalised, racialised, and dissident communities, as for example in Pakistan, Kenya, and India (p.116).

In the final chapter of the book, "Futures", the author underlines that the militarised global apartheid is unsustainable. Besteman suggests that "widespread global precarity precipitated and promoted by capitalism, compounded by insistent mobility in the face of environmental collapse, may hold the key to the undoing of contemporary capitalism and of militarized apartheid" (p.130). In this chapter there is reference to migrant insurgencies and to different initiatives, ranging from the anti-racist and anti-capitalist to the feminist and worker movements, as the hope for the best possible future.

The book offers a very clear-cut argument, drawing on the similarities of the apartheid regime to what the author describes as the global militarised apartheid of today. However, the argument is too clear-cut in some ways. Although there are examples from all over the world shedding light on different processes, the overall schema reads as linear, as there is a globally coordinated system. However, in contrast to the apartheid regime of South Africa, today there is no global central authority, and the different actors involved – nation states, international bodies, corporations, and so on – often have different priorities and frictions between them. In parallel, the different global processes are described as if there is no conflict, struggle, or resistance in the ways they are manufactured and operate. Although the final chapter refers to insurgencies,

struggles, and movements, these are not central in the analysis of global security apartheid, but rather referred to as offering the possibility “to walk away” (p.136).

However, all over the world there are important struggles around “belonging”, mainly articulated as claims to participation, legal status, or citizenship by groups who are supposed to be undeserving (McNevin 2011). Similarly, borders and technologies of securitisation are not just imposed – they are also challenged in many different ways (Stierl 2018). From the everyday practices of migrants who try to cross multiple borders and recreate their livelihoods, to wider struggles on the right to freedom of movement and settlement (Cantat 2016; Lafazani 2021; Trimikliniotis et al. 2015). Likewise, the struggles over labour mobility criss-cross the whole history of capitalism (Mezzandra 2011). These struggles are not simply part of a hopeful future, but are actively shaping the global regimes of belonging, migration, labour, and borders.

In the same vein, although the author clearly mentions that the North/South divide is not definitive, it still reads as clearly defined throughout the book – as if there are no differentiations, conflicts, alliances, and antagonisms. For example, from my experience based on a “seam state”¹ in the city of Athens, many of the plundering practices described have been evident since the economic crisis of 2010, as have the massive struggles against the implications of such policies. Also evident – especially after the summer of 2015 – was the militarisation of borders and the massive illegalisation of migration, as well as a corresponding excess of solidarity and grassroots initiatives, challenging both borders and illegalisation.

Having in mind the points mentioned above, it doesn’t come as a surprise that one review of Besteman’s book is entitled “The global North always wins” (Hurtgen 2021). It is a fact – and a dilemma in the work of many scholars – that by emphasising the complexity of processes, the big picture can be lost. In order to present a clear argument and to sketch an overview – especially on a global scale – we have to leave many things out. Still, I think that Besteman’s

¹ The “Seam States” are the buffer between the “Functioning Core” and the “Non-Integrating Gap” as described in Thomas Barnett’s (2004) *The Pentagon’s New Map*, cited in the introduction of Besteman’s book (p.2-4).



book warrants a second volume on the ambiguities, discontinuities, and the struggles that have manufactured and at the same time challenge global militarised apartheid. If it was written in the exact same clear, detailed, global, and fascinating way, not only would it be really interesting, but it would actually meet Besteman's goal of identifying and mapping out the broader pattern "in order to locate weaknesses, points of contradiction, and failures where resistances against militarized global apartheid and new political imaginaries might find success" (p.19).

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