

**At war with women: military humanitarianism and imperial feminism in an era of permanent war.** By Jennifer Greenburg. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2023. 282pp. £121.33. ISBN 978 1 50176 773 9. Available as e-book and open access.

Jennifer Greenburg's book provides a thorough analysis of how the post 9/11 wars are fought through the instrumentalization of imperial notions of gender and development. Greenburg articulates how women's incorporation into combat does not necessarily disrupt the female/male binary; instead, women's 'entrance' into what is conceived as a man's last fortress becomes possible through a new military femininity that values women's 'difference' for strategic purposes. Gender essentialisms are reinforced both when it comes to women's natural inclination to provide emotional support to the occupied population, particularly 'women and children', and to ideas about women's emotional labour being instrumentalized in gathering intelligence. Greenburg conceptualizes this idea through the term 'military femininity', which manifests itself 'through an interrelationship between humanitarianism and combat' (p. 9).

One of the most interesting parts of Greenburg's book illustrates how imperial history is treated in military classrooms. Military instructors, through the examination of past strategies and tactics in colonial wars, aim to provide comprehensive manuals of 'lessons learned'. Yet, by depoliticizing war and examining its tactics in an abstract way, the most important lesson about war remains unlearned: war is indeed the continuation of politics by other means, and any depoliticization that aims to disconnect war from the specific historical material analysis from which it emerges is doomed. The book also challenges the tradition of liberal feminist militarism that uses servicewomen as the personification of gender equality, empowerment and progression, and existing in opposition to the non-western 'other', in particular Afghan women. For this liberal white feminism, any rationalization of intervention first needs an 'other' to save from its own fate. In that context, these new imperial wars portray Afghan women in essentializing ways as subjects who need saving from Afghan men, denying them any agency.

This gender-specific deployment of servicewomen on the front line becomes evident in the cited interviews, where former female soldiers frame their involvement through a rhetoric of emotion. Here, emotion and maternal thinking become instrumentalized in order 'to facilitate military violence by dampening the reaction to a home raid, a body search or a traffic control point' (p. 159). The language that women use in the interviews also demonstrates how they rationalize their involvement in the war as a necessary evil to save other women from their suffering, articulating their acts as a noble sacrifice while refusing to see the suffering that the military occupation has caused.

Greenburg also re-evaluates and broadens the notion of violence to include new forms of imperial violence. Humanitarian activities and development are re-evaluated, both in the context of war and occupation and in relation to their military objective. The author examines how what seems an innocent PowerPoint presentation in military history classrooms enables violence, since the historical material

is used to produce the contemporary soldier and the modern occupying force. This point is particularly interesting in the context of imperialism, as the notion of violence includes forms of white superiority that see the oppressed through colonial lenses. In order to articulate the necessity of a war as a 'saving/civilizing mission', the imperial subject has to dehumanize the oppressed and strip away their intellectual selves.

Another interesting point made in the book that could be further researched in the future concerns the dynamics on the ground of using development as a counter-insurgency strategy. Indeed, as the author mentions, 'military personnel closer to the ground have always pushed back against the notion of development as a weapon of war' (p. 120). Here, future research could challenge internalized ideas of imperialism, the coloniality of knowledge and depoliticized ideas of war that ignore the inherently violent nature of occupation. The inclusion of Afghan scholars, with the necessary language skills, could enhance further research on how the occupied population receives these initiatives and what language is deployed to describe them.

Overall, Greenburg's book is an important contribution to the scholarship; it sheds light on several under-researched aspects of the post-9/11 imperial wars in relation to gender, humanitarianism and counter-insurgency. The book is empirically and methodologically rich, and it will be of interest to audiences interested in war, gender studies and decolonial approaches. Scholars engaged with insurgencies will find this book's novel approach to the post-9/11 wars particularly useful.

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## **Political economy, economics and development**

**The crisis of democratic capitalism.** By **Martin Wolf**. London: Allen Lane. 2023. 496pp. £30.00. ISBN 978 0 24130 341 2. Available as e-book.

**Crack-up capitalism: market radicals and the dream of a world without democracy.** By **Quinn Slobodian**. London: Allen Lane. 2023. 352pp. £25.00. ISBN 978 0 24146 024 5. Available as e-book.

Around the world, trust in democratic institutions and values appears to be waning, and support for authoritarian populist leaders is on the rise. Most would argue that the reasons for this erosion are complex and multifaceted, but the relationship between capitalism and democracy occupies an important place in nearly all accounts. Together with climate change, migration, transnational white supremacy and geopolitical conflicts, democracy faces challenges from a global economic system that has generated significant inequalities. Can democracy survive the logic of capitalism? What is the relationship between markets and democracy? Implicitly or explicitly, the books under review tackle these questions in compelling and accessible prose.

For Martin Wolf, markets and democracy go hand in hand, but their partnership can be fraught. In his lucid book, *The crisis of democratic capitalism*, Wolf explores the