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BOOK REVIEW

Heller Henry, *The Cold War and the New Imperialism: A
Global History, 1945-2005*,
Canada: Monthly Review Press, 2006.

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The Cold War has been regarded as the most critical period of the 20th century and in fact in all of modern world history. While trying to explain the contemporary global order, the emergence of new perspectives has become more essential for a broader approach to global history. Henry Heller, professor of history at the University of Manitoba, Canada, opens a post-US perspective to the analysis of global history with his book, “The Cold War and the New Imperialism: A Global History, 1945-2005”. Having written many other books contributing to the early modern history of France, this time Heller elaborates on the aspects, events, and consequences of the Cold War within a wide range of global political, economic, and social framework. In the same vein, he successfully attempts to argue against the historians who regard the Cold War as the “end of the history” and as the

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victory of the US.¹ Instead, he predicts that on the horizon, there seems “at best, to be an increasing international tension and social conflict and, at worst, one of economic crisis and war” (p. 331). That is the reason why he does not take the Soviet Union’s collapse as the final destination in the course of the Cold War; rather he extends his periodization to 2005 in order to highlight the fifteen years of the post-Cold War era. This periodization is preferred on purpose in order to indicate the “New Imperialism” in the leadership of the US and how it was formed after the Cold War. His book, covering almost all the regions of the world, provides general information for readers who are interested in the research of global history. Although Heller uses a wide variety of Western sources together with Eastern ones, he, unlike traditional historians, does not focus only on the events revolving around the two big powers, the USSR and the US. Therefore, one of the strengths of the book is due to Heller’s efforts to involve other regions of the world such as India, Latin America, and Africa, where the actual Cold War took place. Shifting the Transatlantic Cold War perspective to the Third World, Heller’s book tells the side-effects of this power struggle such as decolonization and social movements sweeping all the globe, and as well it tells the story of the rising neoliberal economies.

Regarding the structure, the book is divided into three parts. The first of which, entitled “Construction,” contains three chapters, the second, “Crisis,” also contains three, and the final two chapters are found in the third part, “Devolution.”

Moreover, while at first the author’s chronology may seem to mark Cold War events as beginning sharply in 1945, in addition he successfully provides an account of other events relevant to Cold War history by reaching back to World War I and proceeding through the inter-war period and on through World War II.

1 Francis Fukuyama, (1992) “The End of History and the Last Man”. According to Fukuyama, The Cold War ended up in favor of liberal democracies since this form of governance marks the “final form of human government”. This is a provocative and outdated view considering many different post-Cold War governance structures in Africa or Middle East.

-The wide spectrum of the index also adds a lot to the value of the book.

Regarding the content, the book provides the chronological course of Cold War events, covering almost all the regions of the world. For instance, when Heller talks about “De-colonization” in the second chapter, he presents all countries in the region, from Guinea to Philippines, where upheavals took place. This can also be said about the chapter “Vietnam War and the Upheavals of the 1960s” in which the impact of the Vietnam War inside and outside of the US is discussed. The Southeast Asia conflicts and the synchronized social and political upheavals, formed mainly by the interventions of the US, are touched upon in different regions of the world. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the author gives enough satisfactory data, thanks to his quantitative analysis, to elaborate on his arguments both in his comparative and indicative narrative.

In the beginning of each chapter, the readers are offered an overview on the period/events that mark a significant moment in the Cold War before being introduced to the detailed course of the events. As Heller explains in his preface, the first chapter is dedicated to the establishment of the Cold War system around the globe. The US has shown significant efforts to extend its liberal ideology by the construction of military and political alliances in the Western hemisphere, whereas the USSR attempts to spread Stalinism over the continents as far as it can reach. For instance, the reader is introduced to revolutions in Korea, China, and Vietnam, and to decolonization and national liberation movements in the “underdeveloped countries between East and West” (p. 12). The second chapter, “Crisis” deals with revolutions and populist movements in Latin America following the Cuban Revolution, and proceeds with the events of the Vietnam War. This chapter concludes with the period of transition from the third world revolution to neoliberalism in the 1970s. The final chapter, “Devolution” discusses the reasons for the USSR’s collapse. In the final sub-section of this chapter, Heller underlines his perspective and arguments by remarking how “the ability of the United States to control global events became doubtful” in contemporary global politics (ibid.). Questioning the

current order and US leadership, the author has become doubtful of global stability, economic welfare, social development, and the effects of neoliberalism.

To sum up, throughout the book, Heller underlines two main aspects as the focal point his argument. Firstly, in his conclusion, it is clearly implied that although the United States was victor of the Cold War, its global hegemony is being challenged and questioned in the post-Cold War order by the new rising powers, namely Latin American countries, European Union and China particularly after 2000s (p. 328). The more power the US loses politically and economically, the more it has begun to regard the military intervention as another alternative to practice its power. The war in Iraq is given as an example for this argument since with the invasion of Iraq, the US showed off its aggression and military capacity in the Middle East. Secondly, the aggression of the US and the resistance of the powerful and rising states –the EU, China, and Latin America– is likely to lead to an apparent future conflict (Ibid). This brings the author to his conclusive argument that “the end of history is not in sight”, implying that the new global order has opened a new era of conflicts by shifting the power balances (p. 331). He seems to be aware of the problem that is created by the continuing weakness of the global economy in the current transition and transformation period. Thus, he calls for adaptation to the possible and future international tensions.

Despite being an elegant source for the Cold War events, Heller’s book has some weaknesses concerning the structure. Since he tries to cover and follow almost all of the events, impacts, and results of the era, the book has overloaded with subtitles in the chapters that are superficially elaborated. However, the book is distinguished from its contemporaries concerning the diversity of target regions, the level of detailed narration, and information is questionable. Another weakness is that Heller tends to give the impression of positioning himself against the global order that is formed by the dominance of the US. Yet, it is quite arguable whether this position is explicitly visible from the beginning. Towards the end of the book marking the post-Cold War era, his position and arguments appear to be more stable and visible. Possibly, Heller’s aim is to depict the existing world order, which

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was vague until the 1980s, but later it became more obvious and clearer for the advantage of the US.

Taking everything into consideration, Heller's book provides a fascinating framework for discussion with its new perspective on how "New Imperialism" was born through the course of the Cold War, how it was conducted unilaterally, and how it is being challenged today. Written in 2006, Heller's book illuminates recent history, particularly by developing a global perspective on the Iraq War with the post-Cold War background. Furthermore, the author's contribution to contemporary academia with his book is indisputable due to his challenging position in the post-Cold War order. Despite his pessimistic manner because of being critical of the leadership and unilateralist nature of the US foreign policy, his predictions for future conflicts can help foresee unexpected global conflicts or even take precautions for policy makers. All in all, "The Cold War and the New Imperialism: A Global History, 1945-2005" is a fundamental book not only for the study of global history, but also as a guide opening new perspectives on a world challenging US hegemony.