

Marcin Wałdoch¹

(rec.): **Samir Puri,**
***The Great Imperial Hangover. How
Empires Have Shaped the World***

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Samir Puri is a political scientists interested in international relations who worked at RAND and at British Foreign Office where he covered counter terrorism. He monitored situation in Ukraine in 2014 during the war. He was also a lecturer in War Studies at King's College London and taught at Cambridge and Johns Hopkins. Since 2020 he has been working as a Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore (Samir Puri, personal website).

The book, *The Great Imperial Hangover*, consists of preface, introduction, eight chapters, conclusion, bibliography and index. The book contains 12 maps. All chapters cover different empires. In the first chapter the author discusses America's Imperial Inheritance. In the second chapter Britain's Grandeur and Guilt of Empire. Third chapter is about The European Union's Post-Imperial Project. Fourth chapter is under the title Russia's Embrace of its Imperial Legacy. Fifth is about Janus Faces of Empire. Sixth about India's Overcoming of the Intimate Enemy. Seventh about the Middle East's Post-Imperial Instability. Eighth about Africa's Scramble Beyond Colonialism.

Author thinks that „[...] an outwardly expanding metropolitan core gobbled up territories via conquest. Nowadays, this kind of formal empire seems to be extinct” and that „outright subjugation is now rare” (p. 4), but as we still

¹ Dr, Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, Wydział Nauk o Polityce i Administracji, e-mail: waldoch@ukw.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-8778-1780.

see on the most current example of Russia war against Ukraine, territorial seizure still matters in international relations. He also insist on the same page that Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 has been not yet a precedent for others. In his point of view today's empires are more informal, and they are of political and economic influence. And further we read: „Empires have been vessels for order, modernity, culture and conquest since ancient times” which is a controversial approach to the problem of empires and their roles in world history and development. He thinks that the main thing arisen when people were imposing their will upon others (p. 4). Empires seeks clients (p. 5) and were „default mode of political organization” and empire was a synonymous with world order (p. 11). It is quite disputable looking at chaotic moves of some empires, such as The British Empire (Ferguson, 2007).

Author writes about empires such as for example Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Third Reich. He sees decolonization as one of the most important process that blocked the empires to again flourish. The Cold War and the fall of Soviet Union was the formal end of the time of empires (1991) (p. 8).

He accurately noticed that „World affairs is not just a game of states, but of non-state actors too” (p. 9). Author thinks that the absent of formal empires may seem for observers as a progress, but as Author admits those with historical eye see old problems that beset humanity. It seems that we live in a completely new world – empire free-world. In the eyes of Puri globalization was pioneered by empires. At the beginning of that process lay Chinese Silk Road.

Puri thinks that „Globalization, rather than colonization, had become the American way of ruling the post-imperial roost” (p. 46). He claims that the American empire is set not only on military bases but rather on soft power influences. Author accuse Western's leaders such as Tony Blair of a „mission” of democratization of other regions such as Middle East, democratization that means war and a lot of casualties and death (p. 80). He also criticise the European Union overstretched ambitions and hubris, Author also thinks that Europe has an imperial inclination to build inside empire as well as outside empire by colonialism (p. 95). Revoking an example of Belgium and its empire in Congo is a case worth thinking of (p. 109). EU in the eyes of an Author is an pure example of European imperialism, because as in the past Europeans are eager to replicate their system elsewhere (p. 119). He then criticized the union of „over thirty” countries, it seems that Author do not see any logic in that process (p. 121). In his view EU should be perceived as a inheritor of Roman Empire. Also in the cultural sense Author writes that Europeans „know best”

and this is a crucial sign of Europocentrism in today's political elites of Europe (p. 124). I must admit that I completely agree with that fact, and disagree with the statement that „Even as the EU tries to be post-imperial it cannot ignore its imperial DNA [...]”. I cannot agree with this, because most of recent EU members weren't Empires.

The clues about situation in Ukraine are mistakenly taken, such as this: „[...] no matter which language they spoke many Ukrainians could agree that their government, sitting in Kiev, had tended to display rather corrupt, self-serving attitudes” (p. 131). Even though we can read that Russian foreign minister Lavrov in 2016 wrote that: „the world needs a plurality of models rather than a boring uniformity in which the West lectures everyone else on democracy” (p. 157). I must agree with the statement that „[...] no person is bigger than an imperial legacy” (p. 157). Eventually Putin will pass, but this does not mean imperial pride would perish. In this study Samir Puri highlighted that the lack of democracy in China is an „inheritance of centuries-long imperial tradition” (p. 181). When we look at other studies about the democracy we can easily find a theoretical confirmation to that in the writing of Christian Welzel (2021). Another thing that connects today's China with imperial times is its centralized power over far provinces and many diverse ethnic minorities (p. 182), as Author writes: „[...] vessel has changed, but its culture persists” (p. 183). What's more important for understanding current affairs is that China did not officially condemn Russia's war in Ukraine (p. 185). And the most important statement of the Author is that „civilization doesn't clash; imperial legacies collide” (p. 294). There is general feeling after the lecture, that Author sees evil in the eyes of European – Anglo – Saxon Empires.

The whole book is a well written political sciences book, it is obviously a political synthesis of selected empires. Even though the book is well documented it lacks a deeper sources analysis, there is no archival research presented, that would be fruitful for better understanding the described processes, but still this is a great synthesis which gives a better understanding of empires and their legacy.

Bibliography

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