

Cultural Imperialism: Linguistic Perversion and Obfuscation of Empire Building

By [Prof. James Petras](#)

Global Research, November 13, 2018

Region: [Europe, USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

In the contemporary world, western imperialist propagandists, particularly journalists and editors of the mass media, have resorted to perverting everyday concepts and the language of politics.

The use and abuse of the language of politics has served to blame victims and to justify imperial aggressors. The consequences are multiple, both in legitimizing war crimes and economic plunder, as well as neutralizing domestic opposition.

We will proceed by identifying the key terminology which furthers imperial aggression. We will then describe the economic and political objectives of linguistic imperialism.

We will conclude by examining the political/cultural alternatives.

Critique of Concepts: Nationalism and Populism

The most abused and obfuscated concept in the modern imperial lexicon is 'populism'.

In its original meaning 'populism' referred to mass movements composed of exploited workers. Popular movements fought oligarchical bankers and media moguls.

At the turn of the 19th and the early decades of the 20th century, populists formed powerful political movements and electoral parties in the US, Canada, Russia and Western Europe.

By the mid 20th century, populist parties and movements multiplied, and in some cases, came to power in Asia and Latin America. Populist movements gained mass support in Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Mexico. In the United States populist parties and movement represented farmers who fought railroad monopolies, bankers and corrupt political bosses. Their objective was to secure fair market prices for transport, moderate interest rates from banks and honest elections, free of corruption by political bosses. Populists elected several governors, scores of mayors and several state legislators.

In Latin America, populist parties in Peru (APRA) fought for indigenous rights, opposing neo-colonial and oligarchical rule. In Argentina, Brazil and Mexico populist parties led by **Juan Peron**, **Getulio Vargas** and **Lazaro Cardenas** fought and secured workers' rights, and national ownership of essential resources (especially the oil fields). They successfully launched national industrialization programs.

Similar developments took place in China, the Philippines, Indo-China and India. Nationalism and populism were the twin motors of independence and social justice.

Nationalism was based on ending imperial domination and recovering national cultural values free from colonial impositions. By the turn of the 21st century with the rise and advance of post-colonial regimes, the western imperial powers sought to denigrate the movements and parties which questioned their legitimacy.

No longer could the imperial powers rely on the ideology of beneficent empires (“the white mans’ burden”). Nor could they claim that foreign capital exploitation and pillage were serving ‘nation-building’.

Imperial ideology resorted to distorting and reverting the positive concepts associated with liberation struggles into their opposite. Instead they associated populism with oppressive and authoritarian doctrines of regressive regimes.

Populism was emptied of its original emancipatory content and replaced by, and associated with reactionary, racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, fascist ideology.

Any and all popular mass movements, independent of their socio-economic content, were painted with the same regressive content. Likewise, nationalism was linked with neo-fascists who expelled minorities and migrants.

As a corollary the imperial ideologies presented US and European empire builders as inclusive upholders of democratic values who fought against ‘nationalists’.

The Use and Abuse of Populism and Nationalism

The principal enemies of ‘populism’ are staunch western neo-liberal ruling classes and their venomous scribes in the Financial Times, New York Times; the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal.

Anti-populism in defense of ‘western democratic values’ serves as pseudo-progressive propaganda in favor of imperialism. The anti-populist rhetoric amalgamates rightists and leftists, chauvinists and defenders of national independence.

The purpose was to justify US and EU multiple imperial wars and coups throughout Asia, the Middle East, North and East Africa and Latin America.

While the ‘virtuous’ anti populist and anti-nationalist rabble-rousing media, condemn the populists they promote and defend murderous western wars and coups in Iraq, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Honduras, Somalia, South Sudan, Venezuela and the Ukraine.

‘Anti-nationalism’ serves to disarm pro-independence critics of imperialism and to ‘legitimize’ western leaders. Media ideologues attacked rightists, ‘nationalists’, who attack immigrants but obfuscated the fact that the immigrants were victims of western imperial military invasions.

Rightist domestic nationalists and neo-liberal imperialists reflect two-sides of the same coin. One excited the nationalist passions of the masses, the other proceeded to satisfy the voracious appetite for capitalist profits.

Anti-populism and nationalism, were the driving force of neo-liberal elites which exploits the

domestic workforce and attacks social welfare and workplace democracy. They portrayed popular social movements as versions of 'populism to be condemned as enemies of free-markets and free elections.

Nationalists opposed to imperial wars are denigrated as authoritarian enemies of western security, globalization and democratic values.

Conclusion

US and EU imperialism face adversaries from within and without. Domestic opposition has turned against costly wars and financial profiteering and has turned in favor of greater welfare.

In desperate need for a new ideological defense, the western powers have fabricated new enemies, labeled 'populists', a disguise for supporting economic oligarchs. The western elites seek to undermine anti-imperialists by lumping them with far-right nationalists.

The ideologists of western imperialism have other propaganda tools. National independence militants are equated with 'terrorists'. Russian defenders of secure borders are described as authoritarian expansionists. China's international economic networks are dubbed 'colonial debts collectors'.

The mass media's drum beat is necessary to obfuscate reality. The US and EU have nearly 200 overseas military bases throughout the world. China has a tiny base in East Africa.

The US has a string of military bases surrounding China. Beijing lacks a single overseas military base surrounding the US.

While western colonial and neo-colonial elites plunder Asia, Africa and Latin America, China finances infrastructure, invests in productive enterprises and does not operate military bases to intervene in Third World countries.

The US and Europe hijack progressive concepts like populists and invert their meaning, into regressive reactionary movements, parties and personalities.

Pro-imperial colonialist racist labels are pinned on 'nationalists' many of whom are defenders of national sovereignty and oppose imperial hegemony. Political language at the service of empire is no virtue!

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

*Award winning author **Prof. James Petras** is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization.*

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Prof. James Petras](#), Global Research, 2018

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[Prof. James Petras](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca