

NEO-COLONIALISM/NEO-IMPERIALISM

Neo-colonialism meaning 'new colonialism' was a term coined by Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, and the leading exponent of pan-Africanism in his *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). This title, which echoed Lenin's definition of **imperialism** as the last stage of capitalism, suggested that, although countries like Ghana had achieved political independence, the ex-colonial powers and the newly emerging superpowers such as the United States continued to play a decisive role in their cultures and economies through new instruments of indirect control such as international monetary bodies, through the power of multinational corporations and cartels which artificially fixed prices in world markets, and through a variety of other educational and cultural NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). In fact, Nkrumah argued that neo-colonialism was more insidious and more difficult to detect and resist than the direct control exercised by classic colonialism.

The term has since been widely used to refer to any and all forms of control of the ex-colonies after political independence. Thus, for example, it has been argued by some that the new élites brought to power by independence, and often educated and trained by the colonialist powers, were unrepresentative of the people and acted as unwitting or even willing agents (**compradors**) for the former colonial rulers. In a wider sense the term has come to signify the inability of developing economies, the erstwhile so-called **Third World** economies to develop an independent economic and political identity under the pressures of **globalization**. Recently the term has been associated less with the influence of the former colonial powers and more with the role of the new superpower of the United States, whose expansionist policy past and present, it is argued, constitutes a new form of imperialism). In the same immediate post-Second World War period and through the use of different institutions such as Comintern and its economic wing, Comecon, as well as through loan organizations such as the International Bank for Economic Cooperation, it has been argued that the role of the erstwhile Soviet Union in the period of the 'Cold War' mirrored the role of the United States, with aid and development programmes from both sides having many political strings attached, despite the claims of the Soviet Union at the time to be the leading supporter of the many **National Liberation** movements as these contesting powers extended their struggle into the rest of the world. China also participated in this process, as witness its role in parts of Africa in the period from the

1960s onwards. In many ways this process mirrored the way in which imperialist powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had also extended their struggle into the new regions opened up by colonial expansion.

Recently, with the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of capitalism in China, the United States (the nation state most directly associated with **neo-liberal** capitalism) has become the primary concern of those who see globalization as continuing older forms of imperial control. Just as these theorists (Hardt and Negri 2001) have used the term **empire** to distinguish this new force from the classic **imperialism** of the era of direct colonization, so the term **neo-imperialism** has increasingly been used instead of **neo-colonialism** in a number of places, especially in material on the world wide web, to distinguish the ongoing control exercised over developing countries by a globalized capitalist economy often epitomized by the United States from earlier **neo-colonialism**. Although, of course, the main instruments of both were formed under the auspices of the United States after the end of the Second World War and in the aftermath of the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. (See also **World System Theory**). The distinction draws attention to important shifts in the operation of global capital, but it should not be overlooked that many of the ways in which the new **empire** functions are directly analogous with operations in the era of classic imperialism, though the instruments may differ. Thus, for example, the role of modern NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and especially non-governmental international aid and development organizations such as UNESCO operate in areas of concern and through practices very analogous to organizations in the colonial period such as missions. In fact it is arguable that missions and missionaries were the NGOs of their time. In the case of cultural organizations such as UNESCO, supporters have argued that the many benefits it brings may have been overlooked in the more radical objections to these global developments. In both cases the story is probably more complex than is sometimes recognized, with such organizations having both positive and negative impacts. (See **missions and colonialism**) Though it must be conceded that the claims of such Non-Governmental Organizations then and now to be acting independently of the existing global superpowers may also seem increasingly naïve. The negative view of these established international organizations has in recent times led to the setting up of counter organizations which have sought to speak for these more radical voices, notably the World Social Forum. Its charter claims that it represents

... an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to **neo-liberalism** and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind and between it and the Earth.

Its emergence may be viewed as a reaction by radical forces to the collapse of the earlier formal opposition from anti-capitalist states such as Russia and China in recent times, though it represents broader forces than the equivalent groups forged in the ideological conflicts of the post-war period including environmentalists and human rights activists.

Further reading: Benjamin, 2007; Denning 2004; French 2005; Gowda 1983; Nkrumah 1965; Pomeroy 1970; Rajen 1997; Saini 1981; Sen *et al.* 2004; Spivak 1999; B. Smith 1992; Thiong'o 1983; Woddis 1967.

NEO-LIBERALISM

A term used by many critics to refer to the theory and practice of an unfettered liberalization of market forces, sometimes regarded as synonymous with economic **globalization** or 'late capitalism'. Its major exponents over the last fifty years have been the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank but it has deep philosophical roots in historical liberalism and is a key feature of the **Washington Consensus**. It is significant for post-colonial studies because it has become the most obvious medium of **neo-colonial/neo-imperial** domination and of economic **globalization**.

Liberalism as a coherent social philosophy dates from the late eighteenth century. At first there was no distinction between political and economic liberalism, and classic liberal political philosophy continued to develop after 1900 as pure conservative. Economic liberalization has always advocated the unrestrained operation of the market: free trade, absence of state intervention, or of any outside interference, the reliance on the processes of the market to create profit. Maynard Keynes' *General Theory*, published in the 1930s was revolutionary in its advocacy of state intervention and served to better explain the economy at that time, but philosophy of the totally free market reasserted itself very quickly – in