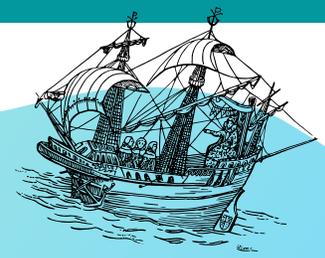


WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT IMPERIALISM?

Factsheet based on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith Beau. H.



IMPERIALISM IS the expansion of a nation's power to other parts of the world. It has a long and complicated history that spans thousands of years. European imperialism, specifically, is a system that has resulted in forceful domination of most of the globe.

Imperialism is a system that has been in motion for centuries, and it manifests in many different ways. There are **four ways that we can define imperialism**, all of them deeply connected.

1 IMPERIALISM AS ECONOMIC EXPANSION

Imperialism is considered a critical part of Europe's economic growth. In this sense, imperialism works as a system of control to enable Europe to gain a hold of new sources of wealth: land, natural resources, and labour.

In the later stages of European imperialism (in the 19th Century), this system was maintained as a way to offset the fact that many Europeans could not afford to purchase the products that were produced there: in order to maintain economic growth, European industrialists opened up new markets that were more stable.

Colonialism helped with the process of economic expansion: by ensuring that Europe had an inter-continental presence, it was able to further solidify their economic power through control of Indigenous populations in the colonies.

5 STAGES OF EUROPEAN EXPANSION

- i **Exploration**: Europe's missions to "discover new lands" (These places had already been home to their Indigenous inhabitants for 1000s of years, and therefore were neither new nor waiting to be discovered, but were simply unknown to Europeans.)
- ii **Contact, Conquest, Settlement and Colonization**: The processes of European arrival, takeover of land, and establishment of European bases and communities.
- iii **Establishment of Permanent Imperialist Foundations**: Solidification of colonies, settlements, and extraction through infrastructures such as plantations in North America, the Caribbean, and South Asia. This is also when capitalism as a global market took hold.
- iv **Apex of Imperialism**: When the imperialist race to establish claim over territories, markets and natural resources was at its peak, leading into the WWI.
- v **The Present**: The majority of the world's economies are directed around the interests of Western powers, despite being formally independent of Europe.

2 IMPERIALISM AS CONTROL OVER INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

When the Europeans (in particular, the British) made contact with Indigenous peoples in the South Pacific, they already had developed strategies to guide their interactions with Indigenous populations, based on prior colonial encounters with peoples elsewhere.

These tactics lead to oppressive rule over Indigenous peoples, but that did not happen in the same way across the colonies, nor at the same time. In fact, European nations were in competition with each other—but over time, the actions of these individual nations across the globe cumulatively worked together to create a system of European domination.

The specific tactics of European control over Indigenous peoples differ widely across geographies. For example: The Maori (Indigenous peoples of what is now called New Zealand) had the majority of their lands annexed by the British, but not all Maori tribes had their lands taken, of those who did, not all were subjected to military invasion in that process.

Regardless of the specific tactics that imperialists used to control Indigenous populations in the colonies, the overall effect across the colonized world is the same: loss of land, culture, and human rights.

COLONIALISM VS IMPERIALISM: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Colonialism is part of the larger system of imperialism, but it refers to a specific aspect of it: establishing an "outpost" (a colony) outside of a nation's borders.

Colonies started as a way to transfer goods, obtain raw materials, and to set up ports.

Colonialism as a system is still used as a concrete means for European nations to expand their economic and political power. Some nations that began as colonies, such as the United States, have since become independent nations.

3

IMPERIALISM AS AN ATTITUDE OR IDEOLOGY

Imperialism is more than actions: it is also a very influential ideology (a way of thinking about the world).

This ideology was bolstered by theories of the 19th century Enlightenment period. Imperial ideology is rooted in Enlightenment theories that value— the pursuit of so-called "progress," defined by scholarly knowledge, economic power, and technological advancement. Enlightenment theory was a driving force of the political, economic and cultural transformation in Europe: the 19th century was seen as a shift into a "modern" society. Imperialism became viewed as a necessary part of the Enlightenment pursuit.

Imperialist ideology inspired European imaginings of unseen places, wealth, and material gain to be found and controlled: and this did happen, through the use of science, economic expansion, and political control.

This logic continues to persist today, and is used to justify historical and ongoing imperialist violence: environmental degradation, wealth inequality, political power imbalances, and destruction of non-European ways of life (all typically enforced by military might).

A POST-IMPERIALISM ERA?

Some describe the present day as a "post-colonial" or "post-imperial" world. However, it is important to note that imperialism and colonialism are still ongoing— they just look different.

In the earlier days of colonial rule, European power was maintained by establishing a physical presence. This became increasingly difficult to manage, as some colonies revolted against the imperialists through armed revolutions.

By the 1960s, Europeans had adapted their colonial system to one of indirect rule: establishing "spheres of influence" throughout colonized nations. This allowed Europe to maintain power, without having to manage the difficult task of maintaining an empire in a hands-on manner, and actually has been more effective than previous versions of colonialism.

This new system, known as neo-imperialism or neo-colonialism, still facilitates an imperialist stronghold on most of the globe, not only by maintaining the powers of Europe itself, but also of former European colonies that have since gained independence.

Some such nation-states, such as the USA, have become as (if not more) wealthy and politically powerful than parts of Europe, due entirely to their appropriated wealth and militarized establishment of sovereignty over the lands on which they sit. These countries now continue the imperialist mission to maintain and expand their own power through controlling land and populations (especially Indigenous and Black communities) within their own imposed borders, as well as by expropriating land, resources, and labour from elsewhere.

4

IMPERIALISM AS A FIELD OF ANALYSIS

This way of looking at imperialism is from the perspective those who have been oppressed by imperialism and are turning to critique it, focusing on how this system has uniquely impacted specific colonized communities.

It is critical to understand this layer of imperialism, because this system still has significant consequences on Indigenous peoples around the globe. Developing these critiques imperialism can be challenging, because the ideologies of imperialism are heavily naturalized and their influence is very hard to escape, even within Indigenous communities.

This area of analysis is sometimes known as "post-colonial discourse," and "writing from the margins." There are other, interconnected, bodies of knowledge that centre anti-colonial, sometimes revolutionary, frameworks, many of which draw on the work of marginalized individuals (such as Black scholars/thinkers) focused on other social justice issues.

RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL

Imperialism continues to have devastating impacts on Indigenous peoples across the world through historical and ongoing attempts by imperialist powers to displace Indigenous peoples from their lands, limit their access to their cultural practices, and remove their human rights.

However, it is important to remember that the story of imperialism and colonialism is also a story of Indigenous resistance and survival. Despite centuries of European occupation on stolen lands and attempts to subdue or eradicate the original populations, Indigenous people continue to exist as part of a global community of living peoples with living cultures.

Many Indigenous groups have been challenging the logic and actions of imperialism since its early beginnings. Understandings about imperialism that are produced by and for Indigenous communities are a key part of Indigenous politics, discourses, art, storytelling, and everyday practices.



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