

have long been left out in the cold of the social world. Feminists, people of color, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities are among the many who have been eager to embrace such a politics in order to gain a voice and end their historical silence. At the same time, theorists have recognized the limits of identity politics and the view of personhood and community that it endorses. Identity politics, it is argued, promotes the notion of stable, essential identities and as such privileges difference over the reconciliation of difference. To counter this trend, some theorists have proposed a "relational" politics, which assumes that identity is always the product of relationship and therefore never an essential aspect of a person's identity. In contrast to an identity politics that seeks to assert individuality, relational politics aims to overcome the ever-present threat of interpersonal conflict by privileging the flux relationship and social "conversation" over the stability and privilege of identity.

— Michael Ryan

See also Butler, Judith; Collins, Patricia Hill; Feminism

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IMPERIALISM

The term *imperialism* has been used in many ways, but virtually all refer to the coercive incorporation of territories, along with their economies, social formations, and political systems, into wider structures of power dominated by "foreigners." So defined, imperialism is as old as recorded history, and the causes of particular episodes, widely separated in time and space, may be very different. These causes may also be represented differently, depending on the analytical approach: for instance, whether it is that of political economy, historical sociology, realist international relations, or cultural theory.

Nevertheless, some form of economic determination is evident in most studies of imperialism, including work on capitalist imperialism in the modern period, which has attracted the bulk of critical attention. In large part, this is

because Marxian theory has been the dominant approach and has proved extremely influential on historians, social scientists, and cultural theorists concerned with imperialism. The chief exception to this is provided by realist international relations theorists, but even here there are some, like Robert Gilpin and Justin Rosenberg, who have endeavored to fuse political realism and economic determinism in dealing with issues central to imperialism. Much earlier, Joseph Schumpeter's attempt to trace modern imperialism back to a tenacious feudal overhang has also found an impressive following. But here, too, there has been a tendency to integrate Schumpeter's ideas into a form of economic determination.

Because of the intellectual dominance of Marxism in the treatment of imperialism, we concentrate here on Marxian interpretations, which we classify into four types: original, classical, neo, and post. The concluding section outlines some possible future scenarios that are suggested by these theories.

THE ORIGINAL VERSION

Marx wrote about modern imperialism in two contexts: the origins of European capitalism and its extension to the rest of the world. His analysis of the "primitive accumulation of capital" includes the role that colonialism played in the creation of the capitalist mode of production in Western Europe. The accumulation of nonlanded property through tribute, pillage, slavery, and the slave trade facilitated the employment of land and labour under capitalist relations of production in Europe. Once the system was established, Marx argued, imperialism proper proved indispensable in spreading capitalist relations throughout the globe. Marx claimed that all non-European societies lacked internal dynamism, so that imperialism was essential to introduce progress. On these matters he did not depart significantly from the dominant liberal opinion of the early nineteenth century, as reflected for example in James Mill's writings on India.

In Marx's account of imperialism, it is the general acquisitiveness fostered by capitalism that propels its geographical expansion, rather than its contradictions or any particular conjunctural events. These may play some role in explaining capitalist imperialism, but only with regard to its specific forms and precise chronology. Sometimes capitalism can insinuate itself into existing exchange relationships in precapitalist economies and, by its superior efficiency, transform them into capitalist exchange relations. More frequently, capitalist penetration is impeded or wholly blocked by the operation of precapitalist systems, and in these cases some form of imperial domination and forceful restructuring along capitalist lines is essential for expansion to proceed. In both circumstances, capitalism will ultimately act as a solvent on established modes of production, as well as

creating the basis for economic, cultural, and political modernity. Destruction tends to precede reconstruction not only for obvious reasons of sequencing but also because imperialism itself initially exhibits many precapitalist features, reflecting the imperfect transformation of the metropolitan centres, and these wither only as capitalism is purified on its home ground. Thus, while many of the phenomena associated with precapitalist forms of imperialism remain evident for long periods, including tribute and outright theft, for Marx their significance is totally different from that in precapitalist imperialism. Ultimately, as genuine capitalist expansion into new territories takes place, a duplication of European achievements will occur, including rapid and sustainable economic growth.

While Marx was certainly wrong to view societies outside Europe as a homogeneous, static unity, much of what has occurred in the last 150 years is broadly consistent with his forecasts. Capitalism was spread by imperialism, and it has been associated with fast economic growth, by long-run historical standards. Material progress has been widespread, especially in terms of improved life expectancy, the extension of literacy, and mass urbanisation. Thus, even though Marx's understanding of the non-Western world was seriously flawed, his principal claims about the causes and effects of imperialism remain defensible.

CLASSICAL MARXIAN THEORIES OF IMPERIALISM

The chief limitation of Marx's account of imperialism lies in his treatment of the imperial centres. He shared liberal, Cobdenite beliefs about the anachronism of war as a means of resolving conflict between capitalist states, and he confidently anticipated the erosion of all forms of national identity, so that imperialism itself would disappear as capitalism became universal. Not surprisingly, then, with the appearance of growing tensions between advanced capitalist powers after 1900, his original analysis was revised by some of his followers, notably Rudolf Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg, Nikolai Bukharin, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, in a great debate on the causes and consequences of imperialist rivalry that raged between 1910 and 1917.

None of these classical Marxian theorists denied the truth of what Marx had said about imperialism, but their attention shifted toward explaining intercapitalist conflict, which they believed to result from the centralisation of capital and the exhaustion of new imperialist outlets in non-European regions, so that "late starters" like Germany and Japan had to challenge the established imperialist powers by force. The basic ideas of Hilferding, Bukharin, and Lenin were broadly similar, and owed much to the work of contemporary liberal anti-imperialists, especially J. A. Hobson, whose *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) was widely read in both liberal and Marxian circles. Imperialism was now linked directly to the economic contradictions of advanced European capitalism,

in Hobson's case a strong tendency to underconsumption in the metropolitan countries resulting from the maldistribution of income. (The German Marxist Karl Kautsky had made a similar case as early as 1884 in his analysis of the French colonization of Indochina). Luxemburg took the argument even further in her *Accumulation of Capital* (1913), using Marx's two-sector models of accumulation to claim—wrongly—that the continued expansion of any capitalist economy was in principle impossible without constant access to new noncapitalist markets. Hilferding, Bukharin, and Lenin took a slightly different position, pointing to other causes of economic crisis, including disproportionality between sectors and the falling rate of profit. Hilferding's classic text *Finance Capital* (1910) contained a subtle and eclectic account of Marxian crisis theory. But they all agreed that increasing imperialist rivalry was an unavoidable feature of mature, or "overripe," capitalism.

According to the classical Marxists, these underlying economic causes were translated into domestic and international politics in the following way. The growth of monopoly in advanced capitalism had increasingly fused economic and political structures, aligning each national bourgeoisie with its state, undermining the previously vibrant cosmopolitan disposition of the capitalists and weakening liberal institutions. Capitalist acquisitiveness remained resonant, but it was now projected overwhelmingly outwards, to the world economy. Since almost the entire globe had been colonised, any further expansion of one advanced capitalist state brought it into direct conflict with one or more of the others. A new structural incompatibility within capitalism had matured. The economic forces promoting enhanced global integration remained undiminished, but they were divided between sovereign political authorities that could continue to grow rapidly only at each other's expense. The further development of the productive forces was fettered by the boundaries of existing states, or their empires, and a resolution of this contradiction was possible only through warfare.

As World War I overwhelmed the international socialist movement, Karl Kautsky sought desperately to show that imperialist conflict was not inevitable. Kautsky pointed to the strong possibility of an "ultra-imperialism," a sort of global cartel of the leading capitalist powers that would agree to the peaceful partition of the world and to a harmonious division of the spoils of imperialist penetration. Bukharin and Lenin denied that this was possible, invoking the "law of uneven and combined development." Bukharin's *Imperialism and World Economy* (1915) developed this concept in some depth and was an essential source for Lenin's much more celebrated pamphlet, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), published in the following year. Just as cartels were weakened and eventually destroyed by differences in the cost levels and rates of

technical progress in individual companies, they argued, so international agreements between imperialist powers would founder on the conflict between new and dynamic capitalist states and the less progressive, longer-established powers with a large vested interest in the status quo. These arguments, developed during World War I, were vindicated, so many Marxists believed, by the events that led up to World War II.

NEOIMPERIALISM

The apparent relevance of classical theories of imperialism waned after 1945, where the Pax Americana established what Paul Sweezy described as "superimperialism." The United States became the "dominant firm," to pursue the cartel analogy, taming the relations between advanced capitalism states and promoting decolonisation. The principal concern of theorists of imperialism now turned to explaining the apparent failure of imperialism to transform the economic and political structures of the third world. The main thesis of Paul Baran was the "underdevelopment" of the periphery, which, he suggested, had continued after formal decolonisation. Baran, whose influential *Political Economy of Growth* appeared in 1957, saw exit from dependence on the world economy, and emulation of the Soviet model, as prerequisites for genuine development. The problem for the core capitalist states, on the other hand, was to maintain third world incorporation into the circuits of capital, contain the expansion of Sovietised economies, and eliminate nationalist resistance to global market forces. All of this required them repeatedly to apply extra-economic coercion similar to that used in the imperialist era.

Proponents of neoimperialism maintained that much of what Marx and the classical Marxist theorists of imperialism had said was untrue, and this included much of their analysis of conditions within the advanced capitalist states. In particular, they claimed, the European and North American working classes had been substantially incorporated into the system through rising living standards, welfare provisions, and the freedoms afforded by liberal democracy. Baran saw the most significant form of exploitation as the extraction of surplus from the periphery by the core capitalist powers. This was the chief cause of continuing underdevelopment, and it meant that capitalism was polarised internationally, so that nation-states were the principal actors, not social classes. Other Marxian theorists stressed the consequences of "unequal exchange" between North and South. High-wage countries exported commodities containing relatively little labour and imported goods that embodied much larger amounts of low-wage labour. Thus Northern workers had a profound material interest in preserving neoimperialist relations, since their high living standards depended upon it. They had more in common with their own capitalists than with workers in the South.

The evidence on third world development does not obviously refute the neoimperialist analysis. There has been rapid economic progress in many parts of the world but relative or absolute stagnation in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa and a tendency for advanced capitalist economies to grow faster than the global average. The forces of divergence appear stronger than those of convergence. And military intervention by core states has quashed many attempts to break with the capitalist world market. This was not simply a matter of countering Soviet expansionism, but also targeted a wide variety of movements aiming at independent national development.

The real weakness of neoimperialist theories lies in their exaggeration of the importance of the transfer of surplus from South to North, either through trade or by means of direct investment and the consequent growth of third world debt. No convincing account was ever provided as to why, once extracted, surplus was not used to finance accumulation in the periphery (thereby engendering development) but was instead retained in the core to increase investment and consumption there. True, markets in low-wage regions are restricted by the very fact of their poverty, but this is not inconsistent with the use of cheap labour to produce goods (and, increasingly, services) for export to the metropolitan countries. It was precisely such a process of export-oriented industrialisation that transformed the economies of East and Southeast Asia in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, the surplus produced in the South is much too small to account for the prosperity of advanced capitalist areas, which extends far beyond the small "labour aristocracy" that was supposed to share in the proceeds of imperialism in the classical writings of Lenin and before him of Friedrich Engels. The first laws of accumulation are arithmetical, and with core economies now constituting close to three-quarters of world output, it would take an unrealistically large share of the surplus component of the remaining one-quarter to make any substantial difference to the level of mass consumption in the metropolitan regions. This is not to deny that Northern workers benefit from unequal exchange with the South. But the overriding problem for most peripheral economies has been their inability to produce a surplus, or to use it productively, not the fact that it was siphoned off overseas. Better to be part of the system of global exploitation than to remain outside it; better to be Malaysia than Burma, rather China than Chad.

POSTIMPERIALISM

The influence of neoimperialist theories has dwindled with the economic success of the East Asian NICs (newly industrialising countries), the failure of import substitution strategies of industrialisation elsewhere, and the stagnation and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. Increasingly, Marxists have come to argue that the world is

now postimperialist. Decolonisation has substantially ended foreign domination, generalised the system of states, and elevated the power of the world market, so that the entire globe is now subject to “the dull compulsion of economic forces.” In short, the claim is that Marx’s original analysis has proved to be broadly correct. Western capitalism has created a world in its own image, where coordination is primarily economic and where cultural homogenisation is proceeding apace. Unlike labour, capital has no homeland, no particular national loyalties, no reason other than profit opportunities to prefer one location to any other. Marx was right about the global dynamism of capitalism but distinctly premature in predicting its downfall. All this was first argued by Bill Warren in his book *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism* (1980), and it has been restated in postmodern terms by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000). Orthodox liberals and proponents of globalisation would substantially concur, differing only as to implications for radical politics.

AND THE FUTURE?

It is easy to make a persuasive case for the continuing relevance of Marx’s original position. The grand design of U.S. strategic planners mapping out the structures they desire for the future world system is entirely consistent with his expectations. Backward capitalism is to be purified of precapitalist remnants and illiberal practices. Advanced capitalist states will cooperate on matters economic and military. Technologies for global surveillance and the projection of armed force on a worldwide scale, already exceedingly highly developed, will improve and be used to generalise the conditions of law and order that already prevail at the core. If this grand plan succeeds, imperialist wars will not recur, and growth rates will be such that income levels converge much more rapidly than they have done hitherto. Institutional differences between capitalist states are already being eroded, and this process will be reinforced. International organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO) are increasing their powers and evolving into agencies of world government. The remaining barriers to capital mobility will disappear as property rights become secure, so that the comparative advantages of what are now peripheral economies will constitute a powerful basis for rapid economic development.

It is also very easy to construct a diametrically opposite scenario. Uneven development continues in a context of separate states, many of which remain powerful and particularistic. Monopoly capital forms intimate relationships with domestic political authorities, strengthening the political, institutional, and cultural differences between states and reinforcing the material basis of national loyalties. Integration into the world market remains incomplete, and the lack of jurisdictional unification means that distinct

political units meet at many points of friction. Environmental degradation gives rise to a global Ricardian stagnation, but this induces violent conflict (for example, over water resources) rather than ushering in the peaceful and unchanging “stationary state” anticipated by John Stuart Mill. Differences are resolved by armed force, as in the past. Thus, a persuasive case can be made for the continuing relevance of the classical view of imperialism, as reinterpreted by realist theorists of international relations and by Marxian writers such as Rosenberg and the “world systems” theorist Immanuel Wallerstein.

Nor does this end the indeterminacy. It is not yet possible definitively to reject neoimperialist theory. The forces of polarisation that underpin the divergence in growth rates appear to be very strong, and not easily reversible, so that many of the inequalities present in the world economy could increase still further. Thus, while Marx’s original analysis remains convincing, neither a new classical era of imperialist conflicts nor a continuation of neoimperialism can be readily dismissed.

— Michael C. Howard and John E. King

See also Capitalism; Globalization; Marx, Karl; Marxism; Postcolonialism; World-Systems Theory

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IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

The term *impression management* is associated with the work of the influential post-World War II sociologist, Erving Goffman (1922–1982). It is central to his dramaturgical