

## Conceptualising Imperialism in the 21st century

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### Abstract

Current debates surrounding the invasion, occupation and ongoing conflict in Iraq, and indeed the entire prosecution of the 'War on Terror', raise the issue of whether America is attempting to establish an empire. If it is, and this is by no means clear, then what is the character of this 'new imperialism'? Hardt and Negri have argued in *Empire* that state sovereignty has been transferred to supra-state global sovereignty, and that individual states are no longer able to coordinate an imperial project. On the other hand Ellen Meiksins Wood has argued in *Empire of Capital*, that the processes of capitalist appropriation and extra-economic coercion are so co-dependent that capitalism could not actually survive without the military force of nation states. If this is the case, modern imperial adventures may be a phenomenon of late capitalism; its global presence as Chalmers Johnson's 'empire of bases' is required for the continuation of wealth extraction under globalisation. So are such incursions still related to individual states, their interests, and the exploitation of resources? Are they akin to the sort of atavistic expansion of the nineteenth century? And how long will such modern adventures last, for as Michael Ignatieff argues in *Empire Lite*, modern occupation aims to be temporary and seeks the restructuring of politics within states so that challenges to American geopolitical power may be eliminated swiftly.

This paper reviews some key approaches to imperialism developed during the past century, as well as some of these more challenging recent contributions. It attempts to draw on various theories of imperialism to propose a number of imperial and colonial types that have existed over time. The criteria used are based on the effectiveness of domination and the sophistication of rule. It argues that administrative colonialism, which dates from the late 19th century, has been the harbinger of structures of governance and capitalist property relations which today permit the operations of global capitalism. Administrative colonialism based on governmentality, and this type of rule has now achieved quasi-hegemonic status through the diffusion of the nation state. In contrast to the assertions of Hardt and Negri, both United Nations peacekeeping missions and other state-led interventions, by reforming states that are mismanaged or splitting apart, serve to reinforce the primacy of the nation state and its role in providing security for the continuation of global capitalism.

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## Conceptualising Imperialism in the 21st century

### Introduction

Throughout history, the creation of empires and the behaviour of empire builders have occupied the thoughts of many scholars. This paper attempts to assess some of the recent literature on empire and imperial adventures, questioning the main claim of the Hardt and Negri thesis, which is that the nature of imperialism has altered so drastically that no longer is it related to states. In doing so it reviews some of these explanations of imperialism developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and sets out four main groups of causes of imperialism. It then suggests a typology of modern imperialisms based on the characteristics of imperial rule, in particular the methods used to enforce social control. It argues that today's modern adventures are a variety of 'international administrative colonialism', a form that builds on the primacy of the nation state created under administrative colonialism, and that where America 'goes it alone' it soon attempts to devolve responsibility back to a more legitimate body, either a nation-state or a form of 'international trusteeship'. While the 'illegal'<sup>1</sup> invasion of Iraq (BBC 2004) demonstrates all of the hallmarks of a throwback to old-fashioned atavistic colonial rule, America argues that the ultimate objective is to disengage and allow a democratic Iraq. As in other areas of conflict, this stated objective is not actually possible as force is still required to support the nation state and establish the forms of governance that permit the operations of capitalism. As such, the notion that state-driven imperialism is somehow over is only partially correct. Imperialism may not be the normal form of controlling other territories, but powerful states still rely on military force when alternative methods of power projection fail.

### Conceptualising Imperialism

In the nineteenth century the management of dependent territories assumed a professional and technical character. Empires that had existed for decades, and in some cases centuries, began to train professional administrators to assist in the governance of their colonies. This marked a shift away from employing men who were 'sound' generalist administrators to a new class of professional bureaucrats

schooled in anthropology, history, tropical hygiene and techniques of colonial administration. Many of these new professional colonial officers worked at the intermediate level within a colony or dependent territory and acted as part of the bureaucracy of an administrative district. They collected information about those they sought to control, compiled and analysed it and aimed to make the business of government more efficient. As a result of this shift in emphasis toward gathering detailed information for the study of the colonised, the methods employed to achieve social compliance with the various aims of European powers also underwent significant transformation. Knowledge and information were used by the colonial state in increasingly sophisticated ways as it moved from a position of ruling by coercive violence to the maintenance of political rule through tacit consent within a framework of regulation that restricted avenues of opposition.

The massive expansion of the area under the control of other powers has been the subject of much debate. Taking David Fieldhouse's broad definition of imperialism as "the tendency of one society or state to control another, for whatever means or for whatever purpose" (1981, 1), political control could result in colonisation or in colonialism. Where the former denoted conscious settlement, the latter was a widely differing form of political subjugation. Colonisation or colonialism can in turn shift; colonisation generally led to independence and colonialism generally led to decolonisation and neo-colonialism. In the latter case, the political independence of decolonised states was compromised by the retention of economic control by the former colonial power (Ibid: 8-11).

Colonies, protected states, mandates, trusteeships, dependent territories and states in 'free association' thus all form part of a wider imperial whole, or are at least caught up in imperial power relations. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century imperialism was seen to be a process that involved relations between developed states and areas of the world that were not yet states. The incorporation into empire was followed by decolonisation and the spitting out of new states at the end of the production line. Neo-imperialism was then conducted through the international regimes that coordinate policy and activity on behalf of the major international economic actors:

the imperialism of capitalist interests acted to ensure the subjugation of the periphery, whatever the stated purpose of regimes.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* however has developed this thesis further and has posed a challenge to the connection between the state and imperialism that was characteristic of North-South relations until decolonisation. They argue instead that imperialism as it was is over. No state today can be the centre of an imperialist project (Hardt and Negri 2000, xiv) as sovereignty is now beyond the nation state. Rather, a form of global sovereignty has emerged, stemming from crises within the legitimising project of modernity such as industrial unrest among the labouring classes in developed world, anti-imperial pressure from unpopular wars and the failure of planned socialist economies to provide liberty (Negri 2004, 59-61). This has apparently now resulted in the evolution of a form of global governance that is contested, but which is arguably hegemonic. Other writers, for example Koshy (2002), Mann (2003), and Harries (2004) have examined America's increasingly unilateral foreign policy direction, and each draws different conclusions. Koshy claims that the 'war on terror' is imperialist war designed to secure control of resources; Mann that America needs to recant from morally driven unilateralism and return to the more imperfect but realistic multilateralism (2003, 246-247). Harries argues America attempts to dominate the world, probably has a right to do so, but has not been able to succeed in creating consent for its actions (1-8).

Debate of course continues to rage surrounding the motivation and intentions of US actions in the 'war on terror'. In Michael Ignatieff's *Empire Lite* (2003, 109-111) he makes the claim that even when the troops withdraw this is still imperialism as the restructuring that has occurred allows the new regimes to diminish threats to the military, economic and political domination of dominant states. This prospect is taken further by Chalmers Johnson through the idea of the 'empire of bases' which requires the stationing overseas of over 250,000 active service personnel in 725 military bases outside of the USA in around 130 countries (Johnson 2004a, 151-185; Johnson 2004b). The logic of the empire of bases is self-perpetuating; "in order to defend these newly acquired outposts and control the regions they are in, we must expand the areas under our control with still more bases (2004a, 157). For influence to be maintained

force must be present; once force is present, more force is required to maintain influence. Even the conservative columnist and globalisation supporter Thomas Friedman has acknowledged this point (1999, 373):

The hidden hand of the market cannot flourish without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the U.S. Air Force F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine corps.

Ellen Meiksins Wood further explores this link between states and their militaries for the perpetuation of economic opportunities. In her analysis of imperialism *Empire of Capital* (2002), Wood argues convincingly that while capital has become internationalised it is still organised nationally. At the same time, she asserts (2002, 23-24)

... the nation state has remained an indispensable instrument — perhaps the *only* indispensable 'extra-economic' instrument — of global capital. It is possible to imagine changes in existing national boundaries or even the principal of nationality as we know it. Yet global capitalism without a system of multiple territorial states is all but inconceivable.

This brings us back to the fundamental question surrounding imperialism: why do states create empires and what is the connection between states and empires. The following discussion attempts to examine this connection with respect to the creation of empires since 1500.

### **Why do states create empires?**

This paper attempts to classify the vast historiography of imperialism into four general schools, each with differing explanations as to the operative concept and driving force behind the political restructuring of the world. The four schools identified are broadly economic, sociological, statist and cultural in character. Each has a focus of inquiry that delineates what are core explanations of why imperialism occurs. Each makes its contribution to the debates on imperialism and political domination and all provide insights into the relationship of the governed to the

governing. For the purpose of this paper however, these sometimes-conflicting explanations can provide some background as to what scholars have argued with respect to connections between the state and imperialism. At the end of this section, the paper suggests that what we in fact may have is a variant of the national state project that now exists with international permission, but that the creation of this form of control is in no way divorced from the military operations of powerful states. The legal frameworks of structured coercion of the state and the methods of control used by state agencies can allow for a focus in studying modern imperialism and its emphasis on administrative power to permit the operations of capitalism.

### *The motor of capitalism*

The relationship of productive relations to imperialism is the major operative concept of Marxist theorists, as well as some influential liberal writers. As an economic system, capitalism relies upon the sale of commodities for more than the cost of production. While this is not in itself revolutionary the key difference between capitalism and previous economic activities was the reinvestment of the surplus (as profit, rent and interest) in industrial enterprises (Wolf 1982, 77-79). Marxists argue the requirement to produce commodities at a lower price than that at which they are to be sold necessitates the exploitation of labour. The main effects of this process are the enslavement of humans to capital and the opening of new areas of the world either for selling mass produced industrial manufactures or for sourcing cheap raw materials used in the construction of industrial products and mass produced commodities. The role of the state within this process is somewhat contested.

Rosa Luxemburg concluded that capitalism could only survive if it kept expanding and proposed that colonial expansion would be characterised by violent conflict between the capitalists of the industrialised world for the control of resources. Violence linked the exploitation of colonial peoples with the exploitation of the domestic labour force in Europe. Capital employed militarism to secure control of areas and to divert purchasing power from the non-capitalist strata (Brewer 1980, 61-76; Mommsen 1982, 42-45) Luxemburg therefore saw imperialism as a new phase of capitalism which was in essence self-destructive, but which provided the necessary

platform of capitalist domination of the world through colonies. The state plays little role for Luxemburg (Brewer 1980, 74-75) apart from role she attributes to it in terms of carving out areas of the world for conquest and the implementation of capitalist property relations and laws, an idea advanced also by Lenin in *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917). For Lenin, competitive capitalism had been perverted by cartels and trusts and had resulted in monopoly capitalism. The division of the spoils among capitalist states, acting on behalf of national bourgeoisies, led to the Great War for control of markets. The role of the state is of interest here as finance capital found profit extraction easier in countries where formal political control was established. It was however still possible that countries not under the control of European powers, such as Persia, China, Turkey and Argentina could also be subject to the exploitative nature of finance capital (Ibid, 101-102). Capitalism was thus able to expand by means of economic penetration backed up by political support and state military action, but it did not have to be. States were helpful in maximising market share but were not required to maintain formal political control.

The transfer of surplus and the ambivalent role of the state are common threads running through both Marxist and neo-Marxist explanations of imperialism. Andre Gunder Frank (1969) argued against Walt Rostow's (1960) assertion that the lack of development in Third World states was caused by outdated labour practices and an inability to adapt to modern capitalist forms of production. Dependency theorists argued this neglected historical links of economic extraction between the states of the developed and the developing world, the very links that dependency theory argued maintained the process of underdevelopment. Dependency argued Spain's long association with its colonies was the main reason Latin America was not economically developed, despite over a century of independence. States were needed to establish control in the first place but continued domination was not integral to the exploitative economic links created under imperial rule.

Wallerstein (1974, 1979, 1987, 1999, 2002) charts the development of a capitalist system of production that evolves in Europe and leads to imperial conquest. While he disputes the precise point at which capitalism begins, he endorses the notion that capitalism cannot survive without expanded production and that in periods of

expansion of the world system, the state is a vital player in this process. Semi-peripheral states in particular allow the international system to mediate conflict and the history of the modern world system is intricately related to the continual re-alignment of the fortunes of 'core' states. Imperial overstretch is a characteristic of a military response to a crisis of hegemony within the core of the world economy, which Wallerstein argues has been the case since the early 1970s (Wallerstein 2002). America's current action in Iraq are thus the last gasp of a fading superpower that will not go quietly.

In the economic approach to imperialism, capitalism, states and the creation of empires are connected. Once economic control is established political independence may be granted for in reality it matters little. In the contemporary world the regimes created to ensure stability of the overall system now mostly play the part that states used to play: globalisation is restructuring states along economic lines so that private capital may appropriate public resources (Stiglitz 2002). This is not seen to be the fault of any one state but of the global institutions created by wealthy states to ensure stability in the overall system. State collapse sometimes occurs where such processes push the limits of nationhood and may result in multilateral peacekeeping operations or other such interventions led by individual states. For Samir Amin (2001, 9-10), such actions reinforce and privilege the internationally recognised state above other evolving forms of political association and are a form of imperialism. As collapsed states are often dangerous places, as are conflict zones, a modicum of administration is required to allow the relatively safe extraction of resources and wealth. This is what Iraq now represents: the idea of an internationally recognised sovereign state imposed over a territory that is resource rich.

### *Incoherent and accidental*

The idea that imperial expansion and colonialism are intimately involved with capitalism has been disputed by writers who argue there was no coherent logic over time to account for imperial expansion, or for the actions of colonisers. Two writers who expound this view are Joseph Schumpeter and David Fieldhouse who have argued that colonialism is more of a mixture of politics and human nature.

Joseph Schumpeter's argument is derived in part from Max Weber's work on the sociology of organisations and the structures of European states. Schumpeter (in Mommsen 1982, 22) defined imperialism as "the objectless disposition of the part of the state to unlimited forcible expansion", essentially the left over but somewhat refined warlike passions of the ruling classes. As such, imperialism is associated with social rewards, state building and nationalism, but above all a sort of pre-modern desire for conquest. For Schumpeter imperial actions were due mainly to political and social causes: imperial expansion was an irrational action inclined toward war and conquest, and due mainly to the survival of political structures from the era of absolutism. Rather than being the cause of imperialism, capitalism was a direct contrast to it. Capitalism represented the possibility of a new social age of pacificity and reward for manual labour and was thus progressive. Schumpeter felt capitalism was by nature anti-imperialist, and the territorial expansion that was occurring came from forces outside of the logic of capitalism but were supported by social and political factors outside of modern life (Ibid, 23).

David Fieldhouse also takes issue with the notion that capitalism drove colonialism and has identified religious motives, national prestige and geo-political strategy as factors that contributed to the inchoate collection of territories that was called empire. In sociological explanations, capitalist pressures are but one motive for expansion. While capitalism is not disregarded completely, and is seen occasionally as important and often critical, it is by no means the only motive. In this argument colonialism was a slow and uncoordinated development of administrative systems established to deal with new territories acquired in a rather haphazard manner. Fieldhouse gives four main reasons why colonies or protectorates were claimed in the period before 1914: for their value as strategic bases; to deny the territory to another power; as pawns in European power politics; and for national pride (Fieldhouse 1982, 4-5). All these reasons relate to the national state. Capital investments, such as railroads or mines, required a more effective control over land and domestic politics. As a result the administrative systems expanded to include whole regions (Ibid, 20).

A tendency toward controlling others led to a system that came to encompass the world, and Fieldhouse asserts that the 'New Imperialism' from 1870 was primarily a reflection of growing tensions in Europe and state rivalry that emerged with a unified Germany threatening the balance of power. At the same time, empire and national pride were complementary, and psychologically empire came to represent something vitally important for the peoples and states of Europe. Giving it up was consequently unthinkable, whether or not a colony was economically viable. The colony was perhaps not so important for the economy of the given European state, but absolutely vital for its understanding of its place in the world. Germany's drive for colonies in the 1880s is an example of this atavistic imperial passion, and Japan's drive to empire can be explained by a similar notion that 'important states need empires'.

Far from being able to be explained by economic or financial interests, the 'accidental' school argues that imperialism is distinctly illogical and grew from European preoccupations with European class and security problems. Schumpeter argues for pre-modern desire for conquest among the ruling classes, Fieldhouse for a mixture of serendipity, opportunity and geo-politics. While the 'accidental' explanations do not neglect economics, they argue that to view colonialism as either totally inconsistent with economic development or the best approach to stimulating economic growth, is to see colonialism as both historically consistent and coherent in its implementation of control. As Fieldhouse notes, 'Colonialism was not sufficiently consistent over time to justify any such sweeping assertions, nor were its objectives sufficiently coherent to achieve any particular result' (Ibid, 103). As the systems of colonial governance evolved, the costs of administration became ever greater and provide one reason for the later withdrawal from empire through decolonisation; neo-colonialism was a cheaper way to retain control of economic investment and influence. The state however was required to create empire in the first place, even when it was following trade.

### *Statist power rivalry*

Writers who view colonialism as a competition for territorial control between European states have a weight of historical evidence to support their claims. European

power rivalries have dominated interstate and international relations over the past 500 years. Such theories rely on a notion of state interest based on realist conceptions of power politics. They accept the Hobbesian world of *Leviathan* where life is played out in a brutish arena of competition among self-interested individuals. The only right people have is the right to associate for greater protection and the emergence of the Commonwealth (the state) is thus necessary for creation of systems of law and the maintenance of societal order (Hobbes 1962). In realism power projection beyond state boundaries is pursued for reasons of collective (national) interest and each state claims a sovereign right to act as it does, just as it feels itself to be the only legitimate representative of its people and its interests. The international system has arguably functioned in accordance with this notion of state sovereignty since the Peace of Westphalia: sovereign power exists within states, and at the international level there is equality between states, with force used legitimately for defence only. All these ideas are now under review.

An explanation for political expansion and colonialism based on the political dynamics of European states does not effectively distinguish between the activities of private entrepreneurial capital and the political activities of states. However such territories were acquired, the notion that imperialism is a function of competition between states has much to offer, and is borne out by one reading of history.<sup>2</sup> By 1914, European states controlled much of the earth's land territory and most of Africa, Asia and the Pacific islands were part of European empires (Fieldhouse 1986, 373). The strategic rivalry component of Fieldhouse's argument owes a large debt to Max Weber's writings on prestige as a factor in imperial expansion and his analysis of the basis of state power. Weber's conception of modern administration and bureaucracy is important in understanding the rationale of colonial activity at the turn of the century (Gerth and Wright-Mills 1969, 196-240).

Weber's explanation of imperial power draws essentially on the ability of a state to use force against another state or people. He notes that for reasons of power dynamics, great powers are not always orientated toward expansion and cites the example of the little Englanders' reliance on the economic primacy of British manufacturing to assure their place in the world, even if it meant giving up its

colonies (Ibid, 161). The nexus between trade and expansion, according to Weber, depends on the struggle for primacy of different interest groups within states. In the early twentieth century Weber observed that Germany was dominated by what he called 'imperialist capitalism': the state was being run by tax-farmers, state creditors, suppliers to the state, overseas traders privileged by the state and colonial capitalists. As Weber noted 'The profit opportunities of all these groups rest upon the direct exploitation of executive powers, that is, of political power directed towards expansion' (Ibid, 167). Weber understood expansion in two ways: its pacifist tendency (that which desires free trade) and its imperialist tendency (that which desires monopoly conditions which provide the greatest profit), but felt that imperialist capitalism had won the day (Ibid, 167):

The universal revival of imperialist capitalism, which has always been the normal form in which capitalist interests have influenced politics, and the revival of political drives for expansion are thus not accidental. For the predictable future, the prognosis will have to be made in their favour.

While there is commonality about the role of European political concerns in causing colonialism, Weber differs from Fieldhouse by insisting that expansion was intentional and not accidental. For Weber imperialism and colonialism were complex extrapolations of European state politics, both internal and external, which involved economic issues, but they were not totally dominated by them. Economics was but one part of the colonial/imperial question; other factors included culture, the political community and the creation of emotive arguments advanced through the media to encourage nationalism and national prestige. Both Weber and John Hobson (1988) identified the political role of jingoism in creating legitimacy for imperialism. Weber however ascribed an historical role to it, arguing that legitimacy for state action is sanctioned by the support of the masses for imperial expansion, a function in part of a perceived community responsibility to provide wealth and prospects for succeeding generations (Ibid, 171-172). By coopting the masses, or at least demonstrating the possible benefits of expansion, states are able to legitimise their actions at home and create a willing workforce for colonial administration through professional training and management. A bureaucracy results which is governed by rules and laws, operates in a defined area and has a division of responsibility; it keeps records and

files, and develops career structures within a salaried civil service (Ibid, 196-204). It is exactly this type of colonial state activity that is characteristic of administrative colonialism in the twentieth century. The state is therefore the cause of imperialism and essential for the replication of European modernity.

The extension of national sovereignty over colonies also extended the influence of the ruling class of a state. The expansionist state was likely to grant monopoly concessions to those industrialists who could be relied upon to support imperialism. The armaments industries in particular were a key supporter of imperial governments. For Weber the support of industrialists for war was not due to something innate or intrinsic in capitalism but to a deviant form of 'predatory capitalism'. This point has been developed concerning the relationship between the US government and business interests, particularly the Halliburton company and its subsidiaries (notably Kellogg, Brown and Root) in connection with American post-cold War military operations across the globe (Briody 2004, 191-237). In the US case, the relationship is so close that allegations of corruption and improper dealings in military contracts have dogged the US Vice President Dick Cheney. Negri in fact argues that such collusion is now the normal state of affairs within empire, and that "corruption has become a form of government" (Negri, 2004, 56). In the statist explanations for imperialism there are factors at work within the polity that use the military power of the defence forces to achieve territorial conquest. The imperial project is then 'sold' by media barons who whip up public opinion, concentrating on patriotism, ideals and sacrifice, while companies gain from war profiteering. Perhaps it is time to re-read Max Weber.

### *Cultural capital*

Lastly, imperial expansion has been viewed as an accumulation of cultural capital. This is something of a broad category for a diverse body of theory covering literature, representation, post-colonial writing and analyses of power. There is a concentration on the role of culture in the imperial process, which to some extent expands Weber's notion of bourgeois leadership of the state's imperial drive. Cultural explanations frequently concern themselves with power through representation, the mental image of the ruled and the ruler that is described, drawn and institutionalised through

government, education and popular writing. Such literature is useful firstly as it provides an insight into the mental image of the colonised from the perspective of the coloniser, and secondly because the literature itself forms part of the discourse of European power that reinforces the images of 'the Other' and thus provides justification for colonial occupation through the civilising mission. As Foucault (1980) and Said (1991, 1994) have shown, such structures are not in fact neutral, but are imbued with power and meaning through the construction of discourses of knowledge. The symbiosis between culture and imperial power is complex and has redefined the analysis of imperialism and colonialism. It can be broadly broken down into three groups: colonial criticism, post-colonial examination of literature and racism and studies of the effects of culture on institutions and discourses of power.

The racism described by George Orwell (1934; 1970) and E. M. Forster (1976) came from within the milieu of imperialism. It concentrated on the schizophrenia of empire, its unwritten rules, colour bars and double standards that made life hell for both its practitioners and subjects. This theme was taken up by a number of writers in the post-colonial period. Edward Said's work dealt primarily the construction of cultural institutions and drew on the writings of Michel Foucault. Both *Orientalism* (1991) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) discuss discourses of knowledge and power that are created and enhanced through cultural creations such as the novel, poetry or art.

The cultural angle exploring imperialism has established critiques of the discipline of anthropology, of colonial culture and of the racial construction of empire. Nicholas Thomas (1994) and Ann Laura Stoler (1991; 1992) have examined these sorts of issues, and their works have focussed on the macrocosmic level of imperialism/colonialism and its processes, often illuminating the problems inherent in exercising imperial power. Where Weber conceived of organisation and bureaucracy as neutral, Foucault's writings (see for example Gordon, 1980) on the construction of regimes and discourses of knowledge have shown that power can be coercive in ways that do not involve force but do involve regulation and codification, the outlawing of types of behaviour for the common good of the whole society. Such ideological structures may in fact be more coercive than direct violence as the collective subject (the people) is often unaware of the purpose of change. For Foucault medicine,

government and surveying all create bodies of knowledge that are accessible to the specialist, and the state as a whole controls both the content of education and the way in which new knowledge is incorporated or omitted from governing power structures.

To return to the result of cultural imperialism, the resultant educational product is one that reflects the priorities of the administration, since officials within the bureaucracy act, following Weber, as their vocation dictates. Careers are founded on the interpretation of information, which is a key part of successful colonial domination and control. This again become clear in the period of decolonisation when states are governed by indigenous elites, most often the products of colonial educations, thus permitting the transfer of similar understandings of power, liberty and development. In this way colonial power, now exercised through state bureaucracies, is a necessary condition of the condition of governmentality that underpins the conditions of modern life. For Foucault, power is somehow everywhere and nowhere; it is no accident that for Hardt and Negri, empire is somewhat similar. Despite the attraction of the ideas inherent in these post-modern positions here remains a nagging doubt that states do matter and that there are limits to economic control that require military responses. How we have arrived at this position may be viewed by a short sketch of what may be describes as a typology of imperialism.

## **Towards a typology of imperialism**

The often competing and contradictory explanations that find economics, atavism, states and culture to be the driving forces behind imperialism do not alone provide a clear picture of the history of the world over the past centuries. Perhaps each is partially correct and none totally correct. An alternative approach to attempting to show what causes imperialism is to try to pick out some ways in which imperialism has been practised. Such an investigation of power involves another attempt at reductionism, although this time in a typology that examines the nature of the administrative regimes, their methods of rule and the degrees of sophistication and humane behaviour adopted when administering others.

The separation of instances of imperialism into different types is based on the following criteria:

- the treatment of people under the rule of the colonisers;
- the level of physical coercion present;
- the sophistication of systems of government;
- the stated intentions of the imperial power.

The suggested typology attempts to make some sense of the enormous diversity of domination in political rule. It suggests that in the modern period (from about 1500) there are five imperial types, five 'modes of domination', that over a very long time have increased in sophistication and eventually encouraged humane treatment of the colonised. This evolution in the varieties of political rule has been accompanied by increasingly sophisticated techniques of social control. At one end of the spectrum of colonial rule is the consistent use of physical force and violence by people under loose state control acting to attain maximum profit; at the other there is the creation of legal regimes of the state that operate through the more intangible, yet paradoxically more effective, structural coercion of what Michel Foucault has termed 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1980: 109-133; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 126-142). While there is some notion of evolution involved in this typology, clearly one type of imperialism does not instantly transform into another as new techniques of governance are developed. Various powers managed their colonial dependencies

differently, established them at different times and for different reasons. Eventually all adopted the global logic of administrative colonialism, a precursor of the only now acceptable form of intervention, international administrative colonialism.

### *The Imperialism of plunder*

The imperialism of plunder occupies territory through force of arms, has scant regard for the peoples that it dominates and frequently enslaves them, works them to death or kills them when taking land. Emissaries of states, or companies or religious orders, administer these territories in the name of a distant political figure. Rules and regulations governing the treatment of the colonised favour the colonists. Any booty obtained is displayed through conspicuous consumption in the construction of palaces and other buildings. The conquered territory exists for the benefit of the imperial state, its resources are plundered and the proceeds enrich the colonisers.

The sole aim of the imperialism of plunder in acquiring territory is to exploit the riches it possesses. The imperialism of plunder is a primitive form of wealth accumulation, achieved through violent means, often at the hands of private individuals. Its concentration on physical force to suppress a population in order to extract wealth incurs continuing expense for the imperial state, but part of this cost can be paid in booty. The effects of this type of colonial control are that power is held without consent, wealth is extracted and people poorly treated. This form of imperialism is the least sophisticated of the modes of domination. The activities of the Spanish and Portuguese in the Americas from the late fifteenth centuries to the late eighteenth centuries approximate this ideal type, as does the late nineteenth century example of King Leopold's Belgian Congo. The initial occupation of Iraq also has elements of this with the army of 'contractors' (Johnson 2004, 145-149), torture of prisoners (Hersh 2004) and lack of adequate services for the population.

### *The Imperialism of private commerce*

The imperialism of private commerce requires both the state and private companies. In an early example of sub-contracting, a state licenses a chartered company to act on

its behalf. A charter company creates a colony through negotiation with an indigenous self-governing polity. The imperialism of commerce consists of a trading base, a fort or a 'factory', often with a small defensive perimeter. As this is an essentially commercial venture, there is no need to attempt to impose political or governmental control over large areas and no use of large armies to gain substantial territory. Colonial rule is restricted to the entrepot and company workers. The purpose of imperialism by private commerce is profit. As such the rationale is to survive as a company. Political relations that exist between the commercial colony and indigenous polities are shaped by trade concerns. The neighbouring indigenous polities tolerate Europeans as they have particular commercial, political and military uses. Company interests gather commodities to both create and meet demand in home markets. Imperialism by private commerce moves goods from place to place and creates wealth by doing so.

The aims of imperialism by private commerce are to run a successful business and to create profit for directors, shareholders, and for the officers of the company, the workers and governors who run the day-to-day business. The activities of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the Indian Ocean from the mid sixteenth century to the late eighteenth century approximate this ideal type. Historically such private ventures generally found it impossible to resist territorial expansion and so tended to transform into state controlled imperialism, usually through the state assuming the company's administrative responsibilities.

### *Expansionist imperialism*

Expansionist imperialism is primarily concerned with territorial acquisition. In a way all imperialism is expansionist but not all imperialism involves the state taking over responsibility for administration, nor does it involve the introduction of capitalism. The imperial state first begins to fashion an empire out of its existing but disparate trading interests. Each territory is then structured and norms of operation begin to be put in place. Later influential business and political groups lobby for political expansion so as to provide further opportunities for investment. The need for new markets and new opportunities for capitalist enterprises, such as railways and plantations, leads to political control over new territories and peoples. New political regimes are established through military means or through the extension of protection, often annexing a region to protect the European investments already in existence. The economy of the colony plays its part in a wider imperial economy.

Within an imperial framework each colony contributes what it can best provide. Labour is acquired for plantation agriculture and mining while the maximisation of profit is uppermost in the minds of the colonisers. The colony forms part of the empire and is used both for its raw materials and as a market to sell commodities. Colonial officials make rules concerning land alienation and acceptable behaviour in the treatment of indigenes. High levels of violence and physical coercion often accompany the initial occupation of territory but later subside. The aims of expansionist imperialism are to acquire territory and to create new markets. In part it is a progression from the private business imperialism to a more effective integration of new regions into an imperial economy. It is also a necessary precondition to the introduction of administration. The means by which empire acquires new territory is both commercial and military and the nexus between the two remains unbroken with the considerations of one affecting the actions of the other. This type of imperialism is best approximated in the historical period known as the "New Imperialism" (1870-1914) and the activities of the British, French and Germans in Africa.

### *The Imperialism of administration*

The imperialism of administration moves away from the use of physical force in favour of increasingly sophisticated techniques of social management. In place of direct physical coercion comes the structured coercion of governmentality. There is careful consideration given to creating the structures of rule for the colonial state. Through the creation of the administrative state's departments, bureaucracy and legal codes, everyday life in colonies and territories is regulated so that pre-modern forms of economic production are transformed to support a capitalist mode of production. The purpose of the colonial presence is to create a way of life that resembles more closely the society of the coloniser. The interests of capital are subordinated to the interests of the state and the colonial state acts in what it considers to be the best interests of the indigenous population. The administrative colonial state often spends more than it earns, but the main motive is not so much the creation of profit for the colonial state but the linking of the region to the international economy. The administrative colonial state creates a sense of legitimacy of governmental purpose that knits people together into organisational units. It attempts to create a hegemonic system that allows only certain forms of rebellion; for example, any dissent must be non-violent. With decolonisation these structures of the colonial state become the essential features of the new national government. The initial attraction of the imperialism of administration is the provision of government services. In this way it uses governance to induce changes in the economic and political structures of pre-colonial societies, and positions the colonial state as a central actor in matters of production, distribution and exchange of commodities. When attacked at an ideological level, administrative colonialism defends itself with its position that what is being done is in the best interests of the people concerned.

As George Balandier (1951, 47) noted, power could be exercised through non-military means by using a combination of administrative machinery and ideological dominance. The administrative colonial state adopted a number of tactics that Balandier felt were possible ways of achieving non-violent social control. It offered itself as a model for emulation whilst effectively blocking or at least severely limiting access to authority; it maintained contact to a minimum, it used its ideology of progress to justify its position, and it preserved political tactics designed to preserve an imbalance in favour of the colonial power. Indeed force alone is insufficient to

maintain control with a large indigenous population, and misunderstanding quickly became a tool of domination. The confusion of the new, all that had been introduced by imperialism, the laws, the regulations and the new standards of behaviour, assist in the ongoing project of political subjection requiring people to self-regulate (Ibid: 48). For those who cannot or will not follow the new rules, the police act as agents for transferring the 'package' of new ideas to the uninitiated, and they further demonstrated that the state had the capacity to use violence when required. Once behaviour that threatened the legitimacy of the colonial state has been largely eliminated, the police can begin to perform the simpler function of disciplining minorities (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983: 138-139).

Imperialism as administration demands nothing less than the wholesale transformation of society to reflect the priorities of the colonisers. While initial pacification of peoples may be undertaken through military means, the means through which consent for government is achieved are not normally physically coercive but rely on a combination of encouragement, incentives, regulation, provision of services and the establishment and preservation of order. The techniques it uses include the creation of records to develop a knowledge system through which to exert extra pressure on elements of the society who do not wish to conform. This form of imperialism is the most sophisticated and the most effective. By accepting the proffered order, which has advantages in terms of safety and tangible benefits such as education and health, alternative forms of status achievement are removed. The exercise of actual power then becomes possible only through the logic of state governance. By imposing itself on colonised society, imperialism as administration has the effect of creating conditions of consent for processes of social transformation. The territory thus becomes safe for capital, even post-independence, and people and territory are fully integrated into the world capitalist economy.

#### *Imperialism as International administration*

While administrative colonialism transformed most of the world, state control of other territories in the post World War II years became unpopular. The UN was firstly content to monitor states in exercising their responsibilities as trustees of other

territories, but more recently the organisation itself has been called upon to be an administering authority. This is intended to be a temporary situation and it tends to be enacted in societies that have seen horrific conflict. In Cambodia the disputing parties lent sovereignty to the United Nations while it organised elections. In East Timor an international force stabilised the fledgling nation before a United Nations Transitional Administration ran the country prior to an East Timorese government taking over. In Kosovo the UN administration has effectively carved out a protectorate from which it will be difficult to leave, thus creating a protected territory within a sovereign state (Ignatieff, 2003). The United Nations is the only authority with the legitimacy to perform such a function, however imperfect the result. The international community, as embodied in the United Nations, is also the only legitimate body that may attempt to impose justice in post-conflict situations if recovering states are not able to do so themselves. Due to the influence of the United States on the United Nations there are questions about the manner in which the military operations of imperial states may become 'blue rinsed' (Polman 2004) in the form of state incursions being passed off to a UN administration. To its credit the UN has resisted US calls to become more involved in Iraq and the solution is now to reconstruct the Iraqi state as a sovereign entity. The only acceptable intervention appears to be an internationally sanctioned one, and these are normally now contingent on an exit strategy, to limit costs to individual states.

## Conclusions

The techniques of social control that enabled political domination to occur during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are central to understanding the events that have been described as imperialism. In the nineteenth century imperialism as administrative colonialism was the dominant form of social reorganisation of colonial peoples; this remains the case today although for the most part this is rarely the exertion of only one state but rather a loose international action conducted with approval from the international governing regime of world politics. One key difference between colonial times and today's interventions is that in the early twentieth century much time and effort was spent on the study of subject peoples so as to understand the 'true' nature of their societies, with a view to transform them. Frequently administrators made generalisations about pre-modern societies that enabled techniques of rule to be developed that were easy to implement. The notion of indirect rule evolved to install administrators above existing governing groups. This enabled administrative colonialism to pass itself off as advice, or to explain its presence as merely assisting local rulers to create wealth and development. At the heart of the imperialism of administration remains a notion of progress that involves breaking established traditions and replacing them with that hallmark of modernity, 'good government'. The effectiveness of the imperialism of administration lies in its closure of outlets for dissent: the basic choices available to people are those prescribed by the state and its institutions.

If one accepts the broad definition of imperialism as political domination then clearly imperialism still exists. Iraq and Afghanistan would both qualify, and there is an argument for an imperialism in the sense of a global logic of restructuring. The nature of modern imperialism is however difficult to classify, but territorial occupation by force of arms still occurs and still requires states. It results in the imperialism of administration, and in some cases in international administration.

The occupation of Iraq combined many of the worst features of the first four types of imperial rule, and it lacked the international legitimacy that would make such an occupation acceptable. If the stark reality turns out to be that the aims of the invasion

and regime change were the division of the spoils to those countries and countries who supported the war, then Max Weber's thesis looks convincing, as are the prospects of imperialism being around for some time to come. The imperialism of administration as practised by national states through colonialism was an attempt to construct consensus for capitalist hegemony. In the case of Iraq, the US aims to create consensus for the supposedly global ideals of liberal democracy, rights and the free market. The fact that this attempt to produce stability in Iraq has led to a nationalist, and now religious insurgency, indicates that the new American empire lacks the ability to convince to go along with its capacity for military domination. This points to a crisis of legitimacy within capitalist globalisation.

The political beliefs and systems that have grown up within the state to provide the institutional support for capitalism — liberalism, parliamentary government and a modicum of rules governing the 'free' market to perpetuate the creation of wealth — give the nation state legitimacy and allow it to manage differences while remaining essentially the domain of capitalist interests. The linkage between imperialism, capitalism and modernity is through administration as by establishing modern bureaucratic government, colonial empires reshaped the world in their own image, or at least as variations on a theme. Imperialism can be viewed in totality, as a continuum of improving techniques of social control, but it is not entirely coherent. Debates about the nature of imperialism remain, but importantly so do states, sovereignty (for strong states) and military force. Hardt and Negri are perhaps premature in their assessment that the sort of empires the world had known are dead; Wood is perhaps closer to the mark with her notion of the co-dependence of states and capital. The connections between US military actions, geo-political security interests, capitalist interests, and media support for a global civilising project provide a rich field for future inquiry into the nature of modern imperialism.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, in an interview given on September 16. The BBC reported, "When pressed on whether he viewed the invasion of Iraq as illegal, he said: "Yes, if you wish. I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN charter from our point of view, from the charter point of view, it was illegal." BBC News World Edition, 'Iraq war illegal, says Annan', [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3661134.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm)

<sup>2</sup>With the treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, Portugal had a Papal Bull to take all lands from a point 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands, while Spain was entitled to claim lands past that point. European expansionist efforts during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were mainly restricted to Portugal and Spain. The Iberian empires in America were created through state rivalry and the spheres of competition extended to the Indian and Pacific oceans. The challenge for dominance in Europe both of trade and territory was a political and military battle: Charles V attempted to assert Spanish hegemony over the Holy Roman Empire but became bogged down in military campaigns and went bankrupt. The assertion of national interest overseas was then joined by the Dutch who challenged the Portuguese in Brazil and the Indian Ocean, and English rivalry with Spanish interests in the Caribbean and with Portuguese and Dutch interests in the Indian Ocean. The main rivalry of the eighteenth century was between the English and the French and war on three continents (Europe, America, Asia) came about as part of the war of the Austrian succession. Later competition between these dominant European powers spread to the Pacific and was not resolved in England's favour until the end of the Napoleonic wars. A French resurgence in the mid-nineteenth century led to their expansion into Indochina and in the last quarter of the nineteenth century the rising power of Germany, and its challenge to France and Britain, led to the partition of Africa, which also included Portugal, Spain, and Belgium. In the late nineteenth century in the Pacific the imperial power of England was met by Japan, Germany and the expansionist 'anti-imperialism' of the United States of America whose commitment to fostering independent states led to US domination in the Philippines and Samoa.