

Anti-Colonialism and Imperialism (1960s–1970s)

Introduction

In 1971, Ariel Hoffman and Armand Matterlard published *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic in Chile* during the short period of Salvador Allende's presidency. Soon after Pinochet's coup d'état, the book was banned and the remaining copies were destroyed. In just a decade, this title had been published in 15 different countries and translated into 16 different languages. This example is emblematic of the depth of the struggle between the imperialist camp and the (former) colonies and dependent countries that went beyond politics and economics to include the cultural field. In basic Marxist terms, it can be argued that during the 1960s and 1970s, imperialism was heavily criticised not only at the level of the economic base, but also at the level of the superstructure.

This essay aims at addressing the different aspects of anti-colonialism in the 1960s and 1970s, both in the way it was expressed in the former colonies and in relation to the impact it had within imperialist countries. This impact was visible in the formation of anti-war and anti-imperialist movements, as well as movements inspired by anti-colonial struggles (e.g. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defence in the US, or ETA in Spain). Before proceeding to the analysis, we will need to outline the evolution that the Second World War brought about in the world capitalist system with respect to the end of colonialism in its original form and its transformation into neo-colonialism. An enlightening periodisation of decolonisation is provided in Betts (2004) and Rothermund (2006), both of whom provide glossaries of terms or historical events that can help the reader conceptualise the issues dealt with in this essay.

The post-Second World War period was undoubtedly marked by national liberation movements in the former colonies of Western imperialist countries. Decolonisation was initiated in the 1940s with the formation of six independent states, followed by ten more in the 1950s. But it was the decade of the 1960s that was crucially marked by anti-colonialism, since the states that gained their independence during that decade were twice as numerous as those of the previous two decades

combined (Betts 2004: 112–113). The need to study imperialism and anti-colonialism when investigating the aforementioned period has been stressed by historians and other social scientists who have studied this era. As Frederic Jameson emphasises in his milestone article on the 1960s:

It does not seem particularly controversial to mark the beginnings what would come to be called the 60s in the third world with the great movement of decolonization in British and French Africa. It can be argued that the most characteristic expressions of a properly first world 60s are all later than this, whether they are understood in countercultural terms – drugs and rock – or in the political terms of a student new left and a mass antiwar movement. Indeed, politically, a first world 60s owed much to third-worldism in terms of politicocultural models, as in a symbolic Maoism, and, moreover, found its mission in resistance to wars aimed precisely at stemming the new revolutionary forces in the third world. ... The one significant exception to all this is in many ways the most important first world political movement of all – the new black politics and the civil rights movement, which must be dated, not from the Supreme Court decision of 1954, but rather from the first sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February of 1960. Yet it might be argued that this was also a movement of decolonization, and in any case the constant exchange and mutual influences between the American black movements and the various African and Caribbean ones are continuous and incalculable throughout this period. (1984: 180)

In this context, adopting the notion of the 'Long Sixties' – as elaborated by Arthur Marwick (2012) – can help conceptualise the period, whose beginnings may be said to coincide with the emergence of decolonisation struggles of the mid-1950s, as in Algeria or the Second Indochina War (Vietnam War), and their influence on the youth and radical movements in the rest of the world.

Post-Second World War imperialism and colonialism

The Second World War brought about momentous changes in the global balance

of forces, with the US now being the leading imperialist country, the Axis-related imperialisms not only having been defeated, but also subjugated to (mainly US) imperialism. The East, from the Balkans to China a few years later, was now largely red. And the former colonies had initiated a process of decolonisation through a variety of means, from pleas to the United Nations to armed struggle. The impact of these changes on imperialist countries was felt on three levels:

- The first level concerned the changes that decolonisation brought to each imperialist country's position on the geopolitical chessboard, since the loss of former colonies entailed not only economic losses but also loss of the political and military control of geographical regions.
- The second level concerned changes to the equilibrium between the West and the East, understood in terms of the two mutually exclusive worlds of capitalism and that of socialism.
- The third level reflected the contradictions within imperialist countries that were intensified by the emergence of anti-war and anti-colonial/anti-imperialist movements, and, in some cases, movements of various minorities with demands ranging from equality to separatism or autonomy. These movements were to a great extent inspired by the anti-colonial struggles in the so-called 'Third World' (on the lack of concrete conceptualisation of this term, see Tomlinson 2003: 307–321). The most distinctive case was that of the Vietnam War and the impact it had on a global scale on the rise of the anti-war movement and the radicalisation of youth movements.

Each imperialist country had to face the new reality and develop its own strategy and tactics towards this decolonisation process. There were a variety of different approaches on the part of each imperialist country towards each former colony's demand for independence. There were cases in which independence was granted without the necessity for armed struggle. Nevertheless, in every case, the former colonial forces focused on safeguarding their interests, either by denying independence or by imposing – or attempting to impose – their successors, drawn from the local ruling classes. The end of formal empires did not bring the end of colonialism

ex facto (Hobsbawm 1995: 199–222). What it actually did was to transform the 19th and early 20th-century imperial-colonial nexus into the post-Second World War imperialism-neo-colonialism nexus. In this latter nexus, independence would be nominally granted to the former colonies while, in reality, imperialism aimed at retaining control and perpetuating its regime of domination and exploitation (on the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism, see Rothermund 2006: 258–274). The global geopolitical realignment was also determined by the fact that, apart from the US in the West and the Soviet Union in the East, all the other major players on the international chessboard had been either defeated or weakened during the Second World War.

Workers and oppressed peoples and nations of the world, unite!

The above exhortation was used by the Communist Party of China in its document 'A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement' <<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/cpc/proposal.htm>> (03 June 2013). This document, published in 1963, captures the momentum of the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial struggles of the period I am dealing with. Important anti-colonial struggles exploded in formerly French colonies such as Algeria and Indochina, and Dutch colonies such as Indonesia. Despite these significant anti-colonial and national liberation struggles that took place in the vast majority of the so-called 'Third World', the milestone of the era was the struggle in Vietnam. As a consequence of this view of Truth, Gandhi was always ready to amend his ideas and change his mind about actions already undertaken and underway. This has been criticised by many, even in his own times, as being inconsistent or opportunistic. This is not only due to the fact that the Vietnamese anti-colonial struggle lasted for almost three decades – having been initially formed in order to fight against French rule in the 1940s and 1950s, later struggling against US imperialism until the defeat of the latter in the mid-1970s – but mainly because this defeat was inflicted upon the main force within the Western camp, the US. The Vietnam War led to a global solidarity movement, and had an impact on the formation or radicalisation of many social

movements – especially youth movements – as well as on the emergence of anti-US, anti-imperialist sentiment throughout the world.

Anti-colonialism cannot be viewed or treated *en bloc*. Different political and social forces led anti-colonial struggles and the overall decolonisation process in each country. On the one hand, there were conservative or progressive bourgeoisies that sought an independent state – i.e. political independence – through which they could gain a bigger share of the wealth and power than was possible during the colonial period. On the other hand, there existed radical and revolutionary forces whose aims were not limited to merely gaining political independence, but included transforming their societies as well. Questions regarding what was to be done the day after independence were not restricted to the geographical framework of the former colony, and led to the development of ideologies such as Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism or the use of the term ‘Third World’ as a global framework within which individual anti-colonial struggles were part. The ideologies of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism were developed, echoing voices in the anti-colonial camp that articulated how national liberation and social emancipation of the formerly colonial world could only be achieved through a project of unifying the newly liberated areas, rather than through upholding singular paths for each one taken separately. One of the most distinctive representatives of this approach, Kwame Nkrumah, a leader of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and the first president of Ghana, wrote:

Three alternatives are open to African states; first, to unite and to save our continent; secondly, to continue in disunity and to disintegrate; or thirdly, to sell out and capitulate before the forces of imperialism and neo-colonialism. As each year passes, our failure to unite strengthens our enemies and delays the fulfillment of the aspirations of our people. (Nkrumah 1973: 125)

It emblematic of this trend that Nkrumah, who found himself in exile in the mid-1960s after his rule had been overthrown in a coup (Birmingham 1995: 22), created a publishing house named ‘Panaf Books’, specialising in Pan-Africanism and other related issues. (See <<http://www.panafbooks.com/History.html>>, (04 June 2013).

The anti-colonial struggle not only involved the imperialists and the anti-colonial forces. The situation was often complicated by the position of the two main forces in the communist camp, China and the Soviet Union. The communist camp faced a split in the early 1960s that affected the struggles in the former colonies. The communist forces that played a significant role in the anti-colonial struggle aligned themselves either with China or the Soviet Union. There have been cases, especially in the 1970s, where the anti-colonial camp within a country splintered into two or more different sides, often leading to civil war (e.g. Angola; see Rothermund 2006: 231–238).

In order to analyse the anti-colonial struggles of the period, either in a single case or in general terms, the following factors ought to be taken into consideration:

- the sociopolitical and economic forces that formed and led the anti-colonial struggle
- the colonial forces and their potential for forging alliances and for transformation according to shifting circumstances (e.g. the transition from the French to the US in Vietnam)
- the position of the Soviet Union and China towards the anti-colonial struggle as a local focus of a wider ideological and political conflict, which must be assessed both in terms of diplomacy (statements, speeches in international fora and organisations) and in terms of material support (supplying arms and ammunition, military training).

In the belly of the beast: Struggles within imperialist countries

‘[T]he revolutionary movement has never been so powerful in the world, now that the Third World movements for liberation and economic independence have been joined to the anti-capitalist struggle in the imperialist centres.’ This quotation, by Etienne Balibar (1977: 194) addresses the significance of the relation between, on the one hand, the anti-colonial struggles and, on the other hand, struggles within the imperialist countries. The interpenetration of the two struggles cannot be stressed enough. The interaction of the two struggles – of those in the ‘Third World’ and those in imperialist and capitalist countries – should not be perceived as equal.

The struggles in the ‘Third World’ were, as we will see later, inspirational – mainly for the youth and the oppressed minorities – in the so-called ‘First’ and ‘Second’ Worlds; but there is no evidence, or at least evidence of an equal impact, of inspiration also flowing in the opposite direction.

The impact of anti-colonial movements on the imperialist and other capitalist countries, or on non-colonial countries, is visible in two different categories that have historically interacted with each other. The first was the development of anti-war and anti-imperialist movements in imperialist countries. These emerged as a direct result of expressions of solidarity with anti-colonial struggles. The second was the development of both theoretical positions and movements that were either inspired, guided, or otherwise affected by anti-colonial struggles.

As far as the former category is concerned, Vietnam should be considered the anti-colonial struggle that played the most significant role in creating a global anti-war movement. Vietnam was the womb from which emerged what we now refer to as the ‘Long Sixties’. Although the seeds had already been there since the period of the Algerian War and the Cuban Revolution, among others (Kalter 2013: 24). As Christoph Kalter states:

[T]his war was perceived by contemporary 68ers as being part of a larger Third World problematic shaped by the confrontation of ‘imperialism’ and ‘anti-imperialism’. (2013: 24)

Kalter underlines the fact that the notion of ‘Third World’ was also crucial for many of the protesters of the 1960s since:

[t]he concept allowed for a radical critique of existing systems of power and representations while permitting them at the same time to elaborate equally radical alternatives. The Third World stimulated the transnational mobilisation of protest movements. It had profound effects on worldviews and self-images of intellectuals and activists. (ibid.)

Regardless of the national particularities and dimensions of each movement, activists of the 1960s and the 1970s regarded themselves as part of a global movement with the anti-colonial struggles at the vanguard. ‘The storm

of the people’s revolution in Asia, Africa and Latin America requires every political force in the world to take a stand. This mighty revolutionary storm makes the imperialists and colonialists tremble and the revolutionary people of the world rejoice’ (Communist Party of China 1963). It is no coincidence that this was a high tide for separatist movements in imperialist countries, including movements of the Basques in Spain, then Corsicans in France, and Francophones in Quebec. Anti-colonial struggles also constituted the ideological and political basis for groups like the German ‘Red Army Faction’ (Moncourt and Smith 2009). Furthermore, the fact that race issues were placed at the top of the agenda in countries like the US, culminating in the formation of political organisations focusing on people of specific race/ethnicity such as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence (see Seale 1991) or the Young Lords (Enck-Wanzer 2010) cannot be fully comprehended outside of the context of anti-colonialism. An incident that highlights this relationship is featured in the documentary *Eldridge Cleaver: Black Panther* (1970), directed by William Klein. The documentary was filmed in Algiers where, in addition to Cuba and France, Eldridge Cleaver had found refuge while in exile. William Klein met Cleaver at the Pan-African Cultural Festival in 1969, where Cleaver had been officially invited by the Algerian government to participate along with his African-American Information Centre.

One should not forget the impact of revolutionary figures like Ho Chi Minh and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara ‘on the youth all over the world. Their names became slogans chanted during demonstrations and their figures were printed in posters hung on the walls in university dormitories and political hangouts. Che’s quote urging the creation of ‘two, three, many Vietnams’ (Guevara 1998/1967) became an inspiration and a motivation for activists in both the West and the East.

Fighting with cameras and typewriters

The anti-colonial struggle not only had an influence in terms of revolutionary practice, but also in terms of political and ideological theory per se and in terms of art and literature. In this connection, we must note the effect of anti-colonialism on the ‘most valuable means of mass agitation’, namely cinema (J.V. Stalin,

‘Thirteenth Congress of the R.C.P. (B.)’, <http://www.marx2mao.com/Stalin/TPC24.html> [5 June 2013]). More broadly, we must discuss the impact of anti-colonial struggles on Western intellectuals.

The aforementioned William Klein (IMDb n.d.) is just one example of many artists who aligned themselves with the anti-colonial forces through their work. Klein’s films, such as *Far from Vietnam* (1967; co-directed with Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Luc Godard), *Mr. Freedom* (1969) and *Festival Panafricain d’Alger* (1969), are directly related to the anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s. Another example is the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens (Europese Stichting, n.d.), who had been influenced by anti-colonial struggles as early as the 1940s, when he filmed *Indonesia Calling!* (1946). He also made films about Cuba, China, Laos, and Vietnam during the ‘Long Sixties’: *Six Hundred Million with You* (1958), *Pueblo Armado* (1961), *Carnet de Viaje* (1961), *Far from Vietnam* (1967), *The 17th Parallel* (1968), *The People and their Guns* (1970), *Meeting with President Ho Chi Minh* (1970), *How Yukong Moved Mountains* (1976). And of course, one must mention one of the most influential films of this period, Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), a film that ‘painted one of the most vivid pictures of Western colonialism and Third World resistance ever put on film’ (Elbaum 2006: 23). The trend of political films during the 1960s and 1970s focusing on the anti-colonial struggles of the Third World (Wayne 2001) was so strong and pervasive that it acquired the term ‘Third Cinema’:

The original ideas of Third Cinema, as with all such political and aesthetic movements, were a product of both the social and historical conditions of the time, particularly those prevailing in the ‘Third World.’ Poverty, government corruption, fraud ‘democracies,’ economic and cultural neo-imperialisms, and brutal oppression affected many Third World countries. These conditions required an appropriate response, and radical revolutionary movements rapidly sprang up to contest reactionary politics and to champion those whom Frantz Fanon called ‘the wretched of the earth.’ Third Cinema was in many ways an effort to extend the radical politics of the time into the realm of artistic and cultural production. (Gabriel n.d.)

In addition to the arts, like cinema, which were at once inspired by, and provided inspiration to, the struggles and activists worldwide, we must note a sharp transformation in academic thought in its relationship to anti-colonialism. For example, the formation of academic disciplines such as Colonial/Post-colonial Studies and Black Studies in American Universities (now usually known as African-American Studies) has been a direct result of anti-colonial struggles. One impact these struggles and movements had on the student mobilisations, especially in the US, was that the student movement took on as one of its central tasks dissemination of the history of the oppressed. In addition, students connected the anti-colonial struggle to the struggle for their own future – that is, to their demands for an education better suited to their needs. This led to the emergence of intellectuals from the heart of these movements, like Amiri Baraka, or the rise in popularity of intellectuals like C.L.R. James or Edward W. Said who, despite having been born in the colonies, had been active mainly in imperialist centres.

Another direct impact was the orientation that Economic Development studies took during that era, especially in the growing popularity of the dependency theory, some of the best-known proponents of which have been Samir Amin, Arghiri Emmanuel, Andre Gunder Frank, Paul Baran, and Paul Sweezy. One of the most popular periodicals of this school of thought has been *Monthly Review*, first published in 1949. Dependency theory first appeared before the 1960s but reached its peak during the 1960s and 1970s, precisely due to the high tide of anti-colonialism.

However, anti-colonialism not only influenced fields of studies and research as a whole, but also impacted intellectuals on an individual level. One typical case is that of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose contribution on this topic has often been neglected (Paige 2010: 227–228; Wolin 2010). Sartre took a highly active anti-colonial stand, and joined his thought to that of thinkers like Frantz Fanon, one of the best-known and most influential anti-colonial writers, for whose infamous *The Wretched of the Earth* Sartre wrote a preface (Fanon 1963). Other thinkers published works on a variety of academic fields such as history and political science, like the now conservative David Horowitz (then part of the New Left), who produced important

literature such as *From Yalta to Vietnam* (1969), and Herbert Marcuse, who published *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) and *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972).

Conclusion

During the 1960s and 1970s, the only certain thing was that everything was uncertain. Revolution was in the air, and the Absaloms of the world, who believed that their societies were mired in boredom and indifference, were proven wrong. One of the reasons that not only boredom was absent, but in reality there was a constant movement and upheaval, was the existence of anti-colonialism, the theory and practice of which affected not only the (former) colonies and colonial powers, but the whole world. The globe was a theatre of war and revolution. For almost two decades, every social and cultural practice, from music and film to books and reading habits, was transformed in the light of anti-colonial struggles. That period led to the emergence of intellectuals from below, with political activists becoming researchers for the needs of the struggle.

There is a very popular anecdote in Greece which tells how, during the 1970s in the Greek universities, one of the key questions that troubled the student movement was whether China had sent rice to Pinochet's Chile. Radicals worldwide were troubled during the period under consideration by similar questions on issues concerning countries far away, with which they had no actual relation, apart from being part of an imaginary global revolutionary process. Yet, what is the legacy of the anti-colonial movement of the 1960s and 1970s? A very popular phrase in contemporary social movements is 'think globally, act locally'. The essence of the 1960s and 1970s is that a national liberation or an anti-colonial victory was regarded as one's own by people who acted on a local or national level, but at the same time had a strong belief that their struggle was essentially helping the Vietcong, for example, move one step forward towards seizing power.

This spirit of being part of a transnational project helped intellectuals and artists to overcome the limits of national cultures and perceptions and try to place their works in a wider context. (see Klimke and Scharloth 2008). And along with the war(s), a hope for a better future was brought home. 'Bring the war home' was a popular slogan of the

anti-war movements during the Vietnam War (<http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/08/09/bring_the_war_home.php> [04 June 2013]). A lot seemed to be changing during the 'Long Sixties'. As shown in this essay, this period, as well as the issues involved in it, should be elaborated in a critical manner, without an attempt to either idealise or demonise what took place.

Christos Mais

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Arab Socialism

Championed by prominent figures like Baath movement leader Michel Aflaq, Arab socialism was a dominant, almost hegemonic ideology of the Arab World throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. In addition to the Baath Party movement, Arab socialism also influenced Nasser's Egypt, Algeria, Yemen, Palestine, and Lebanon. Even though it identified itself with the term socialism, there were vast differences between Western Marxism and Arab socialism in their interpretations of reality, one glaring example being Arab acceptance of the importance of spirituality and the role of religion in societal culture. Other differences included Arab socialists' relatively benign treatment of private property, the bourgeois class and its role in exploitation of labour, their emphasis on the revolutionary role of the whole Arab nation rather than just the working class, and finally their tendency to equate non-Arab socialism with Soviet practice. Hence, stemming from these philosophical differences, one may argue that Arab socialism, rather than being a movement of genuine resistance against prevailing conditions by the working class in the Arab world, was instead a pragmatic choice by Arab military/civilian bureaucratic elites in modernising their respective nations in the wake of their struggle for independence against Western imperialism. This then, leads us to an exploration of the historical causes that gave rise to what we call the modern state and its associated ideologies in the Middle East.

History of modern Middle Eastern societies

The most important determinant regarding Middle Eastern societies in their pre- and