Charlie Simons Final Essay Prompt #3

The second wave of the anti-colonial struggle unfolded at the end of World War II, a consequence of the post-war conditions primed for revolution. Defeats in Asia, occupation in Europe, and the blatant economic and human cost of fighting a global war exposed the transience of colonial control. Furthermore, millions of colonial soldiers and workers, the subalterns, returned home with grievances— grievances that the weakened Europe could not manage. At the same time, ideas that had once been largely confined to Western European politics, most notably, the concept of *national* self-determination had managed to make its way into these colonies. The prospect of self-determination alongside a weakened Europe spurred the great wave of anti-colonial struggle to motion. Mass *nationalist* mobilization across colonies, shifting international norms, and Cold War rivalry ended European colonial Empires; yet because new states inherited colonial export economies, Western hegemony flourished and evolved using undeniably clever economic tactics, creating what is known today as neo-colonialism.

Nationalist movements made colonial rule untenable from below, but they were structured to seize the colonial state rather than to dismantle its underlying economic order. David Rapoport's account of the "anti-colonial wave" emphasizes the disproportionate impact that a small number of organizations achieved in overseas European colonial empires, particularly Southern Asia, used bombings and other violent means to shake the colonial foundations.[1] Although in the modern era the word terrorism carries intense weight, Rapoport notes that there was "almost a universal international political climate that favored terrorist causes as automatically just," a phrase that captures the moral intent behind anti-colonial violence, as national liberation rather than simple criminality.[2] In Algeria, the FLN planted bombs in cafés and cinemas in Algiers during the Battle of Algiers (1956–1957) and waged guerrilla war in the countryside; French efforts

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[1] Donald J. Alberts, "Armed Struggle in Angola," in Insurgency in the Modern World, ed. Bard E. O'Neill, William R. Heaton, and Donald J. Alberts (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 253, quoted in David C. Rapoport, "Terrorism as a Global Wave Phenomenon: Anti-Colonial Wave," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[2] Rapoport, "Anti-Colonial Wave," 13–14.

to crush the movement through torture and collective punishment weakened the legitimacy of French rule substantially, particularly as the FLN's terror tactics created anxiety for French colonizers. In Kenya, Mau Mau fighters targeted settlers with relentless attacks, forcing Britain into a state of emergency and making a return to the prewar colonial superpower impossible.[3] Taken together, these movements drove up the material and political cost of empire to the point where withdrawal came to seem like the only sustainable option. Yet their leaders were often lawyers, teachers, and former officers trained within imperial institutions, and their central demand was control of existing ministries, security forces, and bureaucracies rather than a wholesale redesign of the economy. The same organizations that destroyed colonial empire were therefore well equipped to inherit its machinery and functions, but far less equipped to handle the export-centric economic structure that machinery had been built to serve.

Shifts in international norms and Cold War rivalry pushed European empires to decolonize on a rushed timeline, which had—and continues to have—dramatic consequences. As political pressures rapidly unraveled the colonial framework of each empire, the number of sovereign states increased at a staggering rate. In India, wartime crises— Japanese advances, the Quit India movement(1942-1945), and the Bengal famine— confronted Britain with a political and military dilemma that could not be resolved within the old colonial structures established.[4] Britain was feeling increasingly pressured by the looming Japanese naval presence surrounding, reinforced by Japan's terrifying occupation of the Dutch East Indies and The Fall of British colonies in South-East Asia, such as Singapore and Malaya. As such, the independence and partition settlement of 1947 was pushed through under conditions of strain and urgency, and brought with it violence between the Muslim population and the Hindu population. All over the British Empire states of emergency and negotiated reforms led to independence under constitutions that preserved much of the colonial administrative and fiscal apparatus. French and Dutch attempts to reimpose control in Indochina, Algeria,

[3] Rapoport, "Anti-Colonial Wave," 17.
[4] Buchanan, "War Crisis and the Decolonization of India," 7.

and Indonesia ended in drawn out wars and subsequent withdrawal as the political and financial costs became unsustainable, and still here too, the new regimes inherited economies built for the export of raw materials.

The cumulative effect was a change in the global consciousness surrounding the empire. As the United Nations gained more members, it created growing communication between nations and populations. Additionally, it placed heavy emphasis on self-determination and human rights. As such, empirical rule became increasingly difficult to justify. And so while the empire model fell, the infrastructures and routines of colonial extraction remained in place. Colonial borders and legal codes were largely retained. The colonies continued to distribute commodities outward, without a superpower to give each good to. The newly freed governments' budgets and civil services depended on export earnings and access to foreign credit. The old imperial division of labor— territories supplying raw materials and importing manufactured goods— survived the fall of the formal empires and set the terms on which the new states entered the postwar international economy.

As European empires continued to unravel in 1948, a US economic plan was developed, approved globally, and put into place; with this the former colonial states were drawn into the global economy on unequal terms. In their study of the Good Neighbor policy, Professor Buchanan and Ruth Lawlor argue that it is "best understood as a war policy, designed first to advance the construction of a U.S.-led autarkic bloc in the Americas,". After 1945, this model expanded globally through the Bretton Woods system and a dollar-centered monetary system; the International Monetary Fund and World Bank offered loans and stabilization programs that came with conditions pertaining to openness to foreign investment, and "responsible" economic management.[5] Newly independent states needed capital to build infrastructure and industry and needed markets for their exports, so it made intuitive sense for them to enter this system, regardless of their

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[5] Andrew N. Buchanan and Ruth Lawlor, "Latin America, the Good Neighbor, and the Global Second World War," *Antíteses* 17, no. 34 (2024): 8.

limited bargaining power, and this chasm of power only grew wider, becoming akin to a new system of imperialism.

Kwame Nkrumah's depiction of neo-colonialism captures the pattern that emerged when technically independent states, still built on colonial economic foundations and yet without an explicit external colonizer, were steered by external powers through control of production. Nkrumah puts this succinctly:

> The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.[6]

The juxtaposing theory and reality showed that though no longer a colonial empire, the States were still subject to international whims. In these States, global hegemon's dumped foreign currency into building mines, oil drilling sites, factories, in ways that often deepened extraction and export of those products back to the US rather than promoting the States development. While debt, loan conditions, and general economic struggles post-colony State's room to redistribute wealth, or implement protectionist policies; US and Soviet military aid, supplies aid and base agreements allowed the two powers to align numerous states with big-power goals (and their rivalries) often putting their importance above the state's own. Interests including the survival of colonial export structures and the asymmetries of the postwar economic order meant that Western nations could maintain a firm influence over the economic and political choices of the former colonies without imposing direct rule.

The great wave of anti-colonial struggles following WW2 was therefore fundamentally successful in eliminating old colonial empires. This is due to the intentional mass nationalist mobilization, the reframing of colonial empire as abusive in light of self-determinism and UN legislated human-rights, and the fight for dominance between the USSR and United States.. As organizations of the anti-colonial struggle brought

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[6] Kwame Nkrumah, Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965): ix

rampant instability to their empires, increasing global consciousness and the rapid, neo-colonial race between the United States and the Soviet Union, massively successful nations in the 1950s narrowed the range of futures in which European colonial rule could survive. The end of colonial empire reshaped world history by multiplying the number of sovereign states and delegitimizing empire as an acceptable form of governance. Yet because the new states inherited export-oriented colonial economies and entered a U.S.-centered international order whose rules they had not written, much of the economic hierarchy of the imperial era persisted in neo-colonial form. Political liberation arrived in a rushed manner, well before nations were prepared for economic transformation, and it was within that gap that Western hegemony could thrive, even without formal colonization.

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