

# North Versus South: Neocolonialism in the World of Climate Change

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## Research Question and Methodology

The purpose of this essay was to examine the question of whether or not colonial mindsets continue today through international climate change agreements. An examination of the labelling system of the Kyoto Protocol, carbon trading systems and Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs), and which nations were the most responsible for the effects of climate change, and which were most impacted was also made. This was done through a study of the current discourse surrounding climate change policy, most notably the Kyoto Protocol, and through direct investigation of the description of these agreements.

## Labels in the Kyoto Protocol

- **Annex I**- Developed countries that are responsible for high historical emissions and are held to legally binding emissions targets
- **Non-Annex I**- Developing nations that are less economically well off and are not responsible for high rates of historical emissions or held to binding emissions targets
- **Annex II**- A sub-category of Annex I nations that are also responsible to provide financial resources and green technologies to developing nations
- **Least Developed Countries (LDCs)**- A sub-category of Non-Annex I nations that are the least able to deal with the adverse effects of climate change and are given access to funding and technology to deal with these changes.

## Carbon Trading Systems

Carbon Trading Systems such as Clean Development Mechanisms (CDMs) are meant to provide developed nations with a way lower their own emissions, while at the same time providing developing nations with methods of sustainable development. However, the benefits of these CDMs are often far greater for developed nations than for developing nations. Many feel that carbon trading is ineffective because it allows for “the legal emissions of greenhouse gases” through limits instead of forcing emitters to change their ways. Criticism is also made of the fact that overwhelmingly, buyers in these programs come from the Global North, while sellers come from the Global South, resulting in similarities to the practices of traditional colonialism.

## Abstract

The current discourse surrounding climate change politics includes many aspects that continue ideals of colonialism. This neocolonialism is most obvious in terms of the geopolitics within the Kyoto Accord and carbon trading systems, along with many other green mechanisms. By examining the discourse surrounding climate change in many recent texts on the subject, inequalities become increasingly evident. This paper provides a basis for the discovery of neocolonial ideas by providing the definitions of colonialism and neocolonialism and giving examples of these practices throughout history. Current examples of neocolonialism are then examined in the division of nations into Annex I, Non-Annex I, Least Developed Countries and Annex II nations under the Kyoto Accord, resulting in the continuation of colonial ideals by producing a new form of the “white man’s burden” in climate politics. The notion of carbon trading is also examined as a new form of colonialism, allowing developed nations to take advantage of developing nations by utilizing their low carbon emissions to make up for developed nations’ own increasingly large carbon emissions. The notion of responsibility for climate change and the vast differences between those who create the emissions and those who suffer for them are examined in terms of two case studies which detail the different approaches to, and impacts of climate change based in Australia, an Annex I nation, and India, a Non-Annex I nation. The paper concludes with a call for more to be done to limit climate change by making global climate policy more equal for all nations.

## Definitions

- Colonialism- “an enduring relationship of domination and mode of dispossession, usually (or at least initially) between an indigenous (or enslaved) majority and a minority of interlopers (colonizers), who are convinced of their own superiority, pursue their own interests and exercise power through a mixture of coercion, persuasion, conflict and collaboration” (Gregory, Johnston and Pratt 94).
- Neocolonialism- the idea that states in the West continue to perpetrate colonialism while presenting themselves as upholders of the ideals of liberty and independence (Gregory, Johnston and Pratt).

## Who is Impacted Versus who is Responsible

Under the Kyoto Protocol, nations are divided based on “the fact that states are neither equal in their capabilities, nor equally responsible for the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere” (Pettenger 157). Annex I nations are considered to be responsible for historical emissions still within the atmosphere, because they underwent industrialization earlier, and so have been emitting large quantities of carbon dioxide for longer. It is believed that “20% of the world’s population is responsible for 75-80% of the historical emissions that created the climate crisis” (Sandberg and Sandberg 57). However, developed nations rarely feel the impact of these emissions (such as drought), and when they do, usually have the wealth to deal with them (through solutions such as irrigation). Many also believe that developing nations increasing emissions should be allowed as they are “subsistence emissions” that are necessary for survival, different than the “luxury emissions” of more developed nations (Pettenger 157).

## Conclusions

The continuation of colonial mindsets within our society is obvious when examining international policy such as climate change agreements. By dividing and labelling nations based on their economic wealth and development, a power disparity is created between the well-developed nations of the Global North and the developing nations of Global South. Nowhere is this inequality more evident than when examining carbon trading and Clean Development Mechanisms, in which developed nations are allowed to profit from the low emissions of the developing world. Without changes to the way climate change agreements are created to make them more equal to those of all nations, lasting change will not be made.