

General Assembly 4

Reparations for post-colonial nations



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Introduction

Colonialism has always been a part of our history. Colonialism was practiced in antiquity by empires such as ancient Greece, ancient Egypt, Phoenicia and ancient Rome. However, the modern use of the term is often strongly associated with the massive waves of western colonialism that occurred between the 15th and 20th centuries.

The age of discovery, led by Portugal and Spain, marked the first wave of European colonialism. The age of discovery began during the 15th century and came to a halt in the 1800s. This time period saw Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French and English empires participate in the colonisation of the Americas.

The second wave of colonialism started in the 19th century and lasted up until the mid-20th century. During this period many western powers such as the French, the UK and the Portugal found their mark in the African continent.

Colonialism has shaped our modern world. The inequalities within and between countries, racial biases, trade and money flows, and the political power of institutions are strongly linked to a countries colonial past. Former colonies are often still very far behind in their development in comparison to countries with colonial pasts.



Definition of Key Terms

Colonization

Colonization is a practice in which a powerful nation establishes and maintains its power over another nation. Colonialism is “the control by one power over a dependent area or people” according to Teen Vogue.

Antiquity

Antiquity is a period of ancient history saw civilizations and cultures flourish in and around the Mediterranean from about 3000 BCE till the end of the Roman Empire in 476 CE. Its trends included the development of early civilization, the rise and fall of empires and its contribution to philosophy, literature, art, architecture and various fields of scientific exploration and development. It is synonymous to the use of the term ancient, and can be used to refer to the period prior to the middle ages.

Arbitrary

Arbitrary actions lack justifiable basis or are often seen as subjective. Arbitrary refers to something that is based off of personal preference or choice, rather than being determined by rational measures. The implication is that when something is arbitrary it lacks forms of justification, fairness, mutual agreement or predictability in decision making. There were no rules, standards or principles that were followed when making an arbitrary decision.

Oppressors

Oppressors are individuals, institutions or groups that use their existing power and authority in order to dominate and suppress others without justifiable reasons. Often oppressors lack respect for the groups they oppress. European powers are often considered oppressors due to their colonial pasts.

Indigenous

Indigenous refers to the original inhabitants or their descendants of a specific region or territory. Indigenous peoples and communities are characterised by their distinct cultures, languages and the connections they have to their ancestral lands.



General Overview

Age of discovery

The first wave of western colonialism, also commonly referred to as the 'age of discovery' or the 'age of exploration', is believed to have been inaugurated by the famous explorer Christopher Columbus. Between 1492 and 1504 the Italian explorer led 4 transatlantic expeditions in name of the Spanish empire. His expeditions were in order to find a new trade route to the Asian continent after the closing of the closure of the silk road by the Ottoman empire. However instead of a new trade route to Asia these expeditions led to the European discovery of the Americas, then known as the new world. Over the course of the next centuries more European empires including the Spanish, Portuguese, French, English and Dutch sought out to colonise large parts of the Americas. It is important to note that these western states never truly discovered any land during the age of discovery as the land they 'discovered' was already inhabited by native peoples. However, the common mindset during this waves of colonialism was that unless the land was inhabited by white people, it had not previously existed. This explains their naming being 'the new world'.

Incentive

There were many motivating factors that led many European powers to colonise the Americas. The main incentive was the idea that they would be able to somehow establish a trade routes that connected them with Asia, without being infiltrated by the Ottoman empire. Yet, even when these routes weren't acquired, there were other incentives that encouraged western nations to maintain their colonies. Empires looked to their colonies as a valuable resource, providing them with gold, silver and other precious stones. They would exploit their colonies causing for a massive economic growth in their home countries which in turn largened inequalities between Europe and the Americas. European empires were also incentivised by the massive political growth they experienced from colonising the Americas. Through owning colonies an empire would assert dominance over other nations and made for a more powerful political influence amongst other European nations. Other important factors that influenced the age of discovery were mainly social. The religious factor is by far the most influential social factor that motivated the first wave of colonialism. Christianity was extremely influential during this time period and so many believed that it was their duty to god to convert the indigenous populations of the Americas to follow their beliefs. They



believed that through spreading and forcing Christianity upon the indigenous peoples that they would be rewarded with a higher power

Scramble for Africa

The second wave of western colonialism began during the 1800s and centred around the African continent. It's also called the 'scramble for Africa' as western nations created arbitrary borders across the continent. This wave of colonialism took away many traditions, deeming them inferior ways of life. Only Liberia and Ethiopia remained independent during the scramble for Africa. In 1870 around 10 percent of Africa was under the control of European countries, which became almost 90 percent by 1914. The scramble for Africa happened during the industrial revolution which increased rivalry between European nations. Because their industries were developing and they were making new technological developments they needed to be able to easily source raw materials. Therefore there was an increased interest amongst European powers to colonise various parts of Africa to ensure their success and prosper. The scramble for Africa happened during the time period we now call the period of new imperialism. Yet, European powers did not want to spend time or money fighting wars, so instead they divided Africa up amongst themselves without consideration of the indigenous populations. This was agreed upon during the conference of 1884. Due to how weak the European powers were after they had gone through the second world war, European powers were eventually forced to give up their colonies. The unbearable conditions for indigenous populations within colonies led to a fight for their independence. The anti-colonialist mindset of the USSR and the USA and other influences such as the newfound United Nations, led to even more pressure upon European powers to free their colonies.

After decolonization

The effects of colonialism on their colonies after they have gained independence varies depending on these factors; what specific colonial power they were under, the duration of colonial rule, and in what conditions they were decolonised. There are many negative impacts however the main effects of colonialism on it's colonies are as following.

Political instability

Many colonies were extremely politically unstable struggling to govern themselves as during the periods in which they were under control, that ability was taken from them. Many powers would leave behind systems of governance that were inapplicable to the local



context. Many African nations for example Nigeria, found many different ethnic groups under one official governmental system which led to extreme cases of genocide.

Economic dependence

Many colonies were also economically dependent upon their former colonisers as their only economic purpose had been to benefit the economies of their former oppressors. When under colonial power their labour and the exportation of their raw materials would have made up their economies. Most ex-colonies were unable to develop leading economies that benefited their ethnic peoples after their independence.

Infrastructural challenges

Many former colonies lacked infrastructural development after gaining their independence. Due to the fact that their former colonisers were uninterested in the development of their colonies. There had often been a lack of investment in their healthcare, education and other critical services as former colonisers had instead focussed on exploiting their labour forces and land. This lack of development within various institutions led to challenges within newly independent countries in sectors such as service provision, public administration and governance.

Culture and tradition

Colonialism has had a massive impact on the social and cultural traditions, values and norms of many former colonies. Colonisers would continue to follow their own beliefs and practice their own traditions when within the colonies they established. In many colonies the beliefs of their oppressors were even forced upon the indigenous communities and groups of those lands. Eventually the lack of freedom in regard to cultural and religious practice led to the erosion of many indigenous cultures. Ethnic beliefs would often be replaced with the new religions, norms and values that were forced upon colonies. Even after a colony would regain its independence, the behaviourism and legacies that the colonisers would leave behind would remain. Even the institutions and various systems such as those of governance or justice would be left behind.



Border disputes leading to ethnic conflict

Arbitrary borders agreements made by rulers for the purpose of sharing of colonial land often led to territorial, ethnic and religious tensions between various indigenous populations forced to share land. These tensions persisted even after colonies gained their independence as the artificial borders imposed upon these communities remained. These tensions that arose due to colonialism sometimes led to border disputes, conflict and even civil wars amongst native populations. Many newly independent states would struggle with national identity and rightful ownership of the land after their colonisers had left.

Increased inequalities

Colonialism caused for massive social, economic, and cultural inequalities within colonies and between countries. Even after a colonies independence these inequalities within its borders often persist. In former colonies the massive differences in socioeconomic status including issues involving access to resources, poverty and social justice remain extremely prevalent. Inequalities regarding the standard of living compared to their other counterparts, such as their former colonisers, are also still massive and ever growing. As many former colonies had been prevented from growing economically, socially and politically for long periods of time.

Major Parties Involved

European powers

European powers are responsible for the two western waves of colonisation discussed in this report. It is important that only part of both waves are mentioned as colonization also occurred in other parts of the world such as Asia. The European powers responsible for the age of discovery are Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. These European powers were also responsible for the scramble for Africa along with two other nations Belgium and Italy.

Former African colonies

Due to the fact that the most recent wave of colonisation centred around the colonisation of Africa, former African colonies are still extremely involved in trying to get the reparations they deserve. Former African colonies are all African countries excluding Ethiopia which fought Italian



invasion, Liberia which was under the protection of the United States of America, the Dervish State, a part of modern day Somalia. Two nations which were only briefly colonised include Libya and Morocco.

United Nations

Since its creation the United Nations has helped to develop treaties and pass resolutions that hold a firm stance against any form of colonisation. Since its birth more than 80 colonies, home to a total of around 750 million people have gained their independence. The United Nations special committee on decolonization C-24 was also established in 1961 by the general assembly. As of today there are 17 Non-Self-Governing states. At 2023 opening session the chair ambassador stated that the committee will remain till there are no longer any Non-Self-Governing states under the committee's eyes.

The Japanese colonial empire

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
12 October 1492	Christopher Columbus reached America marking the beginning of the age of discovery and the first wave of western colonialism.
20 July 1810	Colombia became the South American country to declare its independence from European control under Spanish rule.
3 January 1868	The Japanese empire started when emperor Meiji was named emperor.
1969	Japan acquired Hokkaido marking the beginning of Japanese expansion
1995	Taiwan and the Penghu islands were colonised by Japan marking the beginning of Japanese colonialism.
15 November 1884	The Berlin conference of 1884 was held marking the official beginning of the scramble for Africa.
6 March 1957	Ghana becomes the first African colony to have gained independence.
18 April 1980	Zimbabwe became the last African country to free itself from British rule.



25 November 1975	Suriname officially gained its independence from the Netherlands being the last South American country to gain independence from a European power.
27 June 1977	Djibouti became independent marking the end of the second wave of colonisation.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Decolonization programme in the United Nations System, 6 June 1997 (A/AC.109/2094)
- Report of the Special Political and Decolonization committee, 24 November 1995 (A/50/610)
- Report of the Special Committee on Decolonization, 8 July 2002 (A/57/23(partIII))
- Dissemination of information on decolonization, 5 July 2000 (A/AC.109/2000/20)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The United Nations have made continuous efforts to strengthen their ties with the people of the 17 remaining Non-Self-Governing. By keeping open gateways of communication with these territories the UN is able to gain an understanding of their needs and help protect the populations of these territories. The UN is constantly helping them to find solutions and make way in developing their economies, political systems and institutions, all whilst keeping in mind the importance of the maintenance of their culture and traditions. Eventually the United Nations aims to help these 17 territories to break their current ties and to regain their independence.

Before the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization make any decisions or pass related resolutions to issues surrounding efforts of decolonisation they first handedly consult with the communities of Non-Self-Governing territories. This allows for the people of these territories to be heard, and enables them to contribute to the discussion. This has seemed to work as it has made the communities of these territories that feel oppressed to have some sort of voice or involvement in the decisions that will decide their futures.

In order to try and reach the goal of a world without colonisation the United Nations Special Committee is also trying to start discussions with those administering powers of the left over 17 territories yet to gain independence. The United Nations believes that it is in everyone's best interest



and will eventually help work towards a decolonised world. They have yet to see direct developments due to these dialogues, although they remain confident that it is of utmost importance to build and maintain these relationships that they have been trying to form.

Possible Solutions

Many history books still teach that European expansion during the age of discovery should simply be regarded as exploration. The history books show the economic wealth and political power that the age of discovery brought Europe. However, they brush over or even fail to mention the parts of history that show the darker part of European colonialism. They don't show the violence and genocide that Europeans committed against the many groups of native American history. A small start to a large solution would be to start educating people about the truth. By spreading awareness through accurate history books that tell the full truth, and by stopping the spread of misinformation, we can start to end the suffering caused by colonialism.

Due to the recent COVID-19 outbreak the developing world, many of which are post-colonial nations are facing even more challenged when trying to develop their social, political and economic systems. In order to help these countries get back on track and to try and close the ever growing inequalities in living standards between former colonisers and their oppressors. Institutions such as the world bank and the developed world must work together to help fund and encourage development within these nations.

In order to try and end further suffering of the communities and individuals that have been harmed by colonialism we must raise awareness and shift opinions in order for everyone to support post-colonial nations. In 2014 a YouGov poll showed that 59 percent of British people viewed the British empire as a great pride, it also showed that around 49 percent believed that the empire had benefitted it's former colonies. In order to gain recognition for the suffering that many individuals had to endure at the hands of their colonisers, powers with colonial pasts must own up to their mistakes and spread awareness for the suffering of social media. Awareness campaigns can be created that are funded by governments of nations with colonial pasts. These campaigns will then likely open valuable discussions amongst their populations spreading awareness for the issue.



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Appendix or Appendices

- I. www.teenvogue.com/story/colonialism-explained Teen Vogue on what colonialism is and how it has shaped our world today.
- II. www.un.org/en/library United Nations library houses important resolutions, speeches, decisions and treaties on the UN involvement of this issue
- III. www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/c24/regional-seminars#:~:text=Since%20the%201990s%2C%20the%20Special%20Committee%20on%20Decolonization,the%20International%20Decade%20for%20the%20Eradication%20of%20Colonialism United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation
- IV. www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2019/10/un-human-rights-expert-calls-states-make-reparations-colonialism-and-slavery#:~:text=NEW%20YORK%20%2829%20October%202019%29%20%E2%80%93%20Reparations%20for,to%20make%20reparations%20to%20victims%20and%20their%20descendants talks about reparations for racial discrimination rooted in colonialism
- V. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/14/heres-how-to-repay-developing-nations-for-colonialism-and-fight-the-climate-crisis the Guardian with possible ways to repay post-colonial nations

