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GA4: Special Political and Decolonisation (SPECPOL)

Research Report

Topic 3: Identifying the responsibility of past colonists to support previously colonized countries.



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Introduction

The concept of colonialism is still present to this day, although it may take a different form than it did in the past. However, regarding past colonialism, it has left, and will continue to leave, a lasting impact on those that have been affected. The injustices against colonized states were considerably brutal, and in many post-colonised states, there is still an exertion of influence through economic, political and social means by previous colonial powers. As a result, post-colonial states are calling upon their previous colonizers to take responsibility for such actions. Although the effects of colonialism cannot be taken away, it is important to discuss how past colonizers can take responsibility for what has occurred in the past as there are many forms in which this could take place. Addressing the effects of colonialism can contribute to overcoming the inequalities in previously colonized states as well as the challenges surrounding modern sustainable development.

Definition of Key Terms

Colonialism: The practice of a nation expanding its power and influence over other regions, typically with the goals of economic exploitation, cultural dominance, or geopolitical control.

Reparations: The provision of compensation to certain parties for past injustices or harms they have suffered, taking historical grievances and consequences of actions into account.

Background Information

The fundamental nature of colonialism was rooted in the want for nations to build their global power and influence, obtaining resources that directly helped their own economies at the expense of a country's native people. It brought about slavery, brutality, and death. Dating back to Ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, it was highly prevalent between the 16th to the 20th century, where there was a heavy amount of colonialism, where there was a large number of countries that were subjected to the brutalities and injustices of colonialism.¹ At the time of

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1914, there was a great majority of the world's countries that had been colonized by European countries at some point. Such European colonists, mainly including Spain, Portugal, England, the Netherlands, France and Germany, built empires overseas, fighting each other for the right to these lands. These colonial powers subjected their colonial counterparts to exploitation, often forcing their own cultural attitudes and practices into the nation. During the 18th and 19th century, and then further in the 20th, there were wide-spread revolutions resulting in colonized countries taking back control over their nations.²

The United Nations recognised colonialism as an international practice during the plenary meeting of the General Assembly in 1960, declaring it to be the “subjection of people to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation” to “a denial of human rights”.³ Overall, the effects of the practice took the form of disease, indigenous social, political, and economic structures, repression, exploitation, land displacement and degradation.⁴ It is noted that the actions of colonialism have led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other related intolerances.⁵ Members of previously colonized communities believe that it is time for former colonists to own up to the wrongs they committed in the past, as well as engage in conversations with them. This can help to combat the aforementioned effects, but also to aid in the development that was stalled for so many years under colonialism. As well as these effects, there are other consequences surrounding the concept of colonialism.

Once colonized areas had gained a sense of independence, many were left to build up their nation alone. Colonialism had the pure goal of extracting resources, meaning that the infrastructures put in place reflected this, resulting in the colonized nation to have a limiting power regarding their own economy and population.⁶ As well as this, independence, in some cases, led to domestic conflict.⁷ Considering that they had such little political power, there wasn't necessarily a political influence other than the colonizer. This led to the need to build up a new nation from scratch, as well as with the destruction that the colonists left. Additionally, there is a lasting impact on the position that the previously colonized has in the international world. Colonized regions were left without the same international reputation and standing as their colonists, needing to build up diplomatic relations.⁸ These economic, political and social effects are what prompts the need for a form of responsibility to be taken regarding colonization.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

² Erin Blakemore, “Colonialism Facts and Information,” Culture, February 19, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism#:~:text=Colonialism>.

³ CATHERINE LU, “Colonialism as Structural Injustice: Historical Responsibility and Contemporary Redress*,” Journal of Political Philosophy 19, no. 3 (April 18, 2011): 261–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2011.00403.x>.

⁴ Megan Caldwell, “The Effects of Colonization: How It Happened and How It Still Continues,” Medium (Medium, February 19, 2017), <https://medium.com/@megancaldwell62/the-effects-of-colonization-how-it-happened-and-how-it-still-continues-b463350d1ac5>.

⁵ Human Rights Council, “Acting High Commissioner: Addressing the Legacies of Colonialism Can Contribute to Overcoming Inequalities within and among States and Sustainable Development Challenges of the Twenty-First Century,” OHCHR, September 28, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/acting-high-commissioner-addressing-legacies-colonialism-can-contribute>.

⁶ Megan Caldwell, “The Effects of Colonization: How It Happened and How It Still Continues,” Medium (Medium, February 19, 2017), <https://medium.com/@megancaldwell62/the-effects-of-colonization-how-it-happened-and-how-it-still-continues-b463350d1ac5>.

⁷ Megan Caldwell, “The Effects of Colonization: How It Happened and How It Still Continues,” Medium (Medium, February 19, 2017), <https://medium.com/@megancaldwell62/the-effects-of-colonization-how-it-happened-and-how-it-still-continues-b463350d1ac5>.

⁸ Megan Caldwell, “The Effects of Colonization: How It Happened and How It Still Continues,” Medium (Medium, February 19, 2017), <https://medium.com/@megancaldwell62/the-effects-of-colonization-how-it-happened-and-how-it-still-continues-b463350d1ac5>.

European colonists: In order of those that have colonized the greatest number of countries include the United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Belgium.

Previously-colonized regions: Countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are amongst those most subjected to colonial rule. However, other cases are prevalent. Specific nations will vary based on the historical context.

United Nations: Various UN bodies, such as the General Assembly and specialized agencies, are heavily involved in discussion regarding the responsibility of former colonists and for support of previously colonized countries.

Relevant UN Resolutions

Efforts by the United Nations surrounding addressing colonization derive from Article 1 (2) of the Charter of the United Nations with the principle of “equal rights and self-determination of peoples”. Three specific chapters within the Charter are devoted to the interest of dependent peoples. Chapter XI (“Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories, Articles 73 and 74) highlight issues around decolonisation.

- Article 1 (2): Emphasizes the principle of sovereign equality of all Member States, suggesting that former colonists should acknowledge and respect the sovereignty of previously colonized nations.
- Article 2 (4): Calls for members to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, underscoring the importance of respecting the independence of previously colonized nations.
- Article 55: Stresses the need for international cooperation in promoting universal respect for human rights, contributing to the well-being of peoples, and assisting in their economic and social development.
- Article 73: Highlights the responsibility of former colonial powers toward the well-being and development of territories under their administration, considering the interests and aspirations of the inhabitants.

Resolutions relating to the topic of colonization adopted by the United Nations General Assembly that are relevant include:⁹

- UNGA Resolution 1514 (XV) - Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and People (1960)
- UNGA Resolution 2625 (XXV) - Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States (1970)

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

⁹ Documents | the United Nations and Decolonization,” www.un.org, n.d., <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/documents>.

Panel discussions have been held by the United Nations specialized Human Rights Council surrounding decolonisation.¹⁰ The aim of these panels is to spark and facilitate dialogue surrounding the effects of colonization, shedding light specifically around the human rights aspect. One specific panel held on 28th of September 2022 on the negative impact of the legacies of colonialism on the enjoyment of human rights. Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif stated that addressing the legacies of colonialism can contribute to overcoming the inequalities caused. These discussions are vital to further resolving the issue as it allows for openness around solutions that can be found. Notably, many indigenous community members speak at such panels, offering personal insight.

Apologies from former colonists have become more prevalent in recent years. The nations of the Netherlands, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom as well as the European Parliament have issued apologies surrounding their role in colonisation and the slave trade.¹¹

Certain countries have participated in cultural repatriation efforts in order for previously colonized to regain their cultural artifacts taken during the colonial period. This includes, for example, the government of the Netherlands, who have outlined specific policies in order to work with other countries to repatriate them with taken artifacts.¹²

Initiatives surrounding debt relief have been started under The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative launched by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund of 1996.¹³ This was then supplemented in 2005 by the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). This helps countries that have been economically affected by colonialism, allowing them to spend more on health, education and social services in addition to building their economies.

Possible Solutions

Engaging with former colonists to help implement a system whereby they give financial compensation to support the social and economic development and infrastructure in previously colonized nations.

Carrying out initiatives that work to help development and assistance surrounding socio-economic disparities resulting from historical colonization such as health and education.

Providing debt relief and economic support to countries that have proof of economic challenges resulting from colonization.

¹⁰ Human Rights Council, "Acting High Commissioner: Addressing the Legacies of Colonialism Can Contribute to Overcoming Inequalities within and among States and Sustainable Development Challenges of the Twenty-First Century," OHCHR, September 28, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/acting-high-commissioner-addressing-legacies-colonialism-can-contribute>.

¹¹ Alice Tidey, "Some EU Nations Have Apologised for Their Colonial Past. Is It Enough?," euronews, December 20, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/12/20/some-european-countries-have-apologised-for-their-colonial-past-is-it-enough>.

¹² Cultuur en Wetenschap Ministerie van Onderwijs, "Government: Redressing an Injustice by Returning Cultural Heritage Objects to Their Country of Origin - News Item - Government.nl," www.government.nl, January 29, 2021, <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2021/01/29/government-redressing-an-injustice-by-returning-cultural-heritage-objects-to-their-country-of-origin>.

¹³ International Monetary Fund, "Debt Relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative," IMF, February 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/Sheets/2023/Debt-relief-under-the-heavily-indebted-poor-countries-initiative-HIPC>.

Implementing policies around land and resource redistribution, ensuring that proper control of their own natural resources is regained in an effective manner.

Establishing initiatives around reconciliation whereby dialogue can be facilitated between former colonists and those they previously colonized.

Establishing a framework whereby former colonists agree to preserve and restore the cultural heritage that they may have played a part in suppressing during their colonial period.

Establishing clear agreements that recognise the responsibility of former colonists.

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