

# Scars of Colonialism

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When one brings up the word ‘colonialism’, people might think of Christopher Columbus stepping foot onto the coasts of a Caribbean island or maybe the Pilgrims sitting down with Native Americans for Thanksgiving dinner, but most will fail to note the aftershock or scars of colonialism. There is not one continent that has not been touched by the hand of colonialism and imperialism and no time soon will it be forgotten. Most people will agree that colonialism wasn’t so much of a positive thing (a drastic change from public opinion a century ago), but those same people will tell you to ‘shut up’ and ‘get over it – it’s in the past’ when you rant on about its horrors. Colonialism did cause much death, slavery, and social injustices, throughout its reign but it is my opinion that the majority of its wrong doings are taking place today.

The most obvious effect of colonialism that has dragged out throughout the centuries is that on culture. From the beginning of a power’s induction to imperialism, it has progressed economically, politically, and culturally. The social and political institutions of these powers were and are all tweaked in accordance to their populations’ culture. As these powers’ colonies began to go through the decolonization process, they were programmed and built to fit the mold of their former colonizers. The highest forms of the culture of imperial powers – clothing, medicine, housing, religion, family and social institutions, and so on – all began the goal of the newly found republics. This fact is not so obvious to the naked eye, but one should ask themselves the following question to get the picture; how many former colonies have attempted to regress to their previous cultures?

Most of this was done by two institutions: the former colonial governments, wishing to assimilate their colonial subjects, and the missionaries. A. Adu Boahen, former Professor of History at the University of Ghana, described the effect of western missionaries on African colonies:

The standards of living of the converts had changed, for some were wearing European-style clothes, had gained access to modern medicine, were living in houses built in a modern style, were practicing monogamous marriage, and were feeling contemptuous of their own traditional institutions, their traditional polygamous system of marriage, and their traditional religion.[1]

These missionaries would (and sometimes still do) give education to their converts, which was often constructed from western-style curricula. This led to a split in culture and a polarization of these colonies’ population into converts (often westernized) and nonconverts (often nonwesternized). In some areas, the vast majority of the population were converted (as seen in modern Latin America), and in others, colonial religions did not spread far (the Middle East), but in all colonies an upper-class receiving western education and a lower-class of peasants and proletarian culturally differed sharply. or hardly any of the Such conditions offered a breeding place towards cultural clash, as seen by the North Vietnamese and the more colonially influenced culture of South. These converts would later end up supporting encroaching colonial imperialism. Such policies were carried out by the missionaries due to the fact that they did not identify themselves with local and indigenous racial ambitions and idiosyncrasies.[2] This resulted in the adoption of one culture by another; one man was attempting to walk in the shoes of another man thousands of miles away. Journalist Robert D. Kaplan recalls in his travel journal, *An Empire Wilderness*, a Native American friend telling him “Our inability to cope in the white man’s world may be due to our Indian culture”.[3]

The worst thing about one culture attempting to live that of another's is the adoption of values specified for a completely different peoples. Moro Naba, an African king, told an imperial officer that "you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country good just as it is." [4] What we see here is a difference in values; Moro Naba prefers more traditional African life styles to that of the French – a disagreement in values that has been forfeited to the latter's by today's African states. The imperial powers, along with the colonies' elite and convert populations wished to civilize Africa through "introducing Christianity, education, capitalism, industrialization and the Protestant work ethic". [5] All of these institutions required a change in cultural attitudes and values. Some of the cultural values necessary for these institutions have yet to fully assimilate (thus explaining these their failures in the region).

The commercializing of land also clashed with local cultures. The North American Indians for example could simply not understand how the earth could be privatized. For the commercialization of land to take place and to coexist with native cultures and peoples, a change in values and cultural characteristics had to take place. Even courts, which are the highest forms of institutionalized enforcers of values, were established by colonial administrations. We now see that if a colonial power did not aggressively push its cultures onto the colonized, that it forced the other colonies' culture to reform in order to coexist with that of the imperial power.

Not only have cultures been adopted or reformed, but complete cultures have disappeared. During the protocolonial stages of Africa's interaction with the European powers, for example, the long-distance trade that accelerated through the continent resulted in the spread of languages and cultures. This unification of commercial areas led to the conquering and replacement of various cultures by others. This can be seen in my article Globalization and Culture where I elaborate on how half of the world's living languages are expected to disappear within the next century. In my writing I note how Arawak villages in Latin America are quickly disappearing as their youth run off to the large cities (results of colonialism) to take up jobs in the fast-paced world market (also the result of colonialism). [6] Various cultures have died during the era of colonialism, and cultures continue to die today due to the institutions constructed by that colonialism.

The former colonies have also inherited the social classes implemented by their former colonists. Someone noted to me how Latin American presidents are generally white-skinned, while the vast majority of the population that lies under them is made up of blacks, mulattos, mestizos, and Indians. This is due to the fact that the upper class that Latin America has today is the same upper class that it had during the Spanish occupation. The white-skinned rich Latin American landowners are the great great grandchildren of the white-skinned rich Latin American landowners that were sent by Spain expand the Spanish empire.

Gapping class differences can best be seen in rural Latin America, where rich landowner class and the lower peasant class lies the most polarized. In some areas, the great grandchildren of a farm's peasants work for the great grandchildren of their ancestors' landowner. These plantations are not a result of postcolonial Latin American capitalism gone wrong; "The traditional agrarian structures in Latin America," states Professor Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "have evolved over a period of several hundred years. They have their roots in Spanish (and for Brazil, Portuguese) colonial policy," [7] and some have barely changed structure after the Spanish withdrawal. Since the land still laid in the hands of the rich Spaniards after the banning of the slavery of Indians, Indians were required to render a large amount of labor in exchange for the right to cultivate a small plot of land for themselves if they wanted to eat. [8] Due to the isolation of these rural plantations, "it [is] possible to maintain a form of serfdom that was instituted by

the encomienda system and had already passed into illegality 250 years ago”.[9] Colonially-designed classes still exist, and the wide span in-between the upper and lower class creates an “absence of the possibilities of social ascension from the lower ranks”.[10]

In most of the former colonies, class did not even exist before they were invaded, purchased, colonized, or exchanged as commodities as war booty. In one form or another, ‘left behind’ class systems barely differ, or are even identical to that of the former colonizers’. These classes tend to be drawn according to race and have negatively effected the mentalities of the lower classes as seen in the following quotation:

Despite a pervasive myth of racial democracy in Belize, discrimination exists. Belize is not a harmonious, multiethnic island in a sea of violence. For example, sociologist Bruce Ergood notes that it “is not uncommon to hear a light Creole badmouth ‘blacks,’ even though both are considered Creole. This reflects a vestige of English colonial attitude summed up by the saying, ‘Best to be white, less good to be mulatto, worst to be black...’”[11]

These social, economic, and cultural tensions that have survived the days of colonialism are the root causes to the vast majority, if not all, of the uprisings and social movements that are common throughout the former colonies. Colonial powers stepped in, molded mini- societies and classes in their own image, packed up their bags and left, then wipe their hands clean as the former colonized kill each other off.

Colonies were not founded so that their indigenous populations could prosper from economic development – the economies of colonies were designed so that wealth would be exported to its colonial power.[12] The economies imposed onto the colonies continued to exist far after independence and decolonization was achieved and still continue in the same matter today. Much of wealth generated by postcolonies – weather in the form of raw minerals, capital, or crops – is exported to former colonial powers.

Many of these colonies became dependent on cash crops and other goods that were bought up by their colonizers’ countries. This caused serious problems, for their dependency on goods that are so frigidly linked to the world market now leaves them at the mercy of foreign economies. Exportation is prioritized so much by the postcolonies’ economic policies that little or no capital is left for the development of the country.[13]

The final and the worst of the postcolonial trauma is that of colonially-drawn borders. Most of the borders that exist today around and in the former colonies are artificial creations totally ignoring geographical, and most importantly ethnocultural realities. Many of these political borders were drawn up on maps in the chancelleries of the colonial powers.[14] This establishment of false borders in ignorance towards the predefined boundaries of nations, clans, kingdoms, and empires, has caused serious problems for postcolonies. How can a country wish to successfully nation-build when its state is made up of a host of different ethnocultural groups and nations, each with different histories, traditions, cultures, and languages?

Border and territorial conflicts between Pakistan and India, Iraq and Kuwait, and ethnic clashes in Nigeria, Uganda, and Zaire have all been due to colonially-imposed borders. Austria-Hungary’s imperial boundaries that overlapped the preexisting nation of Serbia is the main cause for World War I. We see here that these fake boundaries often include or cram together rival groups. American colonialism, for instance, unlike European imperialism did not conquer and divide, but conquer and expel thus cramming together different Indian cultures.. This too

has caused tension between various Native American groups as seen in the quarrels between the Hopi and the Navajo reservations:

The struggle between the Hopi and the Navajo appears to outsiders age old, but it began only in the late nineteenth century as a reaction to modern development and the conversion of imperial territories to states, which necessitated the drawing of artificial borders and the adjudication of land rights for the exploitation of water and minerals.[15]

Colonialism might be long gone but its scars have yet to even begin to heal. Reparations in no way have been handed over to the postcolonies for the imperial actions committed against them. In fact, these postcolonies find themselves in debt to the former colonial powers. The blame for all of these woes have been retracted from the former imperial powers thus creating a whole generation or two within the postcolonies who blame the “inefficiencies” of their countries for their horrible conditions. They are mistaken, for it is not domestic inefficiencies but colonial scars that make the Third World the way it is today.

*Luis Orlando Gallardo Rivera can be reached at [reddpr@hotmail.com](mailto:red DPR@hotmail.com)*

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