

Imperialism in the late 19th century



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Imperialism is the intentional expansion of a country's nation through subjugation of another. Ultimately driven by the economic, political and social incentives of an empire as it develops. The concept of perpetual imperialism is impossible as it's founded exceedingly on capitalist based desires, this did not impair the endeavours of European countries throughout the 19th century. It was through the imperialism of modern empires that today's world was forged. The repercussions are still rampant across many countries, exceedingly so in Africa through it's economic, political, and social impressions.

Often it was the demand for profit, or commodities that prompted imperialism. Having domain over an area that offered unique resources was a powerful and lucrative position. Trade within new markets offered greatly prosperous opportunities. The wealth created through imperialism ensured greater economic security and created more respect for the nation. The 19th century saw the emergence of Great Britain's empire, many longstanding empires like that of Napoleon had faded, allowing the first economic, political, and military "superpower" to preponderate. Indications of a capitalist inspired economic drive directly corresponds to a Marxist view of economy: a capitalist system needs to consistently seek new opportunities for profit, new markets and resources would need to be found and exploited. This insinuates that imperial action is necessary to maintain wealth, power, and influence, once resources are exhausted capitalism will adapt a socialist agenda. Fellow economist John Hobson agreed with Marx's approach to capitalist driven imperialism. He worked in South Africa and concluded that the diamond mines there were the motive for the Boer Wars. In *Imperialism:*

A Study (1902) he condemns imperialism alluding to its chauvinistic agenda. Hobson was convinced that imperialism denounced common morals and sought out vulnerability in foreign countries. Allowing Empire nations to profit off of resources with lessened labour expenses as they dictated the distribution of wealth.

Ultimately empires expanded conquering new territories and creating new colonies with the intention of utilising the resources (both labour and raw materials) that country had in abundance. The colonies in turn acted as new markets that dilated the empire's span of control. For example, Britain occupied India until the mid 20th century, during that time the cotton plantations and the affordable labour that farmed them were exploited for the British empire's profit. The raw cotton was exported back to Britain to be manufactured for cloth and sold back throughout the markets. The British empire also insured their monopoly by forbidding production in unauthorised territories.

Imperialism in summary was entirely profit for the empire and resulted in financial security, power, and influence for the Imperialist nation.

The political disposition of Europe engaged ambition and encouraged an imperialistic nature. An individual country could never have the same power or influence as an Empire, consequently a sense of patriotic obligation was deemed necessary to gain political ground. This, in a sense, was nationalism or influenced by it. After the French Revolution in 1789 the pride and place of one's country was a valued concept that spread throughout Europe. This sense of nationalism contributed to the imperialistic desire of emerging

democratic systems. The goal of these imperialistic ventures was not incentivised by wealth but rather the power and governmental control of ruling the conquered nations. More specifically theories of political imperialism can be grouped into three categories; Metrocentric, Pericentric, and Systemic. Metrocentric refers to the tendencies of the imperial nations, the subjective motivations of the Empire i. e. capitalist nations distributing capital.

Pericentric theories are regarding the political incentives of a colony and as a result how involved the domineering Empire will be in governing it. A colonised country may have elite societal members that wish to conserve the integrity of the nation and so will be unwilling to compromise, deeming direct governing necessary to maintain possession. Systemic theories of imperialism are characterised by the competition between sovereignties for continuity and influence. Sustenance of capitalist nations are reliant on the conquest of territories for the particular resources they retain. Regardless of current demand by disallowing competing Empires to hold them supremacy is maintained. This is exemplified by what's referred to as the " Scramble for Africa". In the late 19th century and into the early 20th century several European countries (including Britain) were in contest for the occupation of Africa, interest in the land was not limited to its natural reserves, it was clear that it acted valuably as a link to oceanic trade. Each country's involvement was strategic and intended to limit the trade of the others.

However, it was not solely political and economic incentives that enlivened imperialism, social motives were used to condone the immoral actions of empires. The rising popularity of Darwinism's social perceptions of " survival

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of the fittest" played a significant role in the justification of 19th century imperialistic tendencies. This theory suggested that the elite of any society would be the "best-adapted" thus the elite deemed themselves superior and justified the domination and exploitation of less-developed countries that *they* labelled as inferior. Herbert Spencer supported Darwinist theories of natural selection and proposed his own ideas of the world's natural order. His proposals encouraged imperial actions even more barbaric than Darwinism. Suggesting the retraction of funds for international development and aid for the poor, he theorised that by doing so the truly strong, despite difficult acclimation, would still persevere. Thus imperialism was excused as an evolutionary step, that would serve as a method of preservation of the western elite while weeding out the weak of alternate societies. Another significant social drive for 19th century imperialism was religion. Religion was influential in many endeavours during the 1800s, there was an incentive to spread religion with the desire to convert on a large scale and ultimately to decimate other conflicting religions. Missionaries provided education and health care in conjunction with Empirical religion aiming to inspire a wilful spiritual transition.

In the late 19th century there was little regulation of validity of publicised scientific inference, so the hypothesis of geographers regarding the effects of climate on societal development was taken as fact. They had concluded that individuals are a product of their physical environment, i. e. the physical landscape and the climate. False statements were made insinuating that it was equatorial locality that determined the level of a society's civilisation. This led to prejudicial stereotyping from highly regarded sources. President

Thomas Jefferson contributed by stating tropical climates “ encouraged laziness, relaxed attitudes, promiscuity, and generally degenerative societies.” Due to the mass of writers in agreement over the matter a racial bias was created that tilted in favour of a Eurocentric pattern of thought, naming them civilised and hardworking whilst demonising and stigmatising the people of the lands the empires intended to conquer. It was the environmental determinism that moralised the imperialist acts of the 19th century and bore many of the racial stereotypes that unjustly demeaned and belittled masses of people, much of which remains prevalent even today.

From an economic standpoint Africa offered the perfect combination of cheap labour and valuable raw materials, resulting in a lot of attraction from European imperialists. The native African’s nomadic tendencies with minor implementation of trade was seen as insufficient by the European invaders. They capitalised on the modest culture by enslaving the people, using them as a source of labour within the country and as a commodity to trade in Europe. No goods were manufactured in Africa so dependence on European trade increased and due to this position as a forced working class there was a lack of demand for initiative from the people of Africa so the development of industrialising technology was stunted.

It was the use of Africa as a slave supplier that disintegrated the local economy. The slave trade ensured that even after its abolishment in the early 19th century the repercussions would remain. The population had declined significantly, and the supply of material goods was dependant on European markets. Much of the most fertile land, and lucrative areas had been claimed and colonised for the imperialist powers benefit. The economic

system did not facilitate profit for the localities and producers, only imperialists. Retraction of the empirical states resulted in economic instability and disability, as little initiative was applied to assist in adapting to an industry that wasn't comprised of a monoculture of cash crops.

Today Africa has still not recovered economically from the repercussions of imperialism, many countries are in irrefutable debt, much of which has been acquired with the intention of providing education, health care and food to their people. However efforts have been in vain as the corruption that emerged in the mid 20th century has not been overcome, leaving the innocent without basic human rights.

The politics of imperialist Africa were brutish and imperious with the enslavement of indigenous people, along with the unjust degradation of those same people to substandard working class members of a society of Eurocentrism. European colonies destroyed all of the existing tribal governments completely altering the perennial systems that stood before, replacing them with intolerant authoritarianisms that excluded indigenous representation.

After African decolonisation no assistance was provided to enable competent government systems to develop. Instead the rapacious contended for leadership and the basis of the new government was self-serving and reliant on the colonial regimes remanence, the political position of many African countries are still detrimentally influenced neo-colonialism. The division of Africa under the Berlin Conference provoked political turbulence, independence meant people were living under governments that had been

actualised by their oppressors. Before colonisation the concept of hard borders was entirely incomparable to their boundary system. To expect that these confinements that were a staple of serfdom and entrapment would be respected was senseless. It's because of this that rulers like Idi Amin Dada (Uganda, 1971-1979) and Omar Al-Bashir (Sudan, 1989-Present) came into power and remain there. Imperialism was a direct impetus for the precarious infrastructure and the hundreds of politically directed wars that have occurred. To question the corrupt, negative political status of these countries less than 60 years after their chaotic dive into independence is naive.

Socially, imperialism had an extremely negative effect on Africa. Years spent ruled by self-serving foreign administration cost many regions their rich, unique cultures. Longstanding tribal-nation's land had been divided by European intervention in the 1884 Berlin Conference, subsequently the new borders chaotically separated religious and ethnic groups causing unnecessary conflict. Western ideals, including religion, were enforced without any constraint or encumbrance for the principles that had existed before them.

Imperialist treatment of the African people was often inhumane, blinded by the prejudicial beliefs of Darwinism few saw the immorality in it. The irreversible social discrimination developed by imperialism is devastating and incomparable to any inequity that had taken place before colonisation, prejudiced beliefs continue to hinder many nations.

Even after agrarian European intervention had receded hostility and crime increased taking advantage of the uncertain political and economic condition

of the continent. The innovative took positions of power where they could manipulate and abuse the innocent to benefit themselves. Wide class divides became even more prevalent than they had been and many people were living in inhumane conditions in slums, and the plight of starvation began.

The imperialist initiative of the 19th century was preeminent in the extent of the success of European empires, it broadened the available goods and supply of them.

Specifically in Africa the expansion of the reaches of trade and extent of transport and communication elevated but it's undeniable that it was imperialism that spurred Africa toward the corruption, political turmoil, and economic belligerence that befalls it.

The effects ricocheted throughout the continent, from the racism that brazenly plagues to the starvation and death of an innumerable amount, the imperialism of the 19th century is at fault. Going forward we can only hope that the morality of modern society will be embedded throughout Africa so the economic, political, and social state of the nations will recover and imperialism, despite its benefits, will never resurface.

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