Humans are often driven by an impulsive attraction to gain personal satisfaction with little thought of consequence to others or foresight into the effects actions will have on the future or their long term well-being. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this unfortunate but very real trait of humanity was allowed to thrive in grand fashion by Western powers in the name of imperialism. While this imperialism was geographically widespread and took a multitude of forms, one general commonality was an overall failure to provide basic attention and care to the people or territories under this imperialistic control. The West's imperialistic gains were measurable during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by means of land, resources and wealth, but failure to instill basic human rights and a sense of welfare on its subordinates ultimately prohibited full growth and jeopardized the long-term security of the Western World.

The West’s imperialistic energy spent in the continent of Africa failed to bring about a moral allegiance or solidarity with the people to their respective overseeing powers. One noteworthy example of this imperialism providing wealth yet failing to honor the people rests with the British Empire. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is a prominent example of an imperialistic power (Britain) exploiting the native people for material gain. “By the nineteenth century the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade had declined due to it being outlawed and been replaced with the pursuit of resources from the continent.”1 While Britain had seemingly abolished an immoral yet immensely profitable practice on paper, it had managed to continue to drain resources and dissolve the existing ways of life.

The British and other Western powers used their influence to gain footholds in areas by often illegitimate, immoral means. One pertinent example, describing a British military policy during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) states, “As British troops swept the countryside, they systematically destroyed crops, burned homesteads and farms, poisoned wells and interned Boer and African women, children and workers in concentration camps.” 2 Here is an extreme yet not uncommon practice seen as a result of imperialism, and noteworthy is the extreme difference between the living conditions of the subjected people versus their mother countries.

Britain was not the only European country dipping their imperial hand in the continent; nearly every great European power in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century was involved in Africa to the detriment to the local people. The Dutch (Netherlands) established their presence in Cape Town in South Africa employing local Africans to be used as slaves. Belgium’s King Leopold II gripped part of the continent under the “false premise of bringing Christianity to its native people.”3 King Leopold’s ruthless imperialist control as a means of acquiring Africa’s natural resources (in the geographic area near the Congo River), is summarized:

Leopold’s personal enrichment came at an exorbitant price to the indigenous population. To harvest ivory and, more importantly, rubber, required conscription of the “natives.” In the process all manner of hideous acts were committed. Rubber quotas were assigned, and if the output was too low, villages would be burned and Africans shot. 4

European imperialistic ambitions “demonstrated much less interest in providing basic social services. Expenditures on education, public health, hospitals increased after the First World War but still remained small.”5 Much of the continent has since remained in a perpetual state of poverty and turmoil, opening up pockets containing mindsets in opposition to the West rather than developing alongside it in shared values. Examining the continent in the present day, one finds groups vehemently opposed to the West; even posing a threat to it, such as terrorist groups finding refuge there due to a lack of Western ideals which may have prevailed and spread had the subjected people discussed been treated with dignity.

Some of the West’s imperialistic territorial tirades in Asia have impacted today’s world stability. For example, the country of Korea contains a government in the north growing increasingly threatening to the existence of the United States, Japan, and its allies. There, exists a great “anti-Western imperialist” sentiment against the United States and Japan. The mindset of North Korea may have never developed to its point had Japan never flexed its imperialist muscle in Korea (i.e. the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1910, which essentially allowed Japan to assume control over the country) at the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to this, Japanese control of the country had already been in the works. A1904 Japanese government telegram read, “The Imperial Government of Japan may…occupy, when circumstances require it, such places as may be necessary from strategic points of view.”6 This directive, as blatantly outlined in the telegram, granted permission for the Japanese to occupy Korea under rules of their own making. In the age of imperialism, these examples were only a few of many similar acts involving powers blatantly violating the independence of countries for material reward, without acknowledgement or respect for existing ways of life.

Ultimately imperialism, in its near-sightedness, failed to bring long-term, permanent security and limited the sphere of influence in the West. Western powers may have won over resources, territory and made monetary gains necessary to the growth and short-term stability of their empires, but failed to win over the hearts and minds of the people they controlled. The neglect, caused by mistreatment and little desire to respect the cultures or honor human rights created a rift that now exists in the form of hostility toward Western ideals. The near-sightedness of imperialism has created a world with many areas of anti-Western mindsets.

Had Western imperialistic aims been more focused on the fair treatment of the subjected people, it is not hard to envision a world today where the West’s ideals and sphere of influence would be more widespread and unified with the people originally subjected to 19th and 20th century exploitation. The result of imperialism was two-fold: gains were made enabling some world powers to thrive, but the long-term effects of failing to instill adequate care to the colonized created areas carrying deep resentment of the West. In other words, imperialism enabled the gaining of power at the time which created a level of relatively unchallenged global dominance, but simultaneously created anti-Western attitudes challenging the power of the West due to mismanagement and self-absorbed aims. The West would find itself in a position of unthreatened power and would continue to profit and grow economically and from an amiable relationship with these groups rather than today’s picture of hostility and exclusion due to division partly created by imperialism.

If the imperialistic ventures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries included time and energy to assimilate these people to Western ideals, the picture of today’s world would see the West in a much more stable, beneficial position. There is little doubt that had more care been given to subservient peoples or countries, the anti-West sentiments existing in today’s world would have not been as immense. As a result, the Western world would be a more powerful and secure place.

Notes

1. McKay, et al. *Understanding World Societies: A Brief History*. Vol. 2. Boston: Beford/St. Mar tin's, 2013. 668

2. Peter Goulding. *The Hero, the Widow and the Army Pensions Board*. 2015. 47.

3. McKay, et al. *Understanding World Societies: A Brief History*. Vol. 2. Boston: Beford/St. Mar tin's, 2013. 672.

4. Robert G. Weisbord. "The King, the Cardinal and the Pope: Leopold II's Genocide in the Congo and the Vatican." *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 1 (2003): 36.

5. McKay, et al. *Understanding World Societies: A Brief History*. Vol. 2. Boston: Beford/St. Mar tin's, 2013. 675.

6. Japan. U.S. Foreign Affairs Office. *Korea's Political Situation in 1905 and Japan's Annexation of Dokdo.* By Japanese Government.

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