

# ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

## FACTSHEET - EXPLAINER

Name	Professor Gurminder K Bhambra
Details, area of experience	Professor of Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies at the University of Sussex.
Interview date	November 2020
Issues addressed	British Empire, Imperialism, Colonisation, Welfare State, Historical dynamics/links between past and present.
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/>
Dates mentioned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>1757-1947:</b> Two centuries over which the British ruled India. It started with the East India Company in 1757 until India's independence in 1947.</li> <li>• <b>1831:</b> Slavery Abolition Act passed officially ending slavery. Indentured labour was established thereafter.</li> <li>• <b>1707:</b> Scotland and England entered into a Union. At this point, both nations had colonies across the world.</li> <li>• <b>1948:</b> Establishment of the welfare state post-WWII.</li> <li>• <b>1970s:</b> Almost full decolonisation of the countries that were part of the British Empire.</li> </ul>
Key words	British imperialism and institutions British colonial history Inception of the NHS and welfare state Reparation to former British colonies Human value in work Poverty and wealth Redistributive wealth

	Multiculturalism, Brexit and Covid Belonging and identity
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Brief summary (key points)	<p>Professor Gurminder Bhambra explains the extent of wealth extraction from former British colonies to fund British institutions and the idea that an economically just world is about human value and fair distribution.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Britain isn't a national country; it is a former Empire. It should be seen and referred to as such.</b></p> <p>As part of the British Empire, a large amount of wealth - extracted from exploitative labour and taxation – was collected by private enterprises and the British government. Those resources were used to build hospitals, fund Oxbridge/education, infrastructure, and art galleries in Britain. Consequently, every institution in Britain was built from the wealth extraction of its Empire.</p> <p>It can be argued that the first documented crisis of the welfare state in the 1970s was due to the large scale decolonisation within the British Empire. There was a lack of funds coming through to support national infrastructures.</p> <p>The NHS represents why Britain should be seen as more than 'an island'. Since its inception, not only was the money collected from Empire used to set it up, but the human labour working for this institution came and still comes from abroad.</p> <p><b>An economically just world is about human value and a just distribution.</b></p> <p>It is a world where everyone can pursue activities of human value in relation to one's interests, abilities, and temperament.</p> <p>There is currently a mismatch between economic/market value and human value reflected during the Covid-19 pandemic when low-paid jobs - shown to have been essential and invaluable - kept the economy running whilst others were self-isolating. Their sacrifice needs to be acknowledged and workers' rights need to be upheld and protected for all workers.</p> <p>We cannot have an economically just world unless we understand where wealth in Britain came from and how it was accumulated. The inequalities in the present moment stem from the historical processes of imperialism and colonialism, therefore no justice can truly occur unless this nation confronts its history and thereby supports reparation. Reparation could be in the form of scholarships offered to former colonies.</p>
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	<p><b>How can we use history to understand the concept of 'belonging'?</b></p> <p>We cannot understand who we are until the imperial history that has shaped this nation is understood.</p> <p>During the Brexit referendum, a 'mythical British community' concept was pushed forward. It looks as if one legitimately belonged in Britain if they could demonstrate historical belonging within this nation's political boundaries. The only problem is that Britain has never been an island, it was an Empire.</p> <p>During the pandemic, workers e.g., bus drivers/cleaners/nurses dying from Covid were disproportionately from a Black, Asian, and Ethnic minority population. It is then that the multicultural aspect of Britain - lost in the Brexit referendum - came to a forefront. It is multicultural Britain that kept the nation going through this crisis.</p>
<p>Stand-out quotations</p>	<p>"When we in Britain talk about the wealth of Britain that this wealth hasn't been established on the basis of the labour and activities of people who've only lived in Britain, but this wealth has been established on the basis of the labour and activities of all those who lived within the British Empire."</p> <p>"None of us who are alive today are responsible for the past that produces the conditions within which we live, but to the extent that we benefit from those inequalities then I believe that we have a responsibility to see how we can address those inequalities through acts of redistribution which occur at a social level not an individual level."</p> <p>"If we think about place that are poor today there is not place in which poverty is a natural phenomenon, poverty is always produced."</p> <p>"If we don't understand that British history is imperial history and that imperial history is British history, we also don't understand what Britain is in the present."</p> <p>"On a very personal note, when I was growing up in Britain, I thought of myself as an immigrant that's what I learn in school, that's how people who look like me were depicted on TV, that's the entire discourse was about being an immigrant and being somewhere where I wasn't presume to belong."</p> <p>"If my family for generations have been regarded as British by the British State, then do people in Britain today think of me as an immigrant?"</p> <p>"To have an absolute commitment to the truth of history and the ways in which we establish the truth of history."</p>

	<p>“There is no inequality in the present that does not emerge out of historical processes and without an understanding how that past has configured us in the present we are not going to have effective solutions to addressing inequality in the present.”</p>
Main themes for learners	<p><b>Where does Britain’s wealth come from?</b> (Gurinder talks about the extraction of taxes from former British colonies to fund British institutions).</p> <p><b>How Britain as a nation should be referred to and seen as?</b> (Gurminder looks at why we should talk about Britain beyond its political borders).</p> <p><b>Brexit and Covid-19: any unease with who this nation is?</b> (Gurminder explores nationalism during the Brexit referendum in contrast to multicultural Britain helping this nation to get through Covid).</p> <p><b>Immigrant discourse: Who legitimately belongs in Britain?</b> (Gurminder shares a personal story looking back at her and her parents’ passports).</p> <p><b>How do we explain the social inequalities in our present society?</b> (Gurminder concludes that the present can only be explained looking back at history and how it has shaped the world we are in today).</p>

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