



Colonialism and debt:

*How debt is used to
exploit and control*

Discussion pack



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Introduction and welcome

The debt crisis in the global south is inextricably linked to a history of colonial exploitation by wealthy countries in the global north.

Right now, 54 countries are in debt crisis, this means their national debt is stopping them from funding public services like health and education and fighting the climate crisis. The debt crisis is a racist crisis, and one that won't be solved with the tools available to us through the neocolonial financial system. What we need is a new way of structuring our economies that puts people before profit and prioritises justice in all its forms. If we're to dismantle and transform our current financial system, we first need to understand the ways in which it perpetuates racist and colonial structures today.

The ideas discussed here tend to be left out of mainstream accounts of the global debt crisis and the economy because they call to account the foundations of inequality caused through capitalism.

We've created these resources to explain the links between debt and colonialism, they include a written briefing and accompanying videos. The resources have been created to support people to reflect on these ideas and the possibilities they open up.

This pack contains everything you need to run your own discussion group exploring the links between debt and colonialism.

We've included notes on how to facilitate a group effectively and links to further resources in case you want to go deeper into the topic.

You can run a one-off discussion group online or in person, with your friends and family, or with people in any group. However you choose to do it, please do snap a photo and send it our way (you can find us on twitter [@debtjustice](https://twitter.com/debtjustice) or by emailing info@debtjustice.org.uk). We'd love to tweet your photos to encourage others to hold their own discussions.

We're excited to share these resources with you - thanks so much for getting involved!

Why hold a discussion group?

In creating this discussion pack we're hoping to start conversations about debt and its links with colonialism - not just in economic justice spaces but across progressive movements. We hope these resources can be helpful for groups working on issues of racial justice, climate justice, and across progressive movements, helping to draw

links between these struggles and the struggle for debt justice.

A discussion group is an excellent way to gain a deeper understanding of and connection to a text. You'll hear perspectives you may not have considered before, get to consolidate your opinions and learning by sharing them with others, and be able to ask questions about things you don't understand.

Making the most of your discussions

In this pack, you'll find a list of questions to help ground your discussions of the text. However, there are also some other things you can do to make sure the conversation is productive and enjoyable. The whole session should take between an hour and an hour and a half - it's up to you exactly how much time you allow for it. Before the session ensure everyone has read the briefing and watched the video, you could email this to them week or so before.

Here are some more tips on how to run your event:

Make sure everyone has all the **resources** in good time and encourage them to read them properly in advance

Use the questions provided as a guide, but don't be afraid to go off track - follow your own interests

Spend the first part of the conversation getting to know each other - get people to say their names, anything else they feel the group should know about them (pronouns, access needs etc.) and why they came. You may want to try an icebreaker - there are hundreds of examples online

Start with some easy questions to get people settled in - something like 'do you have any initial reflections?' or 'what was something you learned that you didn't know before?' work well

Keep an eye on who's speaking, and if certain people are dominating the conversation gently point it out and encourage quieter people to speak if they wish to. This is especially important from an anti-oppression framework - people with more societal privilege often find it easier to state their opinions and you may notice patterns in who feels more able to assert themselves

Consider different ways people can contribute if they don't feel comfortable speaking in front of people. For example, people could write their initial thoughts on a post-it (or **Jamboard** if running the group online), and then the group could discuss the comments

If you have any questions you can't find the answers to, feel free to email us and we'll do our best to help. You can get in touch at: info@debtjustice.org.uk

Questions to get you going

These are guiding questions you could use to frame your discussion, but feel free to also come up with your own.

What do you think the story in the front cover illustration of the briefing is telling us?

Did anything in the briefing connect with your personal relationships with money, debt, and the economy?

Did anything you learned from the briefing shock or surprise you?

Has your view of global south debt changed after reading the briefing/watching the video, if so, how?

How has debt been used to maintain racialised global power dynamics post-independence?

What are some of the ways that former colonial powers are benefitting from indebtedness in the global south?

What are some of the ways debt has harmed the health and wellbeing of communities in the global south?

The briefing mentions the climate crisis in a number of places. In what ways are the debt and climate crises connected?

From the examples of resistance, we know that change is possible. If you were going to take action on global south debt, how would you go about it and who would you target?

It is clear that a debt is owed to the global south by the global north, and not the other way round. How should the global north go about paying this debt beyond financial compensation?

Achieving debt justice is one key part of creating a fairer world, but there are many others too. How does debt justice connect to wider struggles for economic and social justice?

Difficult conversations?

It's possible that these discussion groups may bring up sensitivities around issues of the global south/north divide, the current day and the past, race and economics.

It's worth having a think about how you will manage this.

Some tips might include:

- Assume goodwill. If people are engaging with the resources, it is likely because they want to understand and learn
- Don't shut down difficult conversations – instead ask exploratory questions to encourage participants to reflect on and challenge their preconceptions
- Be aware of who is doing the labour of explaining issues – is a person of global south heritage having to explain the damaging legacy of colonialism while the white British people in the room stay silent? Make efforts to redress the balance
- Try and avoid tone policing – when people are personally affected by an issue, it's easy for conversations to get emotive, but as long as basic levels of respect are maintained displays of emotion are appropriate and fair
- However, if people are being actively disrespectful or oppressive, for example by exhibiting racism or other hate speech, they should be asked to leave the discussion
- You could start the session by establishing some collective 'ground rules' for the discussion, such as treating each other respectfully and allowing everyone a chance to speak

Get started!

All the resources you will need for your discussion, including the briefing and video, can be found at:

debtjustice.org.uk/Colonialism



Accessibility

We want as many people as possible to be able to access the discussion groups, and that means thinking about how to remove any barriers that might stop people participating.

Here's an inexhaustive checklist to get you started:

Before the event

- On your promotional materials, have you given people a way to contact you to request specific access needs you may not have thought of?
- Have you provided alt captions for any images you've posted online? This is text that can be read out loud by a screen reader so that anyone with a visual impairment is able to interpret the image. Depending on where you're posting images, there will be instructions on how to do this online.
- Have you checked printed communications to make sure the font you're using is large enough, and is dyslexia friendly?

Checklist for in-person discussion groups

- Is your venue wheelchair accessible, or is there step-free access?
- Does your venue have an accessible toilet, changing places station, and are there gender-neutral loos available for people who need them?
- Is your venue easily accessible by public transport?
- Is there a hearing loop at the venue?
- If you're providing drinks or snacks, are

there alcohol-free options, vegan/vegetarian and halal/kosher options, and snacks that do not contain gluten, nuts, or other major allergens?

- Is there a quiet space people can go to if they need to step away from the main event?
- Is English the most spoken language in the group? Is there a way of providing interpretation?

Checklist for online discussion groups

- Have you turned on captions? Software such as **Otter.ai** can generate captions for you, but if you can find someone who enjoys typing them out manually they are usually more accurate.
- Can background noise be kept to a minimum?
- If there are people in your community who would like to participate but who lack appropriate internet access to use software such as zoom, contact us (info@debjustice.org.uk) and we'll attempt to find a solution (e.g. paying for a temporary phone data top up for the day of the event).
- Plan in breaks where people can step away from the screen for a few minutes.
- Allow contributions to be made in the chat box for those who find verbal communication a barrier.



Feedback

Thank you so much for running a discussion group! We'd love to hear how it went and how you found the process. We've created a short survey you can complete here:

debtjustice.org.uk/discussionfeedback

Your feedback is really important and will help us improve our materials and support others to hold even more effective discussion groups, so we really appreciate you filling out our survey.

Don't forget to send us a picture of your session. You can email it to us at (info@debtjustice.org.uk) or find us on Twitter [@debtjustice](https://twitter.com/debtjustice)

Further information

Extra reading

- [Climate and Debt: The Perfect Storm](#)
Briefing - Debt Justice
- [How Europe Underdeveloped Africa](#)
Book - Walter Rodney
- [Rich countries drained \\$152tn from the global South since 1960: Imperialism never ended, it just changed form](#)
Article - Al Jazeera
- [The Case for Haitian Reparations](#)
Article in Jacobin
- [Esther Stanford-Xosei on the Case for Climate Reparations](#)
Podcast - Novara Media

Campaign with Debt Justice

Debt Justice is a campaigning organisation working with others to end unjust debt and the poverty and inequality it perpetuates, in the UK and across the world.

If you want to get involved, join the Debt Justice Activist Network, a national network of activists all working towards debt justice.

Whether you've done loads of campaigning before or you're completely new to this, if you want to get more involved, this is the space for you: debtjustice.org.uk/DJAN

Check out our new materials and order leaflets, postcards and briefings: debtjustice.org.uk/materials

You can also join our mailing list by signing up here: debtjustice.org.uk/signup

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Keep in touch

Follow us @debtjustice

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