

The royals have a duty to the Commonwealth: pay your debts, and apologise

Nalini Mohabir Tue 13 Sep 2022 10.00 BST

5 Monarchy has been harmful⁽¹⁾ for former colonies and those who live in its gilded cage⁽²⁾. It's time to imagine a future without it. I live at the crossroads of the Commonwealth. My home is Canada, where First Nations people have called on King Charles to renounce the Doctrine of Discovery as his first official act. This law sanctioned the colonial possession of Indigenous lands and has justified violence against Indigenous people. I live in the French-speaking province of Quebec, which was ceded to the British empire in 1763. Here, the proposed
10 abolition of the role of "lieutenant-governor", the crown's provincial representative, is a flashpoint⁽³⁾ in the upcoming election. And I am also a member of the Caribbean diaspora, a region that was violently pulled into the production of sugar to satisfy the bourgeois tastes of the British empire. To this day, the Caribbean bears⁽⁴⁾ the scars of Indigenous genocide, slavery, indentureship⁽⁵⁾ and colonialism.

15 For the people of formerly colonised countries, the monarchy is not a neutral institution. It is the embodiment of imperial legacies that benefited Britain at the expense of its colonies, and played an active role in the slave trade. Queen Elizabeth I financially backed slave-trading voyages, and by the 17th-century King Charles II granted royal approval to the Company of Adventurers of London Trading to the Ports of Africa, marking the moment at which
20 transatlantic slavery officially began. In the mid-20th century, when Caribbean countries were agitating for independence, the British government, under prime minister Winston Churchill, sent warships to British Guiana, a member of the Commonwealth, and openly removed an elected government in 1953. Even after Caribbean countries achieved independence, many remained members of the Commonwealth, retained colonial curriculums in their schools, and
25 were sold consumer dreams by companies bearing royal warrants⁽⁶⁾. Yet these associations did little to protect these member states. Indeed, when Grenada was invaded by the US in 1983, Britain did not intervene.

For remembering this history just when the Queen's coffin is travelling through Britain, I might be accused by some of speaking ill of the dead. The media have been dominated by reverential
30 comments and melancholic coverage. Some have focused not on the Queen as the personal embodiment of empire, but rather as the figurehead of political institutions (in Canada, for example, the media seem concerned about whether the Bank of Canada will change the look of its currency to reflect the King's accession).

The monarchy has been politically and economically devastating for former colonies. (...) Britain and the Commonwealth now have a new king. What else has died with Elizabeth? Barbados recently made the landmark decision to free itself of imperial bonds by removing
35 the Queen as head of state. (...)

Across the Caribbean, countries such as Jamaica, the Bahamas and Belize are calling for reparations. These demands were only accelerated after the disastrous visit of Prince William and Kate earlier this year. Such reparations would mean not just an apology, but distributive
40 justice between so-called developed and developing countries. Integral to reparations is the idea of repairing unequal, one-sided relationships.

In his first address to the British nation and Commonwealth "realms", Charles said "relationships change, friendship endures". Yet friendship requires accountability, especially
45 when there's a power imbalance – such as when one side speaks of service and duty but such aspirations remain unfulfilled. Surely in 2022, 70 years after his mother ascended the throne in 1952, we have a more nuanced and accurate understanding of these issues. What might

50 duty look like if we understood that debts need to be paid and apologists held accountable?
What might public service mean if we understood that imperial attitudes and monarchic institutions must be abolished for an alternative future to be born?

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/13/royals-commonwealth-debts-colonies-monarchy?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

- (1) Dangerous
- (2) A luxurious environment but with no or little freedom
- (3) Flashpoint – controversial issue
- (4) To bear – to carry
- (5) Indentureship – being obliged to be a servant (in exchange for transport for example)
- (6) A royal warrant allows companies to show the royal sign on their products