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Gen Z Protests and Their Psychology in the Postcolonial Era

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Abstract

Protests by Gen Z in the postcolonial period signify a deep psychological confrontation with colonial legacies, emerging as strong, digitally-enhanced opposition to corruption, inequality, and distrust in institutions throughout Asia, Africa, and other regions. This study examines the psychological foundations—self-efficacy, collective emotional management, and moral obligation—referencing the 2025 revolts in Nepal, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Kenya, and Madagascar. Utilizing case studies, theoretical exploration, and direct quotes from activists and specialists, it contends that Gen Z's activism merges humour, intention, and resistance to break down neocolonial systems, cultivating a fresh postcolonial agency.

Keywords: Gen Z, confrontation, corruption, inequality, distrust, resistance.

Introduction

The postcolonial period, characterized by official autonomy but ongoing economic reliance, elite dominance, and cultural oppression, has given rise to Gen Z demonstrations as a mental revolt against systemic stifling. Born between 1997 and 2012, this cohort faces significant youth unemployment, nepotism, and governance issues intensified by social media, turning indifference in the Global North into outrage in the Global South. In 2025, large-scale uprisings led by youth overthrew administrations in Nepal and extended to seven nations, marking a transition from acceptance to rebellion.

Professor Faturochman of Universitas Gadjah Mada states that when individuals feel let down and observe no signs of improvement, that sense of oppression will lead to resistance, which is a natural response in our social existence. This “suffocation” resonates with postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon, who illustrated how colonized minds pursue relief through violence, yet Gen Z transforms this with digital creativity and compassion. Their approach combines Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, discovering purpose in hardship through memes and street performances.

Postcolonial psychology views these protests as a way to decolonize the mind, dismissing elite narratives passed down from colonial divide-and-rule strategies. Economic instability, where young people encounter unpredictability, drives a feeling of ethical obligation. According to Britannica, in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, elevated youth unemployment, graft, and favoritism were fueling

resentment instead of indifference. Social media amplified that rage. This article analyzes factors, instances, and consequences related to Gen Z revolution or resentment.

Psychological Foundations

The revolutionary mindset of Gen Z rests on elevated self-efficacy and integrative resilience, balancing revolution with compassion. During Nepal's 2025 uprising, young people transformed the streets into "places of joy and activity," employing memes such as "Nepo Kids" to ridicule corruption while supporting at-risk families, alleviating trauma through comedy. This "shared emotional management" supports prolonged efforts, combating exhaustion.

Deteriorating trust serves as the main catalyst. Professor Faturochman mentions that the societal pressures experienced by this generation, whether stemming from financial difficulties or a decline in trust in government, render street protests a form of expression commonly seen as legitimate. Gen Z views formal institutions as untrustworthy, reflecting postcolonial mixed systems that fuse colonial administration with tyranny. Digital nativity allows for quick mobilization; platforms such as TikTok and X promote "cross-border inspiration," evident in the waves from Kenya to Nepal.

Ethical obligation motivates involvement. Rova, a 23-year-old student from Madagascar, claims, "For Rova, protesting is not a choice. It's a moral necessity." We are maturing in a society where unfairness is common, where corruption crushes optimism, and where remaining silent can be more perilous than voicing concerns. This is in harmony with self-determination theory-- autonomy, skill, and connection drive behavior. In contrast to millennials' quiet resilience, Gen Z embraces optimism, representing "positive peace" through their calls for fairness and involvement.

In Indonesia, ironic trends diminish elite authority, nurturing optimism. Psychological models such as Positive Peace expose institutional flaws: corruption undermines justice perceptions, driving youth to the streets.

Historical Context: Postcolonial Legacies

Postcolonial nations received colonial extractivism, resulting in unequal economies where elites replicate imperial favoritism. Gen Z receives this as instability: power outages in Madagascar, unemployment with growth in Bangladesh. Demonstrations focus on "favoritism and harsh governmental oppression," driven by social media revealing wrongdoings.

In Asia, demonstrations reflect 20th century anti-colonial movements but with Gen Z elements. The fire at Singha Durbar in Nepal represented a repudiation of bureaucratic colonialism. Britannica states that an educated but economically challenged generation was realizing its ability to take action. Africa's waves, stretching from Kenya to Morocco, call for service delivery, perceiving oppression as neocolonial.

Digital tools alter narratives, circumventing state media. Carnegie highlights social media's "opportunities and challenges" during protests in Nepal and Indonesia regarding income disparities. Psychologically, this strengthens marginalized voices, addressing colonial inferiority complexes through worldwide unity.

Case Studies

Nepal 2025 Uprising

Youth surged into Kathmandu, setting government buildings ablaze in response to corruption scandals. Demonstrations merged creativity—urban art, performances—with calls for change, redefining democracy. A demonstrator through Amnesty stated that we are standing up for an improved future and denouncing a system that has neglected education.

Indonesia and Bangladesh

Decentralized protests aimed at dynastic governance. UGM's Faturochman connects to "unfulfilled desires," highlighting Gen Z's "robust awareness of social justice". Memes rallied millions, confronting postcolonial elites.

Kenya, Madagascar, and Beyond

Protests in Kenya are culturally widespread, advocating for fairness. Rova cautions officials: "You can stop voices, but you cannot stop thought...." Madagascar's "civic revival" opposes authoritarianism.

Country	Key Triggers	Psychological Tactics	Outcomes
Nepal	Corruption, nepotism	Humor, memes, empathy	Government toppled
Indonesia	Elite capture	Digital decentralization	Policy reforms
Kenya	Unemployment, repression	Cultural symbols	Cross-border spread
Madagascar	Poverty, power abuses	Moral narratives	Ongoing mobilization

These cases illustrate postcolonial psychology, as well as intersectional resistance, blending mental health advocacy with anti-corruption efforts.

Theoretical Framework

Combining postcolonial theory (Fanon, Spivak) with psychology produces "decolonial resilience". Gen Z disrupts the silence of the subaltern through digital empowerment. Frankl's "Life always has the potential for meaning" is evident in protests as a quest for purpose.

The Positive Peace framework reveals shortcomings: inadequate equity views ignite turmoil. Self-efficacy theory clarifies courage; Bandura's idea resonates with Gen Z facing uncertainty. Spirituality connects: demonstrations call for compassion instead of fear.

Implications: Governments should involve young people as stakeholders, rebuilding trust through reforms rather than sympathy. Faturochman emphasizes what is required... is true respect for the people as the nation's most valuable resource.

Conclusion

Gen Z demonstrations signal a mental decolonization, using digital resources and passionate drive to disrupt postcolonial stagnation. Their voices – "We shall always endure – and we shall grow" – promise systemic change. Policymakers need to pay attention to this organization for enduring peace.

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