

# Colonialism

'When we were at school  
we were taught to sing the songs of the Europeans.'

How many of us were taught the songs  
of the Wanyamwezi  
or of the Wahehe?'

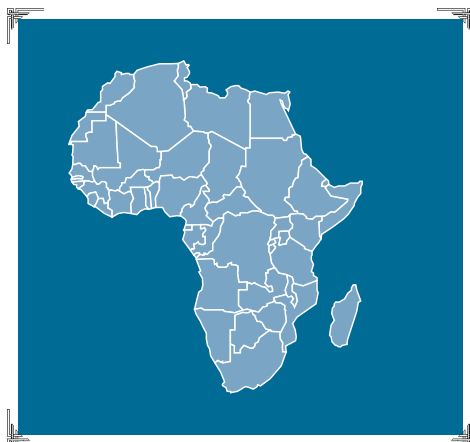
Julius Nyerere

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# Colonialism

As many developed and developing countries were linked through colonialism, an understanding of the colonial period and its impact is important to the development debate today. Colonialism remains a controversial issue, as many people disagree about its effects on citizens in former colonies and its peoples, and whether it is responsible for poverty in developing countries today.



- Q** Was the country you are now living in colonised? Who was the colonial ruler?
- Q** When did the country gain independence? Was there a peaceful transition, or an independence struggle?
- Q** Ask local friends and colleagues what they know of the colonial period.
- Q** How did it affect the local community?



Which of the statements below do you agree or disagree with?			
	agree	disagree	don't know
Western capitalism was built on the backs of developing countries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Only a minority in developing countries benefited from colonial rule.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All colonised states suffered under colonialism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The poverty of developing countries is due to colonialism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The demise of colonialism was accompanied by the rise of a new imperialism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Viewpoints...

'We no longer think of the colonies as places made for our special benefit or profit. In the past many mistakes have been made, but that is how we have had to learn the duty of being in charge of these colonies. The first consideration now is how can we best help the peoples – whatever their colours – who live in these places.'

'I wish I had the time to tell you that story of how we came to have this Empire. It is a wonderful tale of adventure and romance, and some of the finest characters in British history have played their part in it. For instance, think of the men who crossed the Atlantic to colonise America.'

*Scouting for Boys*, Lord Baden Powell

'By the end of the 18th century, only 150 years after the arrival of the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope, thousands of Bushmen (San) had been shot and killed, and many more were forced to work for their colonial captors. The new British government vowed to stop the fighting. They hoped to "civilize" the Bushmen by encouraging them to adopt a more agricultural lifestyle, but were unsuccessful. By the 1870s, the last Bushmen of the Cape were hunted to extinction. Other Bushman groups were able to survive the European encroachment, despite continued threats. The last licence to hunt Bushmen was reportedly issued in Namibia by the South African government in 1936.'

[www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com)

'The white man was also their brother because they were all sons of God. And he told them about this new God, the creator of all the world and all the men and women. He told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone. A deep murmur went through the crowd when he said this. Evil men and all the heathen who in the blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm oil. But good men who worshipped the true God lived forever in his happy kingdom. "We have been sent by this great God to ask you to leave your wicked ways and false gods and turn to Him so that you may be saved when you die," he said.'

*Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe

'Let me finish with an epitaph on the district officer in Africa. It comes from the late Prime Minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. In a speech he made on Independence Day in October 1960, he paid tribute to the record of the colonial service. "We are grateful to the British officers," the PM said, "whom we have known first as masters, and then as leaders and finally as partners; but always as friends".'

*Tales from the Dark Continent*, Charles Allen

'In India, famines were frequent during colonial rule, and the Bengal famine killed between two and three million people in 1943. Famines stopped abruptly after independence with the installation of a democratic form of government.'

*Human Development Report 2000*, UNDP

'by the 1870s  
the last Bushmen of the Cape  
were hunted to  
extinction'

[www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com)



Mansell Collection/Rex Features

**Pears' Soap ad 1884**

The associated picture text reads: "Even if our invasion of the Soudan has done nothing else, it has left the Arab something to puzzle his fuzzy head over, for the legend "Pears' Soap is the best", inscribed in huge white letters on the rock which marks the furthest point of our advance towards Berber, will tax all the wits of the Dervishes of the desert to translate." – Phil Robinson, (in the Soudan) of the Daily Telegraph in London, 1884.'

*The Age of Empire*, Eric Hobsbawn



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# Overview

The timescale of colonialism was not universal, and it varied from continent to continent.

European colonial expansion dominated the period 1500–1900, when countries such as France, Spain, Portugal and England colonised large parts of Africa and Latin America. During the eighteenth century, colonialism was influenced by independent merchants, particularly in England and Holland.



## Perspective...

### Foundation of Empire

**The East India Company was formed by 218 Knights and merchants of the City of London and was granted a Royal Charter on 31 December 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I. Its initial objective was to wrest control of the lucrative spice trade from the Dutch, but it made little impression. However, over time, it enabled Britain to establish both a military dominance and a political empire in the East.**

**Tension between the straightforward commercial aims of the Court of Directors in London, who simply desired the Company to trade profitably and peacefully, and the opportunist vision of the officers overseas, continued until the nineteenth century. Military action by these officers was often met with a chorus of disapproval from their superiors in the UK.**

**Unlike global trading today, time and geographical distance made the attempts of the Directors to direct the company overseas extremely difficult, and ultimately it lay in the hands of its officers to do as best as they could in the field, which they did with vengeance. By 1834, whilst still a company with shareholders and directors in the ordinary way, the East India Company had ceased to be a trading company at all, and was instead authorised ruler of the vast Indian subcontinent and numerous other possessions.**

[www.theeastindiacompany.com](http://www.theeastindiacompany.com)

As industrial capitalism took root in Europe, colonial powers moulded their empires so that their economies could take advantage of the raw materials and manpower available in the states they controlled.

Many pre-colonial societies were technologically sophisticated, but colonial states held an advantage. The development of ocean-going sailing ships enabled colonial expansion to take place and the power of European weaponry allowed colonial rule to be enforced.

Early colonial traders recognised the superiority of technology in overseas products, for example, textiles produced in India were of a much higher quality than the ones produced in the UK. Traders therefore purchased, then copied these for their own economic advantage.


**Perspective...**

**British manufacturing industry at the end of the eighteenth century required a 100 per cent tariff on imports of Indian textiles. Until then, India had supplied Europe with its calicos and muslins, as China had supplied the silks and satins. When the machine-made cloths supplanted the products of handlooms first in Europe and then in their own lands, the ancient village industries of the East were one by one destroyed and their populations rendered destitute. The cotton towns of Surat, Dacca and Murishabad, in the centre of what is now the poorest land in the world, the state of Bangladesh, were described by Robert Clive in 1757 as just 'as extensive, popular and rich as the city of London'. These manufacturing centres of Bengal exported millions of pounds worth of cotton goods each year. Yet, within 60 years, their exports had ceased and India was importing cloth from British factories using increasingly as their raw material raw cotton from India.**

*Fair Trade, Michael Barrat Brown*

The political systems of colonial control were designed to service this underlying need to protect trade. Colonial forces also used other tactics to sustain power. One such method was known as divide and rule.


**Perspective...**

### Rwanda

**In colonial Rwanda and Burundi, the German and later Belgian rulers cultivated the notion that the Tutsis were somehow less African and more European and, by extension, superior to their fellow Hutu countrymen. They ruled through and with the assistance of a Tutsi elite built around a king and a group of land-owning clans. In justifying this form of colonial and minority rule, the Belgians resorted to all manner of racial nonsense.**

**It is important to remember that all of this was done less because the Belgians had any real desire to embrace the Tutsis as their equals, but rather because they needed the Tutsis as their allies to maintain a fundamentally unjust political dispensation. In other words, race and identity were used as a means to create and preserve an inherently unjust power structure. The effect of this injustice and of the stereotyping of Hutus as lesser beings was to create murderous feelings of inferiority and resentment amongst the majority. When, at the end of the fifties, the Belgians relinquished power, the Hutus rose up and began the first of many campaigns of massacre against their former Tutsi rulers. The Belgians, of course, escaped back to Belgium.**

*Letters to Daniel, Fergal Keane*

**Q** Can you identify any nations that have used force in the past fifteen years to sustain power over another country?

**'It is a wonderful tale of  
adventure and  
romance'**

*Scouting for Boys, Lord Baden Powell*

# Motives

**Q** From the viewpoints and images in this unit what motives can you identify for colonialism?



**‘Two other factors played a major part in shaping the decisions of those who were to go out to Africa. The first was the obvious attraction of an outdoor life, one that combined travel with sunshine and a strong element of human interest – and which was far removed from the “rather stuffy, formal career structure” which most other graduates would be doomed to follow.’**

*Tales from the Dark Continent, Charles Allen*

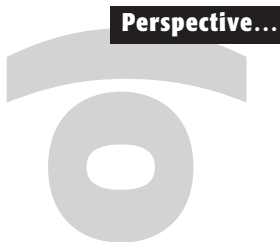
**‘When you have just arrived in a new culture, the simplest things turn into small adventures, like posting your letters, developing films, or jumping aside because a rickshaw rushes by furiously ringing its bell, a basket of cauliflowers balancing a metre high. So this is how Columbus must have felt ...’**

VSO volunteer

**Q** What were your motivations for volunteering?

# Politics

The loss of sovereignty is also identified with European colonialism. However, many states were invaded at different points in their history. In some cases, loss of political control was for a brief period only; in others, foreign rule extended for over a century. Some, such as Taiwan, were colonised by non-European states.



## China and Taiwan

**Taiwan is an island off the south-east coast of mainland China. In recent years, Taiwan has enjoyed economic success, but its biggest problem is political, and lies in the differing views of the island’s national identity.**

**In 2000, a pro-nationalist independence party won the elections in Taiwan. The Nationalists argue that Taiwan has not always been considered part of China and has often been governed by non-Chinese. Because it has never been ruled exclusively by people who consider Taiwan as home, it should be allowed to do so. China argues that historically, Taiwan is a province and should come under Chinese rule.**

**The Portuguese first explored Taiwan in 1590, and in 1624, the Dutch set up forts in the south, and the Spanish in the North. In 1641, the Dutch forced the Spanish off the island and subsequently controlled it until 1661, when the Chinese general Koxinga took control and established an independent kingdom. In 1683 the Manchus seized the island and held it until 1895, when the Japanese occupation began. Following the Second World War, Taiwan was handed back to China, and its troubled relationship with China began in 1949.**

**In January 1949, during the civil war in China, communist troops took Beijing, and changed its name back to Beijing. Nationalist troops along with their leader, Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island of Taiwan, and in December that year, Chiang proclaimed Taipei as the temporary capital of China. In 1958, President Eisenhower ordered the US 7th Fleet to destroy any Chinese invasion force heading for Taiwan. China saw the**

Perspective continued...

government of Chiang as illegitimate; and has since viewed the island as a breakaway province. Initially, Taiwan held the UN seat and represented the whole of China; but in October 1971, China was admitted to the UN, and Taiwan was forced to abdicate the seat. Since then, the UN has not recognised Taiwan as a sovereign state.

**Q** What arguments can you see for China governing Taiwan? Or should Taiwan maintain its independence? Should the UN recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state?

## Resistance and decline

Colonial rule was not accepted passively by colonised peoples, and resistance can be traced throughout the colonial period. The Incas and the Mayas of South and Central America fought against the Spanish invaders. Armed resistance by native Americans to European encroachment on their land continued until the late nineteenth century. The British were forced to fight a succession of wars in India and Africa to maintain colonial rule.

Viewpoint...

**“No. Mau Mau is not bad. The Freedom boys are fighting against white settlers. Is it bad to fight for one’s land? Tell me that.”**

**“But they cut black men’s throats.”**

**“Those killed are the traitors! Black white settlers.”**

*Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi WaThiongo

The rise of nationalism in the mid part of the 20th century was also a powerful factor in the decline of colonialism.

Perspective...

### The nationalist movement in Ghana

The first political association in Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) was formed at the end of the First World War. It grew out of the middle classes which were larger and more educated than in many other African states.

After the Second World War, the growing calls for independence in the colonised world gathered momentum in Ghana. In 1947 the United Gold Coast Convention was formed to work for changes in the constitution. Initially this was a fairly moderate body and was not seen as a threat by the government. This changed when Kwame Nkrumah was appointed secretary of the party. Far more radical than his predecessors, Nkrumah eventually broke away and formed the Convention People’s Party (CPP) in 1949. The CPP directed its energies to generating mass support, especially amongst trade unions. Nkrumah started a ‘positive action’ campaign, which aimed at agitation, strikes, and non-cooperation along Gandhian lines.

In 1950 Nkrumah was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison for sedition. He continued to direct the CPP from prison and the party achieved striking success in limited elections held in 1951. It was clear that the British government, which had accepted the prospect of independence in principle, would have to work with him, so he was immediately released. Although Nkrumah did not enjoy support from all sections of the populace, the CPP won two more elections, in 1954 and 1956. The Gold Coast became independent on 6 March 1957. C



Following the Second World War, countries such as Britain and France were in severe economic difficulties and servicing their empires with resources and personnel was expensive. Public opinion also questioned the legitimacy and the advantages of maintaining an empire. It also became clear that profitable trading arrangements could be made with newly independent states. Many leaders of these newly independent countries belonged to political and economic elites that had been educated and trained in the West.

By the mid-1960s the British, French and Dutch empires had been effectively dismantled. By the 1980s the Portuguese colonies had achieved independence and only a few states remained under colonial rule. The maintenance of the British Commonwealth was as much a matter of sustaining economic as historical ties.

## The legacy

### Viewpoints...

**'I myself came to the conclusion that the British were doing more than perhaps most other nations in that we were serving a purpose. Undoubtedly we interfered with the Africans, sometimes by trying to introduce our own way of life which didn't suit them, but, on the whole, I believe that the British set an example for them to follow if they wanted to do so. Our attitude to such things as honesty and tolerance, our belief that an absence of bribery and corruption amongst officials produced the best results, and above all the idea that if we have a responsibility and are put in charge of others, it is up to us to serve the people in any way that we can. That was a great lesson that the British have left behind in Africa.'**

Sir Gerald Reece, quoted in *Tales from the Dark Continent*

Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, one of the largest slave trading posts in the world, was built by the British in 1665.

**'The educational system introduced by the British was a poisonous gift to the people of India. Not only was it irrelevant to the learning needs of the millions, but it also constituted a major colonial instrument for their enslavement and the destruction of their cultural roots. Its main function was to create a new class of the "educated" to provide clerks and specialists for colonial administration.'**

*The Post Development Reader*, ed Majid Rahnema, Victoria Bawtree



VSO/Cathy Chapman

**Q** If you are you working in a country that was colonised, what physical reminders of the colonial era can you see?

# Impact on indigenous societies

Colonialism changed pre-colonial societies and their economies in different ways. In most colonial states, the language of the colonial power became the official language. The effect that colonial rule had on people's consciousness is another legacy of the colonial era.

## Viewpoint...

**'When we were at school we were taught to sing the songs of the Europeans. How many of us were taught the songs of the Wanyamwezi or of the Wahehe? Many of us have learnt to dance the rumba, or the cha cha, to rock and roll and to twist and even to dance the waltz and foxtrot. But how many of us can dance, or have even heard of the gombe sugu, the mangala, nyang umumi, kiduo, or lele mama?'**

Julius Nyerere

- Q** What are your colleagues and friends attitudes towards colonialism today?
- Q** How do they see themselves against people from the former colonial countries?
- Q** How does this compare with the attitudes portrayed in the images and texts in this unit?
- Q** What is the relationship today between the country you are working in and its former colonial power.
- Q** How do your friends and colleagues view this relationship?

Colonialism also had an affect on civil society's structure, the legal system, education, the army, police force.

- Q** If the country you are working in was colonised, were these civil institutions influenced by the colonial era?

## Perspective...

**In 1823, a Committee of Public Instruction was set up in Bengal. In 1834, Thomas Babington Macaulay became president of the committee, and he declared that a 'single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.'**

**In 1835, 'Macaulay produced his "Minute on Education" and his recommendations were brought into immediate effect. A thoroughly English education system was to be introduced which, in Macaulay's own ineffable words, would create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect." In 1836 he wrote that: "No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. It is my firm belief (so they always were) that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal in thirty years hence."'**

*Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson

**Activity...**

If the country you are working in was colonised:

- What was the language of the colonial power?
- How is that language used today?
- Does the system of education bear any relationship to that of the colonial power?
- Is national culture promoted through the national curriculum, or from any other country?
- Can you buy English language books, or books that reflect the language of the colonial ruler?
- If the language of the colonial ruler is used, is it the first, second, or third language?
- Is the colonial language used to examine students?
- Does this offer any advantage to the student given that English is an accepted world language?
- Does the country gain any advantage by using the language of the colonial ruler?

In countries that were once colonial powers, the past infiltrates national consciousness in other ways. In Britain, for example, politicians still appeal to a sense of national importance, whatever the economic and military evidence to the contrary.

## The new colonialism

The demise of colonialism did not end the influence of industrialised countries on their former colonies. Dismantling the economies of pre-colonial societies meant that by the time of independence, many developing countries were locked into a global trading system.

Industrialised countries also set the mechanism of this system. It offered existing markets for their primary commodities such as cocoa, tin, coffee or tea, but allowed little opportunity to develop manufacturing industries. In addition, third world debt over the past fifty years has forced many governments in developing countries to acknowledge the advice of international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Politicians in developing countries argue that colonialism has been replaced by an economic imperialism that perpetuates poverty as surely as direct rule had done before.

**Link...**

*You may want to look at the unit on Globalisation.*

**Viewpoint...**

**'They are calling it the new colonialism. The growing tide of information – predominantly television – that is sweeping from the rich countries of the north to the poorer south. According to some, it is threatening the stability and cultural integrity of the developing world. No sooner had developing nations reasserted their independence from the old colonial powers, international satellite television channels began beaming in Western pop music, Western political perspectives and advertisements for Western products.'**

BBC News Online 29.01.99



VSO/Andy Jones - Cameroon

### Viewpoint...

**‘Throughout the third world, as elsewhere around the globe, Western consumerism has taken hold. Visit small villages in which the only supply of water is polluted wells or ponds, but you’ll still be able to buy a bottle of Coca-Cola. Economic and political elites may take on Western lifestyles. They may promote development projects, such as international airports or four-lane motorways which carry prestige but may only serve the needs of a few. Traditional values and social codes are discarded, whilst advertising billboards pay homage to a new materialism. This is what has been termed cultural imperialism.’**

- Q** To what extent do you agree with this viewpoint? What evidence could you provide from the country you are working in?
- Q** What evidence is there in your home country of the colonial era?

Throughout this unit there have been texts and images that relate to the colonial era.

- Q** What do these texts and images say about Colonialism? How did colonial forces gain power and sustain colonial rule? What kind of images did the colonial powers use to portray the colonies? To what extent do you think the images are relevant to attitudes in the West today? ■

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