Learning Objectives

- To understand the causes for imperial expansion;
- To learn about the strategies Indigenous rulers followed in their engagement with European empires;
- To differentiate between the colonial experience in various regions in the developing world; and
- To appreciate the important consequences of colonial rule for Indigenous societies.

Chapter Overview

The idea of development, as it is understood in the twenty-first century, has a history of not even a hundred years, yet political, economic, and cultural interactions between today’s industrialized and developing regions go back half a millennium and more. In examining the long history of European expansion and conquest into what is now known as the developing world, this chapter puts those interactions and the ideas that underlay them in a longer time frame. The deeper historical context sets the stage for many of the themes and problems examined in subsequent chapters dealing with contemporary issues in development. Although the initial steps of expansion, often unplanned, were taken by traders, chartered companies, fortune-seekers, and “men on the spot,” the Industrial Revolution marked the arrival of “high” imperialism, as the English, French, German, and Portuguese states raced to carve out rival empires that circled the globe.

Europeans encountered diverse and different societies. In the Americas, the populous empires of the Aztecs and Incas as well as many other indigenous peoples suffered demographic collapse as a result of diseases, especially smallpox, brought by the Europeans. While Africa remained largely unsettled until the “scramble for Africa” after 1884, it provided the slaves that powered the plantation economies of the Americas.

Throughout the colonial period, imperial powers remained ambivalent about the endeavour and sought to use private chartered companies for expansion, as well as to govern on the cheap through indirect rule. Despite important differences across countries, the colonial experience has played an important role in structuring developing societies in the post-colonial world. Indeed, the first concerns for “development” emerged as the colonial powers responded to national struggles for self-determination after World War II. Political and economic inequalities between individual countries (and within them) and world regions, often with origins in the imperial era, continue to figure in relations between the Global North and South.
Finally, many of the questions and themes in development—including, but not only, the importance of gender, culture, and indigeneity; accounting for sustainability and environmental impact; the effect of politics, such as socialism and capitalism and the state in general; and even global pandemics—have clear antecedents in the “pre-history” of development during the colonial era.

**Key Terms**

**Chartered companies:** a company that received monopoly commercial rights from a state ruler for the purpose of promoting trade and exploration in a specific geographic area. Chartered companies, such as the East India Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company, served as vehicles for European overseas expansion, becoming vitally important in the 17th century.

**Colonialism:** the territorial conquest, occupation, and direct control of one country by another. In some instances, it also involved large-scale settlement and nearly always brought systems of great political inequality and economic exploitation.

**Colonization:** the processes of occupation and administration of a territory, country, or region by another and the consequences of these processes.

**Imperialism:** a political and economic system by which wealthy and powerful states control the political and economic life of other societies. Most forms of imperialism involve long-distance commercial ties, with or without direct political ties.

**Indirect rule:** a system of governance by which colonial powers recognized and supported the legitimacy of Indigenous authorities and legal systems insofar as they were subordinate and useful to the colonial state and used those authorities as intermediaries to govern the local population.

**Industrial Revolution:** the transition from rural, agrarian economies to urban-based factory production, associated with the harnessing of steam power as an energy source. First identified in 18th-century England, the Industrial Revolution eventually brought enormous political, social, and cultural change throughout 19th-century Europe.

**Neo-colonialism:** the perpetuation of exploitative economic relationships between a developed and a developing country despite the formal political independence of the latter.

**“Scramble for Africa”:** the rapid and disorderly colonization of Africa by European powers following the 1884 Berlin Conference.

**Self-determination:** a principle in customary international law and diplomacy according to which all peoples have the right to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). The right of all peoples to self-determination is embodied in several treaties and can be implemented in diverse ways.

**Key Concepts**

**Colonialism**
Colonialism is defined as the territorial conquest, occupation, and direct control of one country by another. In the case of European colonialism, the degree of direct control varied by time period and colonizing power. For instance, by the late-nineteenth century, most European colonizers were using indirect rule as a form of control, rather than the complete occupation and settling of a country, as in the case of North America. The colonial legacy is a major factor in explaining the predicament of the developing world today. Colonization created inequality, poverty, exclusion, and power imbalances within the colonized society, and it often worsened already-existing circumstances.

Imperialism

Imperialism is defined as a political and economic system by which powerful, wealthy states exercise control or domination over weaker states’ political and economic systems. Historically, a key requirement for imperial rule depends on the creation or maintenance of differences into a hierarchy. Direct control is not necessary for an imperialist condition to exist. Therefore, while colonialism was always imperialistic in nature, a state does not have to engage in formal colonization in order to be an imperialistic power. That is, modern-day imperialism can be pursued through indirect means of control, such as trade relations or the holding of debt.

Indirect rule

This is a system of governance by which colonial powers based their rule on the selection or promotion of local/national indigenous authorities and legal systems. Through such a system, local or national groups (which may or may not have already been elite ruling groups) were privileged as the intermediaries of colonial rule. The largest application of indirect rule was in British Asia, in hundreds of pre-colonial states. Indirect rule allowed colonizers to establish a certain amount of legitimacy, which, in turn, helped maintain stability. The legacies of indirect rule can be seen today, well after the end of formal colonialism, in the persistence of inequality and conflict between groups in developing countries along lines that were drawn by colonial rulers.

Neo-colonialism

Neo-colonialism is defined as the continuance of a condition of economic exploitation where as the economies of formally independent countries remain subject to the control of others. The significance of the term is that the exploitative relationship is argued to persist even after the formal end of colonial rule and the achievement of political independence by the colony. In some cases, a history of colonial rule is not necessary, as for instance with the United States and its relations with many developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Some argue that China’s activity in Africa (involving the extraction of natural resources) is neo-colonial in nature, as well.

“Scramble for Africa”

This phrase suggests both speed and disorder to describe the late nineteenth-century European conquest of Africa. On the eve of Africa’s partition, European powers had only a handful of colonies on the continent despite having visited and traded with coastal African societies for more than 400 years. See Box 2.2.
Self-determination

*Self-determination* is a customary principle of international law and diplomacy whereby all peoples are held to have a right to freely choose their own forms of political, economic, social, and cultural development. This principle became a major element in the drive for de-colonization and the formal independence of colonized states. Nations, and communities, in pursuit of self-determination refused to remain confined to the narrow structures imagined by colonial empire, and instead imagined new paths that drew from metropolitan principles of self determination, labour rights, and even gender equity.

**Discussion and Debate Ideas**

1. Discuss Photo 2.3 on page 36 of the textbook. Consider what it says about the power dynamics of colonialism. In particular, consider the issues legitimation of power and indirect rule.

2. Have a class discussion about how colonial policies continue to fuel internal conflicts. You may want to discuss conflicts in the Middle East, Sri Lanka, The Philippines, or Sudan. As well, genocides in Rwanda and Myanmar can also be incorporated into the discussions.

3. Debate topic: Colonialism was mostly an economic phenomenon related to the expansion of capitalism.


   For a short interlude in class from a comedian on the topic, start at 1:45. Have a small group discussion on the themes Trevor raised (i.e., “most arrogant form of patriotism” and “colonialism done right”).


   Anthony Bourdain’s post-colonial Mozambique episode on *No Reservations* is an excellent case study for this chapter. Colonialism in Mozambique is a major theme throughout the episode and touches on the history of slavery and colonialism under Portugal. For a class activity, skill forward and show 28:07-34:20 on the Grand Hotel. Reflect on and talk about the (new) reality for residents in the Grand Hotel. How does this relate to colonialism? How does this relate to colonialism today?

   Divide the class into two groups and debate the following:

   a) Why build a new hotel resort? Bring in foreign direct investment (FDI) to redo the hotel to bring it back to its grander days.

   b) Why not build a new hotel resort and instead a development intervention? What is to be done if the hotel is not redone?
6. Have a class discussion on informal vs. colonial rule, and how it has evolved to neo-colonialism today. In terms of governance, does informal rule and neo-colonialism reproduce difference and hierarchies in similar or different ways from formal colonial rule?

**Film and News Clips**

1. **Cuba! Africa! Revolution**: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1kQ5aIaUcg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1kQ5aIaUcg)
   A fantastic documentary that details independence movements throughout Africa, and the role of the Cuban revolution in inspiring and aiding many of them.

2. **France Gouda: How the Colonial Past Influences the Way We See the World Today. TedxRotterdam**: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7CyPpnZ7PU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7CyPpnZ7PU)
   A good and thorough talk about what the post-colonial present is.

   The mission is a classic, and beautifully scored film, that can serve as an important learning tool for understanding the 18th century politics of the Americas, but also the arbitrary design of colonial intentions.

   *Concerning Violence* is a documentary film based on Frantz Fanon’s essay “Concerning Violence” from his book The Wretched of the Earth. The film is a visual essay on decolonization in Africa and the English version is narrated by Lauryn Hill. The documentary premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival and received a universal acclaim response.

   [https://www.theguardian.com/cities/gallery/2016/may/05/mozambique-abandoned-grande-hotel-beira-squatters-ruins-in-pictures](https://www.theguardian.com/cities/gallery/2016/may/05/mozambique-abandoned-grande-hotel-beira-squatters-ruins-in-pictures)

   [https://open.spotify.com/episode/5DrDdPF7qSKtCOeGP8iCMm?si=qVwCoUBeSb6uxowZcpM67g](https://open.spotify.com/episode/5DrDdPF7qSKtCOeGP8iCMm?si=qVwCoUBeSb6uxowZcpM67g)
   A podcast with two instructors of introduction to development studies who discuss postcolonialism and its broader significance for international development studies.

**Teaching Aids**

   This article examines two recent popular films and argues that they both embody the essence of settler colonial stories.


   A recent publication that explores that highlights the continuing debates about post-colonialism.


   Based on documents from a long-lost and unexplored colonial archive and oral histories from more than one hundred Mozambican, *Slavery by Any Other Name* tells the story of how Portugal privatized part of its empire to the Mozambique Company. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, the company governed central Mozambique under a royal charter and built a vast forced labour regime camouflaged by the rhetoric of the civilizing mission.


   *The Darker Nations* traces the intellectual origins and the political history of the 20th century attempt to knit together the world’s impoverished countries in opposition to the United States and Soviet spheres of influence in the decades following World War II.