

Colonialism and Colonies

I INTRODUCTION

Colonialism and Colonies, one country's domination of another country or people—usually achieved through aggressive, often military, actions—and the territory acquired in this manner. The terms *colonialism* and *imperialism* are sometimes used interchangeably, but scholars usually distinguish between the two, reserving *colonialism* for instances where one country assumes political control over another and using *imperialism* more broadly to refer to political or economic control exercised either formally or informally. This article will discuss both concepts and how they have been practiced in different parts of the world. It will summarize colonial practices before the 15th century and then focus in more detail on colonialism and imperialism during the last 500 years.

II TYPES OF COLONIES

In the past 500 years, there have been several types of colonies. The main ones were colonies of settlement, colonies of exploitation, and what might be called contested settlement colonies. Most European powers established more than one type of colony. The British Empire, for instance, included colonies of settlement (Virginia, Massachusetts, New Zealand, New South Wales), colonies of exploitation (Nigeria, Jamaica, Malaya), a preexisting empire (India), contested settlement colonies (Kenya), and spheres of influence (Argentina). The French Empire also included settlement colonies (Algeria, Québec), exploitation colonies (Martinique, the French Congo), and a preexisting empire (Indochina).

A Colonies of Settlement

Colonies of settlement resulted when citizens of a foreign country, the colonizing country, migrated to and eventually took complete control of a new area. These areas came to be dominated not only by foreign people but also by foreign crops and animals. The foreign colonizers ordinarily substituted their culture for the existing one. Settlers often excluded native inhabitants from their society or killed many of them in violent confrontations or by exposure to disease. In the Americas, many Native Americans died from diseases introduced by Europeans, diseases to which they had no immunity. Colonies of settlement were located in temperate zones, with climates similar to Europe's. They are sometimes called neo-Europes or, until recently, White Man's Countries. Examples of settlement colonies include English colonies in parts of the United States, Canada, and Australia.

B Colonies of Exploitation

Colonies of exploitation, also known as tropical dependencies, did not attract large numbers of permanent European settlers. Europeans went to these colonies primarily as planters, administrators, merchants, or military officers. In exploitation colonies, foreign powers established political control, if necessary using force against colonial resistance, but they did not displace or kill native societies. They also did not, for the most part, intentionally destroy indigenous (native) cultures. Thus, the geographical circumstances and historical dynamics of exploitation colonies are profoundly different from those of colonies of settlement.

A colony of exploitation had an economy based on products of the labor of local inhabitants, working either on their own land or on plantations. These colonies usually produced cash crops such as spices, cotton, palm oil, or rubber. Colonies of exploitation included Indonesia and Malaya in Southeast Asia, and Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa.

C Contested Settlement Colonies

In a contested settlement colony, a significant number of European settlers took up permanent residence. They tended to develop their own government, independent of, or even in defiance of, the parent country. A contested settlement colony also formed its own cultural and political identity. Politically, white citizens dominated native peoples.

However, the native population not only survived, but increased. Native peoples managed to maintain some control over their lives, although their political control was usually slight. Furthermore, their labor remained the backbone of the economy. Eventually, native people were able to successfully contest white control of the colony, both the control by the colonizing country and control by the settlers. Examples of contested settlement colonies include Algeria and Southern Rhodesia, both in Africa.

D Other Types of Colonies

There are several other types of colonialism and imperialism, including preexisting empires, internal colonialism, and spheres of influence or informal empires. *Preexisting empires* were or had been powerful states that possessed a large population, strong political structures, and a sophisticated economy. India under English rule is an example.

In *internal colonialism*, one geographic area or ethnic group dominated another within the same country. Examples of this kind of internal control include the economic domination of the American South by the North after the American Civil War (1861-1865), or the influence of England over other areas of the British Isles.

In spheres of influence or informal empires, Europeans interfered in the internal affairs of a state but stopped short of formal political annexation. During the 19th century, individual Western nations declared so-called spheres of influence over parts of China. They even required that disputes involving Europeans in these areas of China had to be judged according to Western law in Western courts. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, in areas ruled under the Ottoman Empire, some Western nations invested heavily in canals and railroads and intervened politically when they felt they needed to protect those investments. The concept of an informal empire is used to describe British or American relations with the former Spanish colonies in South and Central America after Latin American independence in the early 19th century.

III MOTIVES FOR COLONIZATION

In general, strong countries dominated weaker ones to promote their own national selfinterest, out of economic, religious, cultural, or other reasons. It has been said that the three primary motives for establishing colonies were gold, God, and glory, but the main incentives were usually economic.

A Economic Motives

The colonizing country could control important markets for its exports (such as cotton products) and deny these markets to its competitors. Colonies were also important as sources of raw materials (such as raw cotton) and as opportunities for investment. A country often also increased its wealth by conquering another civilization and taking its riches or by exploiting the mineral wealth of another land. In the 16th century, for example, Spain became a rich and powerful country largely by plundering the riches of existing civilizations in the Americas and by seizing the area's mineral wealth through mining.

These practices were promoted by the policy of mercantilism that many European colonial powers adopted. Those who advocated mercantilism believed that exports to foreign countries were preferable both to trade within a country and to imports because exports brought more money into the country. They also believed that the wealth of a nation depended primarily on the possession of gold and silver. Mercantilists assumed that the volume of world wealth and trade was relatively static, so one country's gain required another's loss. According to this view, a colonial possession should provide wealth to the country that controlled it. Colonies were not supposed to compete with the mother country's home industries. Empires were closed systems, designed to keep competitors out.

To implement mercantilist policy, England passed legislation called the Navigation Acts that restricted its colonies to trading solely with the mother country. The acts also stipulated that goods imported or exported by English colonies in Africa, Asia, or America had to be shipped on vessels constructed by English shipbuilders and that at least three-quarters of the ships' crews had to be English.

Sometimes such regulations backfired. During the French and Indian War (1754-1763) in North America, the British Parliament sought to increase revenues to pay the costs of defending the American colonies. It used the Navigation Acts to levy heavier duties on the American colonies. American colonists felt oppressed by these taxes, which are considered to be one of the causes of the American Revolution (1775-1783).

In the 18th century a reaction to mercantilism began, and the philosophy of free trade started to take root. Economists, particularly British economist Adam Smith, argued against government regulation of the economy. Smith asserted that trade with a colony was no more profitable than with an independent country. He argued that political strategy might justify colonialism, but economics could not. By the 19th century, free-trade policies were prompting European nations to pursue informal empires or spheres of influence.

B Religious and Strategic Motives

European countries also wanted to spread their religious beliefs and eliminate other religions. Roman Catholic countries, particularly Spain, set out to convert non-Christian native peoples. Protestant countries also used religion as a motive for expansion. Beginning in the 19th century, Britain's missionary movements served as a significant reason for that country's colonial efforts. The impact of the colonizer's religion on native societies varied. In parts of West Africa and southern Africa, very large proportions of the population converted to Christianity. In most places, the indigenous people combined the new religion with their existing beliefs and culture, as in Central America, where the Maya people merged their native practices with Christianity.

Sometimes colonies were important for strategic reasons—for example, the Cape of Good Hope, on the southern tip of Africa, guarded European sailors' southern route to Asia. Also, some countries occupied colonies in order to protect previous investments. In Egypt, a nationalist uprising in 1882 threatened the ruling Egyptian powers with whom Britain had an informal agreement regarding the Suez Canal, of which the British government had purchased part ownership. When Britain saw its investments in and its control of the canal in jeopardy, it occupied Egypt to control the situation.

Some European colonizing powers justified their colonial activities on what they called humanitarian motives. In the 19th century, Britain cited the African slave trade as a reason to increase its control over areas in Africa. Of course, the British had been leaders in the slave trade at its height in the previous century.

IV COLONIAL ECONOMIES

The two broad types of colonies—settlement and exploitation—had very different types of economies.

A Colonies of Settlement

Colonies of settlement began by specializing in what are called primary products. These products included commodities such as wool, in New Zealand, and gold, in South Africa. Over time, however, economies of settlement colonies came to resemble those of European nations: their agriculture diversified, and they developed manufacturing industries.

Because most settlement colonies gained political self-rule early, they could use protective tariffs (taxes on imports) to shelter their young industries. These industries could grow without competition from more advanced industries in other countries. The result was high-wage labor and a high standard of living, both for white settlers. Examples of settlement colonies that followed this model include British colonies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

B Colonies of Exploitation

The colonies of exploitation had very different experiences: they remained politically dependent on the mother country and economically underdeveloped. Even after they achieved independence, many colonies of exploitation found developing their economies difficult. The economies of these colonies could typically be divided into two very distinct sectors, the export sector and the subsistence sector.

B1 Export Sector

The export sector was based on the production or extraction of the colony's principal primary products. These included cash crops such as sugar, tea, or rubber, or minerals such as gold, tin, or copper. Virtually all capital invested in a colony of exploitation went into the export sector.

This sector employed unskilled or semiskilled members of the relatively small native middle class, who earned more than their fellow citizens, although they were low-paid by European standards. The colony's railway system operated like a funnel, moving goods efficiently outward to the ports, but not from point to point within the interior. Profits moved in the same direction as the goods on trains—out of the colony and into the colonizing country.

B2 Subsistence Sector

The subsistence sector was the traditional part of the economy. It employed (or underemployed) the bulk of the population and produced most of the food that fed them. The subsistence sector was inefficient,

had little investment, paid poor wages, and supported a low and often declining standard of living. Its food production failed to keep pace with the country's rising population. Because the export sector provided few health benefits or other kinds of social security (such as assistance for the unemployed, the elderly, or people with disabilities), the subsistence sector absorbed much of the cost of raising children and caring for sick or old people. The subsistence sector thereby subsidized the relatively prosperous and advanced export sector, much as the colonial economy as a whole supported the growth of the mother country.

As a whole, the problems of an exploitation colony economy have tended to persist after the colony gained political independence, for several reasons. The former mother country sometimes continued to exercise some control over the economy, maintaining close relationships with the former colony's new rulers and policy-makers. These colonies have also had difficulty attracting loans into the subsistence sector because returns on such loans are low. Investment has tended to go into the export sector where it will produce better results because exports, such as tin, coffee, or palm oil, are in demand and have established markets. For the same reasons, foreign aid has tended to flow into the export sector.

V HISTORY OF COLONIALISM

A Age of Exploration (1450-1700)

In the 15th century, Europe was divided into a number of emerging nation states that competed intensely with one another. This competition was one factor that drove these states to expand. In contrast, during the same time period, China was a strong, unified power that possessed both the technology and the economic base for expansion, but did not do so. China had conducted overseas voyages but decided to end them after a bitter debate at the imperial court in the early 15th century. In contrast, Europe was not a single entity, and its various states competed fiercely for advantage over their neighbors.

Each of the European states ventured beyond its borders at different times: first Portugal, then Spain, then the Netherlands, England, and France. Their attempts to expand overseas were linked very closely with their struggles for political and economic power. Trade was considered a form of war, and trading stations were called forts. The search for a variety of products to trade drove the Europeans' explorations.

The Portuguese began a race to build a commercial empire in the early 15th century by exploring the coast of West Africa. There they established a trade in gold and slaves; by the 16th century African slaves were commonplace throughout southern and western Europe. Other trade items encouraged exploration of other areas. In the North Atlantic Ocean, an enormously valuable trade in fish encouraged boats of all European nations to search for fishing grounds farther from Europe. Spices drew explorers around the tip of Africa to Southeast Asia. Europeans, lacking refrigeration, needed spices to preserve the meat they ate. By trading directly with the East, Europeans could avoid costly customs duties, or taxes, charged by the rulers of every country between Egypt and Europe for letting spice shipments pass through.

Religion also played an important role in the increase of exploration. Early modern Europeans, especially Catholics, gave high priority to converting people with other beliefs. The Spaniards in particular incorporated religion as a vital part of their colonial movements, and they sent many missionaries to the Americas, as did the Portuguese. In early English and Dutch settlements, chaplains primarily ministered to the settlers instead of converting the indigenous peoples. The British missionary movement did not develop significantly until about 1800, although some early settlers left England for the Americas so that they could be free to practice their particular religious beliefs. For example, Plymouth Colony, in what is now Massachusetts, was founded in 1620 by the Pilgrims, a group of Puritans who had been persecuted in England for their religious beliefs.

A pivotal point in European expansion occurred at the end of the 15th century. In 1492 Italian navigator Christopher Columbus sailed west across the Atlantic in an effort to reach Asia by a new route. Basing his voyage on his calculation of the earth's size (an estimate that turned out to be wrong), Columbus reached the Caribbean islands off what would later be called North and South America. On that journey as well as others that followed, Columbus claimed the areas and established outposts for Spain, which financed his voyages. Although at first he insisted the area was part of Asia, Columbus eventually realized that he was exploring what he called a "New World," as yet unknown to Europeans.

In late 1497 Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and in the spring of 1498 became the first European to reach India by a sea route. Columbus's and

da Gama's explorations helped spur a vast movement towards exploration and European colonialism during the 16th century.

A1 Spanish Colonies

Within a few years, Spanish *conquistadors* (conquerors) overwhelmed the powerful Aztec and Inca Empires in what are now Mexico and Peru. These conquistadors claimed the land for Spain, and settlements were soon established. This was the beginning of the Spanish Empire, which became the most powerful empire of its day.

Individual Spanish settlers received large areas of land called *encomiendas*, as well as the right to control the labor of the people who lived on the land. On these encomiendas, the Spaniards raised cattle and sheep, but the most important product of New Spain, as the Spaniards called their claims in the Americas, was silver. The indigenous people, overseen by the Spaniards, mined silver in the mountains of Peru and in Mexico, often at great risks that resulted in death. The silver that reached Spain helped finance that country's trade with other European nations, and it fueled massive inflation in the price of goods that lasted until well after 1600 throughout Europe.

Much of the silver from the New World ended up in India and China. Europeans could not sell their goods in Asia, because Asian manufactured goods, particularly textiles, were more advanced than those of the Europeans. For this reason, Europeans used the gold and silver acquired from their colonies to pay for Asian spices, silk, and cotton cloth.

A2 Portuguese Colonies

Meanwhile, the Portuguese were starting settlements in Brazil. Like the Spaniards in other parts of the Americas, they took over land and forced the native population to work it. Also, Portuguese explorers were establishing a very different sort of commercial empire in the Indian Ocean. This system was based on trade and war, rather than on taking large amounts of land and dominating its people. At first the Portuguese had no competition: the Chinese had called their fleets home; Indian and Arab ships did not carry guns; and other European nations had not yet entered the field.

By the early 16th century the Portuguese had established a string of strategic bases, including Hormuz at the tip of the Persian Gulf, Goa on the western coast of India, and the Straits of Molucca, the gateway between the Indian Ocean and the China Sea. From these bases, the Portuguese could control and monitor the sea-going trade of the entire region. Portuguese power, however, was entirely naval, and they were unable to threaten the internal strength of land-based empires. Moreover, when larger European nations arrived in the area, Portuguese naval supremacy vanished.

A3 Dutch Colonies

By the early 17th century, the Dutch had replaced the Portuguese as the primary European colonial power in Asia. They took control of the Moluccas (now part of the Republic of Indonesia) and instituted a new system that would have great significance for areas in other parts of the world: the plantation system. The Dutch plantations in Indonesia were like Spanish *encomiendas* in that they employed native labor. There were, however, important differences. Plantations were usually more compact and were dedicated to the production of a single *cash crop*, a crop produced primarily for market. The plantation was much like a modern factory; it was an early and highly profitable form of industrial capitalism. On a plantation, labor was a commodity, a cost of producing a crop; consequently, slave labor, the most mobile system of labor, quickly became associated with the plantation system.

The Dutch also colonized parts of North America. They based their claims on the explorations of Henry Hudson, an English mariner employed by the Dutch East India Company. In 1609 Hudson entered present-day New York Bay and explored the river that now bears his name. During the next few years the Dutch dispatched several trading vessels to the region, which they named New Netherland. A few permanent colonists began to arrive in 1624, when a trade outpost was built. The town was named New Amsterdam (now New York City) in 1626, and the first large wave of settlement there occurred the same year.

A4 English Colonies

England began exploration during the same period as the Dutch. In 1600 England granted a charter to the East India Company to establish overseas commercial and trade interests. The English government

granted the company a monopoly of English trade with the “East Indies,” which the company eventually stretched to include the lucrative opium trade in China. Similar companies were established for the trade with Africa, Virginia, and elsewhere in the Americas.

English colonization in the Americas, however, remained almost unknown in the 16th century because England was at war with Spain. The first English colony in North America was established on Roanoke Island, off the North American coast. This colony failed and the English did not attempt further exploration and colonization in the Americas until 1604, after they made peace with Spain. During the 17th century, the English established colonies in the Caribbean and North America that became the foundations of the British Empire. In the West Indies, the English established sugar plantations, and in 1655 they conquered the Spanish colony of Jamaica, the first English colony taken by force. The English established a string of colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America.

A5 French Colonies

The English faced competition in upper North America as the French colonized parts of what is now Canada. In 1608 French explorer Samuel de Champlain founded the colony of Québec as a furtrading center, strengthening French control of the St. Lawrence River. The French were also interested in converting the native peoples to Christianity, and they used the fur trade to fund their missionary activities.

Later in the century, the French became interested in expansion. In 1673 explorer Louis Joliet and Jesuit missionary Jacques Marquette reached the Mississippi River and traveled down it as far as the Arkansas River. In 1682 explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle led an expedition down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, claiming all the land drained by the river for Louis XIV, king of France, and naming the region Louisiana. As the French gained more control in North America, they developed a rivalry with England that would come to a head during the 18th century.

B European Merchant Empires (1700-1815)

The foundations of European sea-based empires were laid during the 16th and 17th centuries. By the 18th century, these empires had become powerful. To understand these empires, it is helpful to break them up into regional networks or world systems. A world system is an area where different cultures are related through commercial and other interactions. The boundaries of a world system are not restricted to territory controlled by any one country. The Atlantic Ocean is an example of a world system, as is the Indian Ocean.

For the Atlantic Ocean, it is helpful to think of two fairly distinct, but connected, world systems. The North Atlantic system included Western Europe, Russia, the Baltic, Scandinavia, the abundant fishing areas near Newfoundland and New England, and what became Canada and the northern states of the United States. Its main products were timber, fish, and fur. The South Atlantic system included the Spanish colonies in South and Central America, the Portuguese colony of Brazil, the sugar-producing islands of the Caribbean, West Africa, and the southern colonies in North America. Its most prominent products were silver, sugar, tobacco, African slaves, and, after 1800, cotton.

The North Atlantic world system relied heavily on the French, Dutch, and English colonies in North America. By the beginning of the 18th century, conflicts between competing European powers had intensified in that area. Territories along North America’s eastern seaboard changed hands as the British gained control of Dutch areas, and the French and British entered a series of wars. Following the French and Indian War, Great Britain gained control of Canada and all French territories east of the Mississippi River. The British also gained Florida from Spain, which had been an ally of France. The war determined that British, rather than French ideas and institutions would dominate North America.

In the South Atlantic world system, slavery was crucial as a source of labor. Millions of Native American people had died because they lacked immunity to diseases introduced to the area. Death rates reached as high as 80 to 90 percent of the native population during the first century of contact with Europeans. Also, relatively few Europeans migrated to the New World until the late 18th century, providing few workers for new industries.

The shortage of labor became particularly acute after the Europeans introduced the plantation system, which became the main form of agricultural production in the South Atlantic system. The plantation system was particularly prominent in the sugar-producing areas of the Caribbean islands and Brazil and in the southeastern colonies of mainland North America, where cotton and tobacco were important.

Around the world, in the Indian Ocean world system, British power was growing. By the beginning of the 18th century, the powerful Mughal Empire, centered in north India, began to decline. The English East India Company, which had established a presence in India during the 1600s, had a fort in Calcutta (now Kolkata). The company used this fort as a base to gradually take over the entire Indian subcontinent. The company accomplished this by hiring an Indian army, overseen by British officers, which was paid for with taxes collected from Indians. This army formed the main British military weapon in Asia, until India achieved independence from Britain in 1947.

In the Indian Ocean world system, trade was primarily in spices, silk, and other luxury goods. This trade had existed for thousands of years, providing Asian countries with economies featuring large, sophisticated markets, credit systems, and manufacturing techniques. Before the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century, Europeans produced little that Asians wanted, so they were able to participate in the Indian Ocean world system only because they possessed a great deal of silver from America. The Industrial Revolution (the shift from hand manufacturing to large-scale factory production) allowed Europeans to increase productivity of labor by about ten times. Consequently they were able to cut costs substantially while maintaining or even improving product quality. Europeans had another huge advantage: military power. More than any other people, Europeans had made fighting a profession, one that helped them expand their commercial activities.

VII CONCLUSION

Were colonies worth the costs to the colonizing country? The answer to that question varies. A visit to London or other centers of British trade reveals the docks, shipping and trading firms, merchant banks, and even street names that were closely related to commercial ventures with India, Malaya, the West Indies, and Africa. But profitability was by no means constant, and the mother country was responsible for administrative and police costs.

Especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, colonial relationships undoubtedly helped the Netherlands, Britain, and other European countries accumulate capital for industrialization. Even then, however, the bulk of the capital was raised internally from the profits of agriculture. In the 18th century, before the abolition of slavery, Great Britain's colonial relationship with the West Indies was much more lucrative than afterwards, when those slave-based colonies became a liability. Some experts believe that the long-term decline of the British economy that set in about the 1870s was cushioned by its colonial empire. Without colonies, the long slide might have been more like a sudden crash. A crash, however, might have encouraged the British to create a more modern, efficient industrial plant, as Germany and Japan did after their disasters in World War II (1939-1945).

On the other hand, colonialism caused many problems for former colonies. The economics of old colonial systems linger, especially in former exploitation colonies, where these nations struggle to overcome depressed economies and archaic class systems. Also, one of the most controversial legacies of colonialism is cultural intolerance. White settlers who conquered nonwhite peoples often held the attitude that ethnic and cultural differences define some people as superior and others as inferior. Some colonizing countries began education programs that maintained white superiority by distancing native students from their own culture and history.

Although imperialism in one form or another remains an issue, by the late 20th century colonialism had become obsolete. In 1970 the United Nations General Assembly, which by then was dominated by a huge majority of former colonies, declared colonialism a crime. After that, even though Western societies continued to intervene in other countries' affairs—for example, the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989—the idea of establishing formal colonial control had become unthinkable. The remnants of colonialism were confined to a few small islands, such as Bermuda, a self-governing dependency of the United Kingdom.