

COLONIALISM

Colonialism is the creation of colonies – when one country extends influence over another country for the purpose of economic advantage.

Colonialism in the 1800s

In the 1800s and early 1900s, Britain and other European countries wanted to import natural resources (such as ivory, diamonds, tea and cotton) from many other nations across the world, particularly in Africa and Asia. They sent explorers and traders to these countries, to export these materials back to Europe.

In order to ensure that they had a guaranteed supply of these resources, and for international prestige, European powers also sent soldiers to conquer the countries, often violently subduing the local tribes or governments. Administrators were then sent to govern these countries as 'colonies', to continue to subdue the local people and ensure the flow of wealth and resources back to the 'home country'.

The British Empire was particularly large, as not only was Britain very established in overseas trade (with India, for example) and conquered those countries advantageous to trade, but also had a tradition of exploring. Countries newly discovered by Europeans were claimed for the monarch. In what is sometimes called the 'scramble for Africa', explorers were anxious to 'discover' new countries and claim them first. Cecil Rhodes, a businessman and explorer, claimed a large portion of Southern Africa for Queen Victoria. This included South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (then called Rhodesia, after Rhodes).

TASK 1: COLONIAL INHERITANCE

Use the internet and your school library to research which other countries in Africa were colonised by different European countries (remember that the borders between countries were different then).

What languages do people of those countries speak now? What remains of the former colonial powers – maybe buildings, forms of government?

Colonialism in Rwanda

Indirect Rule: Working with Existing Government

In 1895, Rwanda became a German colony, part of what was called German East Africa, which also included Burundi and Tanzania. Germany had a relatively small empire, governing 9% of Africa's population compared to France's 15% and Britain's nearly 30%. They were chiefly interested in encouraging the growth of crops such as coffee and cotton.

Germany did not have much direct involvement in the rule of Rwanda. It chose to work with existing forms of government, and even accepted the Tutsi king. They brought the few independent Hutu areas under central control.

Direct Rule: Forming a New Government

After World War I, Germany's overseas colonies were confiscated by the League of Nations (the predecessor of the UN) and divided between countries affected by the war to manage. Rwanda was given to Belgium as a protectorate.

The Belgian government of Rwanda was much more direct than the German government had been. They maintained some of the existing Rwandan forms of government, but manipulated them: for example, they recognised the Tutsi king, but when they considered one king unsuitable they replaced him with their own choice of monarch (disregarding the usual route of succession).

TASK 2: FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

What other colonies were managed by colonial powers who maintained some of the existing systems of government? Did it work? Did the local leaders (e.g. kings or governors) have any real powers or were they just 'puppets'? (You may like to look at India and South Africa under British colonial rule.)

Divide and Conquer

The old phrase "Divide and Conquer" can certainly be used to describe Belgian rule of Rwanda. The authorities classified everyone in the country as Tutsis, Hutu or Twa, and required them to carry identity cards stating which race they belonged to. This decision was quite arbitrary and based on profession, not race, as you can read in the Historical Background section of this resource.

The Belgians thought of the Tutsi as 'superior' to the Hutu and as a kind of 'ruling class'. They decided to use the Tutsi to help them rule, gave them advantages and only offered education to Tutsi boys. This, understandably, caused resentment amongst the Hutus, especially when Tutsi officials had to enforce some unpopular laws that the Belgian government made. These included horrible punishments of Hutus who rebelled, such as physical mutilation.

The Belgian government also encouraged Hutu hatred of the Tutsis, as it suited them for the Hutus to hate the Tutsi officials rather than the government who controlled them.

TASK 3: ADAPTED AFRICA

Find out how Africa has moved on from colonialism. How well has Africa adapted the institutions left by its colonial powers?

