

12.2 Imperialism

Imperialism refers to a historical phase which reached its peak during the 19th and early 20th century.

Imperialism had an even greater impact on the extension of military, political and economic spheres of influence than colonialism. Thus, 'Imperialism' (lat. imperium = empire) is the process in which the objective is to win power and influence in the world, at the expense of other, non-European peoples.

European imperialism was marked by racism, increasingly fierce nationalism, and a sense of mission which originated from these two factors. Basically, it relied on the law of the jungle. Various European countries had a strong ambition for extending their power. It became more or less a race to the territories in Africa and Asia which had not yet been colonized. Their own colonial areas had to be increased at the expense of other powers. The colonial powers' desire for raw materials and natural resources from the colonies was also stimulated by the Industrial Revolution.



Figure 1: "From Cape to Cairo" sphere of Britain in Africa, cartoon 1892

Later on, in the late 19th century Japan joined in the global competition for colonies. In contemporary Taiwan and on the Sakhalin peninsula there were Japanese territories. In the interwar period, Japan occupied Korea and parts of China, which had previously suffered under the influence of European colonial powers. (The Chinese seaport Hong Kong was a British colony until 1997, when it was returned from Britain to China.) There were repeated uprisings in occupied areas that were forcefully crushed by the imperial powers. Two famous examples are the “Boxer Rebellion” in China 1900 and the Herero uprising in German-occupied Namibia.



Figure 2: “Partition of China”, French cartoon of 1898

The ‘Boxers’

They were an alliance of Chinese opponents of exploitive European policy, named after their close style of combat.

The Boxer Rebellion was a revolt against the foreign powers that had gradually brought China under their control. Beijing's Legation Quarter, where all the colonial powers' embassies were located, was literally besieged by the Boxers as well as by groups of ordinary Chinese military units.

An international security force under British command was rapidly established and could quickly regain the upper hand.

The uprising of the Herero in Namibia, who opposed the German colonial power ended in genocide: the uprising cost the Herero not only thousands of lives, the survivors were driven out by the German "protection force" into the Omaheke desert, where most died miserably of thirst and starvation. This is referred to in recent historical research as the first genocide of the 20th century. There are no exact statistics of the victims. Imprecise data suggests that before the uprising there were about 80 000 Herero people, and afterwards about 15 000.

The colonial powers also developed the infrastructure of new territories, but only as far as it was useful to exploit the land. To control the regions, they took advantage of their superior weapons technology.

The various peoples who lived in the colonies were pitted against one another, and thus were alternately won as allies. The people were exploited by the colonial power not only in their own country, but were taken to other continents to engage in wars against other peoples. In both world wars, France used soldiers from African countries, such as Senegal, on the western front. Likewise, the British fought against the Japanese in World War II using soldiers from their African colonies in the harsh jungle warfare in Burma.

Traces of colonialism and imperialism are still recognizable today. For example, in the school system of the former colonies, the languages of the former colonial masters are still taught. Often the language of the colonial power is still the official language, e.g. in Senegal (French), India (English), or Angola (Portuguese). Also, the attitude of many Europeans towards peoples of other continents does not seem to have changed significantly, and in some cases still carries imperialist overtones.

Incidentally, the battle for resources is not over: today there is massive competition among several nations, including Russia and the United States, to divide up the North Pole in order to exploit what could be natural resources in the future.

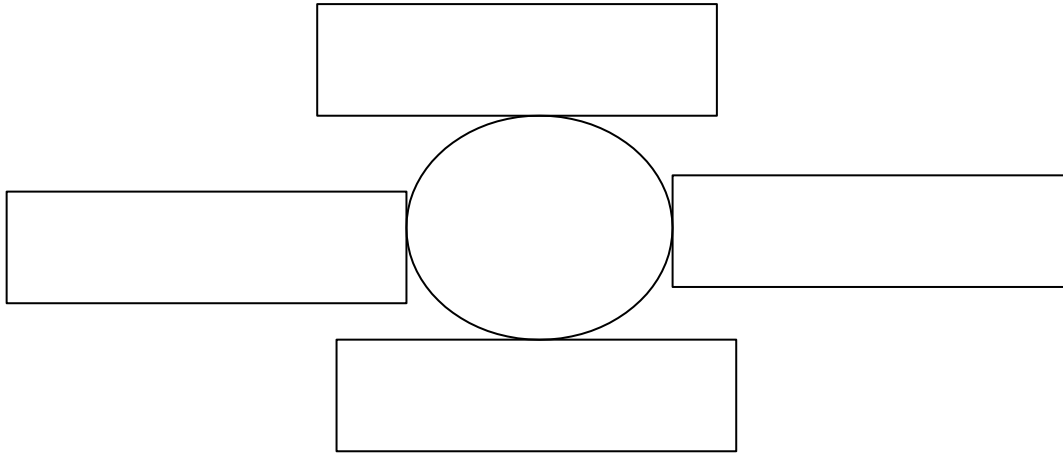
Tasks:

12.2.A What is "Imperialism" and "Colonialism"? Is there a difference?

Below you can find four definitions of imperialism. In groups of four: which features do all four have in common? Which aspects are new? Fill in the diagram.

- 1: The policy of extending the rule or authority of an empire or nation over foreign countries, of acquiring and holding colonies and dependencies.
- 2: The policy or practice of extending a state's rule over other foreign territories by aggressive behaviour.
- 3: The effect that a powerful country or group of countries has in changing or influencing the way people live in other, poorer countries.

4: The policy of extending the power of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas.



When do we talk of imperialism? And when do we talk of colonialism?

12.2.B Comprehension questions: working with the text and the maps (task 7.2.D)

1. What were the main colonial powers in the 16th century?

2. What were the main imperialistic powers in the 19th and 20th century?

3. Why did they strive to extend their power?

4. How did they consolidate their power in their colonies?

5. What are present-day traces of imperialism?

12.2.C “From Cape to Cairo” – interpreting a cartoon

Fig. 206.1 shows a cartoon that symbolizes the empire of Great Britain. Analyze the cartoon (Method 11), taking into consideration the two maps (task 7.2.D). Did the British really rule over the whole continent of Africa, from north to south? Or was this cartoon more a statement of intent? Give reasons for your opinion.

12.2.D The Scramble for Africa: Map comparison – Africa 1884–1914

Compare the two maps (Method 7). What do they say? What kind of development can be read from the card: colonialism or imperialism? Give reasons for your answer



Figure 3: Africa until 1884



Figure 4: Africa until 1914

Glossary

exploitation	Ausbeutung	<i>to exploit people</i>
extension	Verbreitung	<i>to extend one's power over</i>
genocide	Völkermord	<i>to commit genocide</i>
impact	Auswirkung	<i>to have a great impact on</i>
occupation	Besetzung	<i>to occupy a country</i>
to pit so. against so.	gegeneinander ausspielen	<i>They were pitted against each other.</i>
uprising	Aufstand	<i>to set up an uprising</i>