

KEY CONCEPT: COLONIALISM

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Concept origins

The etymological origins of the word ‘colonialism’ stem from the Latin *colonia*, which refers to a farm or settlement and related particularly to Roman citizens who settled in conquered territories. Defined by Loomba (2015, p.20) as ‘the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods’, colonialism has been a widespread and recurrent feature of world history, being a prominent characteristic of the Roman, Mongol, Aztec, Inca, Ottoman and Chinese empires among others before the age of modern European colonisation began in the 16th century. By the 1930s, over 84 per cent of the world’s land surface was or had been subject to colonisation (Loomba, 2015). Forming a colonial settlement inevitably impacts on indigenous populations, reconfiguring local communities through a wide variety of practices. The latter might include military conquest, mass violence, genocide, trade, expropriation and theft, dehumanisation and marginalisation, slavery, **racism**, patriarchal, and—not least—cultural and educational practices (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2006, 2013). European imperialist colonisation was characterised by, among other things, its extensive exploitation of indigenous resources and population as labour and its use of colonies as captive markets for goods and services.

Current status and usage

As an academic discipline, colonial and **postcolonial** studies are a new, growing and somewhat heterogeneous field (Young, 2003; Ashcroft *et al.*, 2006; Andreotti, 2011, 2015). We do not live in a *post*-colonial world: the colonial and postcolonial intertwine, with on-going dependency between the margins and the centre, neocolonial or postcolonial regimes retaining the marks of colonial dynamics and **identity**. Contemporary **globalisation**

reinforces this, with **imperialism** as an economic—rather than a political—system continuing to dominate Third World markets. As both a source of raw materials and customers, capitalism continues to seek to safeguard its own so-called ‘legitimate interests’ (Fanon, 1961; Olsson, 2014), rendering it complicit in the latent and sometimes overt violence of supposedly postcolonial contexts. With education historically intertwined with the exertion of colonial control (Gramsci, 1971; Viswanathan, 1992; Andreotti, 2011; AbuHilal and Abu-Shomar, 2014), contemporary education often continues to obscure and perpetuate colonial legacies (Dei, 2010; Dei and Simmons, 2010). Here, **teacher** and taught become proxies for the colonial master and subject, recapitulating their relational **power** dynamics in educational curricula and practices, not only overseas but in domestic contexts. Education, thus, continues to be dominated by the living legacies of these on-going histories, with postcolonial problems, such as alienation (Fanon, 1952), **race**, and **racism** (Gilroy, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Pajaczkowska and Young, 1992), continuing to negatively impact on educational experience and attainment. In the post-9/11 world, contemporary anxieties around the Muslim other are another iteration of this. Given all this, it is unsurprising that traditional education itself has come to be questioned as a colonising **discourse** (Dei and Simmons, 2010; Hoerder, 2014).



Colonialism impacts on all areas of a colonised people’s life, with the colonial agenda being implemented and maintained through both force and propaganda. Drawing heavily on Gramsci’s (1971) ideas, Viswanathan (1992, p.167) argued that: ‘cultural domination operates by **consent**, indeed often preceding conquest by force ... Consent of the governed is secured primarily through the moral and intellectual suasion’. Submission of colonised peoples is thus substantially achieved through the use of propaganda and mind control: generating a conviction that the colonisers are, not just militarily, but economically, morally and intellectually superior and that they are best suited to govern. As an inevitable part of such **identity politics**, this propaganda process (in promoting the colonisers) demotes and distorts the identity, abilities and **culture** of the colonised. Taking colonial rule in India as one example of this process, the introduction of an English **curriculum** formed a key mechanism of the **ideology** (Althusser, 1971).

The Charter Act of 1813 had placed responsibility for native education on the East India Company, while the 1835 English Education Act made the study of English language and literature compulsory. Such study fostered a cultural ideal and encouraged individualism, undermining group solidarity. This claimed moral, intellectual and cultural superiority was held out as being benevolently available through the Anglicised Indian education system, successful participation in which would allow the colonised population to emulate, equate themselves to, and supposedly ‘meritocratically’ compete with the colonial rulers (Walsh, 1983; Viswanathan, 1992). Neo-Marxist academics in particular have criticised such ideology as a type of **hegemony** (Gramsci, 1971; Hoerder, 2014) that supports the **power** of a select few, while limiting opportunities for the vast majority.



In the influential work of Edward Said (1995), the term Orientalism is used to refer to negative stereotype prejudices towards the East. Said variously defines Orientalism ‘as a set of constraints on and limitations of thought’ (1995, p.42), or ‘as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient’ (1995, p.95), such that ‘the Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western **learning**, Western consciousness, and later, Western Empire’ (1995, pp.202–203). It is thus an example of dehumanisation, a necessary process in the colonial enterprise as it offers pseudo-justification for the actions of the coloniser, as well as reducing their moral engagement. As Césaire (1950, p.21) pithily remarked: ‘colonisation = thingification’. Such constructions of supposed knowledge, following Foucault, highlight the **power** exerted by the West, aided in this process by various intellectuals, educational and cultural institutions. The relevance of these ideas to contemporary education is substantial. Two major reasons will be highlighted here. First, with **globalisation**, mass migration and **multiculturalism**, the populations education serves have become heterogeneous, hybrid and complex. **Postcolonial cultures** are no longer remote and renegotiation of traditional positions and identities is needed on an on-going basis. **Race** and **racism** (as artefacts of colonisation) negatively impact on the educational experience, learning journeys and outcomes of students with postcolonial heritages. Second, the mechanisms, processes and consequences of colonialism usefully illuminate the analogous processes that constrain educational freedom and possibilities. Patriarchy and regulatory practices, for example, disempower students,

rendering them subaltern, while demanding their compliance. Colonial and postcolonial theory offers ways to further address such challenges (Gilroy, 1987; Andreotti, 2011; Andreotti and Souza, 2012; AbuHilal and Abu-Shomar, 2014).

i Within a colonial system, colonised people can struggle to sustain their **identity** and self-esteem. This stems from their subjugated state, their loss of agency, their lack of recognition, and multiple other indignities suffered as a colonised people. Drawing on Hegel (1807; Kojève, 1934–35), Marx and **psychoanalysis**, Frantz Fanon (1952; Gardner, 1996) suggested one common attempted solution to this problem: the colonised group (and particularly its elites) internalises and unconsciously partly identifies with the typically white coloniser. The native self is devalued in this process. A superficial self-esteem can then be maintained through alliance and subservient lieutenancy with the ‘ideal’; the internal coloniser. This false consciousness entails a degree of alienation, though addressing this gives rise to fears not only about social chaos but also about the individual’s mental equilibrium. Active collaboration with the colonial **power**, particularly by participation in its administrative institutions including education, offers colonial peoples a position of some perceived value. The cost, however, is high. Such engagement compromises the colonised subject (and the colonised **society**), relegating them to a lower ranked or subaltern status (Gramsci, 1971; Guha, 1982; Spivak, 1985). While Fanon (1952) depicted this adoption of the coloniser’s mores as a ‘white mask’, the allied notions of ambivalence and mimicry have been importantly discussed by Bhabha (1994). Mimicry is perhaps the most subversive here, Bhabha suggests, as it is not far removed from mockery and contains elements of menace, both of which challenge the coloniser’s pretensions and disrupt their authority. Bhabha extends such arguments using the contested notion of hybridity to emphasise the interdependence of coloniser and colonised groups, challenging notions of racial purity and promoting **diversity** in the process. While educational encounters in colonial contexts operated to extend **hegemony** through persuasion, and power is being exercised in very similar ways within **postcolonial** setups, domestic educational **policy** and **praxis** too often conspire to create contemporary colonial subjects in the classroom. While challenged by **alternative education**, decolonisation in **schools** and wider society has a considerable way to go (Dei and Simmons, 2010; Andreotti, 2011, 2015).

Questions to consider

1. How does colonialism shape your **identity** and that of your local community?
2. Do colonial legacies only impact on Black Asian and Minority **Ethnic** (BAME) students in education?
3. How does colonialism differentially impact on females and males and how is this reflected in education?
4. How was and is the **curriculum** shaped by colonialism?
5. How might you critique the **globalisation** of education from the perspective of colonialism?

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