



Discussion about then and now

Lesson 5.2: Colonies

Topics that may provide an opening for a discussion about colonial times

Colony

A colony is an area, or land, that is under governance by another country. Ordinarily this is an area in another part of the world. The colonizer, or colonial power, makes a profit through the sale of raw materials and produce from the colony. Dutch colonies were, amongst others, the Dutch Indies (the current Indonesia), Dutch New Guinea, the Dutch Antilles, Surinam and other areas in the former Dutch Guiana, sometimes referred to as the 'Wild Coast'. The Netherlands also had colonial possessions in Africa, Brazil and North America. Other seafaring nations also had colonies.

The possession of colonies was generally accepted until in the twentieth century. It brought many economic advantages. Countries with colonies had more power than countries with little or no colonies. Religious and cultural motives also played a role: missionary zealotry (converting other peoples to the 'true faith') and the idea that the culture of the colonizer was better and more civilized than that of the original inhabitants.

Then:

In the colonized regions of the West Indies, the Dutch founded plantations where they cultivated sugar, cacao, coffee, tobacco and cotton. The plantation owners governed the plantations and sought other people to work the land. Many of the native inhabitants of the colonies died through eradication or diseases brought by the westerners, alternatively many colonists died of tropical diseases.

The inlanders, called Indians, resisted working on the plantations. The westerners also did not deem them suitable for working the land. This is why they sought laborers in Africa. There African's were captured by African slave traders, sold to Western-Europeans and shipped to the America's to work as slaves on the plantations and in house keeping. The yield from the plantations was shipped to the homeland where they were sold with large profits. The native inhabitants and the slaves did not profit from this.

1. What were the reasons to colonize other, often overseas, regions? What reason was the most important?
2. Often the native inhabitants were eradicated or chased away from a region that was colonized. Why do you think the colonizers did this?
3. Trade companies, such as the United East India Company and the West India Company, sponsored explorers because they hoped to discover new trade routes. Can you name any discovered area's that did not become a colony? Can you name any discovered area's that did become a colony?
4. What do you think is the difference between discover and colonize?
5. In the past people considered it normal for countries to have colonies. Do you think it was justified that the Netherlands, for example, governed Surinam and the Antilles? Explain why you think so.
6. The Dutch who lived in a colony and governed the land or a colony, felt connected to the colonized land. They had children and grandchildren. What do you think: were the children

and grandchildren of the colonists, for instance in Surinam, who were born and raised there, Surinamese or Dutch? Motivate your answer.

7. Just as the Dutch the slaves in Surinam and the Antilles were not native inhabitants. They were from Africa. Their children and grandchildren were born in the colonies and would likely never see Africa. What do you think: were the children and grandchildren of the slaves, who were born and raised in a colony, for instance in the Antilles, Antillean or African or Dutch?
8. Think about this together: When are you Dutch, or English? When are you Surinamese? When are you Antillean? Is this about where you are born? Or where you are raised? Or where your parents were born and raised? Or where you live, go to school or work? Does your own feeling play a role in this?
9. In countries such as the Netherlands, England and France, slavery was abolished before the age of colonization began. But in the overseas regions, the colonies, the countries re-instated slavery. What do you think about this? Explain why you think so.

Now:

With the years most colonies have become independent countries or have in some way or another become as equal countries or linked to the constitutional order of the former colonial power. This process of detachment we call decolonization.

The Dutch colonies in the West Indies were all traded or lost during a war or decolonized. This often happened under pressure of changed global opinion and political pressure from the inhabitants of the country. Most countries have become independent nations. In the Statute of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2014 it states:

“Article 1.

1. The Kingdom consists of the countries The Netherlands, Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten.
2. Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba are part of the constitutional order of the Netherlands.”

The latter means they have chosen for a special status within the Dutch constitutional order (= the government, the provinces and the municipalities). These three, as ‘special municipalities’ within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the law of ‘public bodies’ for [Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba](#) applies.

1. Do we look at colonies differently now, as compared to the past? If so, why is this and how is this shown? Compared to the past, do you think enough has changed? Or not yet? Elaborate your answer.
2. What is the difference between entering a country and occupying it and entering another country and colonizing it? Or is there no difference?
3. Many games, such as board games (for instance The Settlers of Catan) and games you can play online, are about colonization. Colonizing fictive worlds, dimensions or planets, to name a few examples. Have a look at your answer and your thoughts on question 3. Colonization games are only games, but still... can comparisons be made with how you behave in these games and how the colonists behaved in the past? What do you think about your conclusions? Do they make you think? Motivate your answer.
4. Many inhabitants of the former colonies, such as Surinam and the Antilles, came to the Netherlands after the colony gained independence, the country that had exploited and imported their ancestors as slaves. Why do you think they did this?
5. In a country where people with different ethnic backgrounds live, it is nearly impossible not to influence each other, in language, habits, customs, food, drink and celebrations for example. This has happened for centuries, many examples can be found. Can you think some examples of cross-cultural influences? What do you think of this?

6. Although Dutch law prohibits discrimination and finds it punishable, discrimination still takes place. This can be for any number of reasons: due to somebody's heritage, skin color, education, sexual orientation, religion, political beliefs, age and many more reasons. What are your thoughts about discrimination? Can you name examples of discrimination?
7. If you see somebody being discriminated in your own surroundings, do you do something? Or do you let it happen and look the other way? Why do you do something, or nothing?
8. What can you do as an individual or with your class or the club you are a member of, to combat discrimination.

More information

Dutch Canon of National History – [Surinam and the Antilles](#).