Modern society and sociological methods

1. Administrative
2. Methods of social inquiry
3. Nation states and societies
4. European colonialism

Groups are *set* by tomorow night

- If you haven't yet, sign up for a group!

  (Link is also on MyCourses)

- Your group will get a worksheet at the start of class

- Due on Friday at 5:00pm

Methods of social inquiry

Most Sociological research incorporates *at least* one of:

- Surveys

- Experiments

- Field research

- Secondary analysis

Surveys

Which Crystal Gem Are You?

5 / 6

What do you dislike the most?

Fighting

Uneven decorations

Traditional cerimonies

Quiet places

This planet

Surveys

A survey is a list of questions

Targeted

Specific population, usually with some form of sampling

Uniform

Typically same survey is sent to every participant

Format

Various forms of dissemination

Mail; telephone; in-person; online; …

Various forms of questions

Yes/no; scale; multiple choice; free response; interview; …

Surveys

Advantages	Challenges
⦙ Allows for large samples	⦙ Often time consuming
⦙ Generalizable	⦙ Non-response can lead to bias
⦙ Structured data for charts and statistical anlyses	⦙ Format can yield unreliable *artifacts* (results that reflect the survey structure rather than respondents' beliefs)

Experiments

Experiments

Experiments for *causal analysis*

- Isolate one potential factor that might be causing an outcome
- As much as possible, let nothing else vary
- Assume that the remaining factors vary unpredictably

Common laboratory setup

- Treatment and control group
- Double-blind

  Researchers do not know group assignment
- Compare outcomes

Experiments

Non-laboratory experiments

⋮ Vary potential causal factor "in the wild"

Intervention or "natural experiment"

⋮ Less reliable than controlled experiment

Outside factors can confound results

Ethical concerns of experiments

⋮ Consequences of treatment

⋮ Consequences of *withholding* treatment

Experiments

Advantages	Challenges
⋮ Causal inference	⋮ Narrow scope
⋮ Clear analysis	⋮ Artifical context
⋮ Again: ***causal inference***	⋮ Ethical concerns
	⋮ "Hawthorn effect"

Field research

Field research

Interact with research subjects directly

- Unstructured or minimally structured
- Observe behavior
- Participate in activities

Aims

- Gather in-depth information about community, institution, or place
- Understand how the people that participate in the case make sense of their own experience
- Employ flexible theories and hypotheses, subject to change as researchers learn more about the people involved

Field research

Ethnography

⋮ Systematic observation of an entire community
⋮ "Thick description" (Geertz)
⋮ Often extend over months, years, or even decades

Participant observation

⋮ Participate in the community under study
⋮ Take on roles and responsibilities, form relationships
⋮ Sometimes "under cover"

Case study

⋮ Single organization, event, or person
⋮ May use ethnography and secondary data
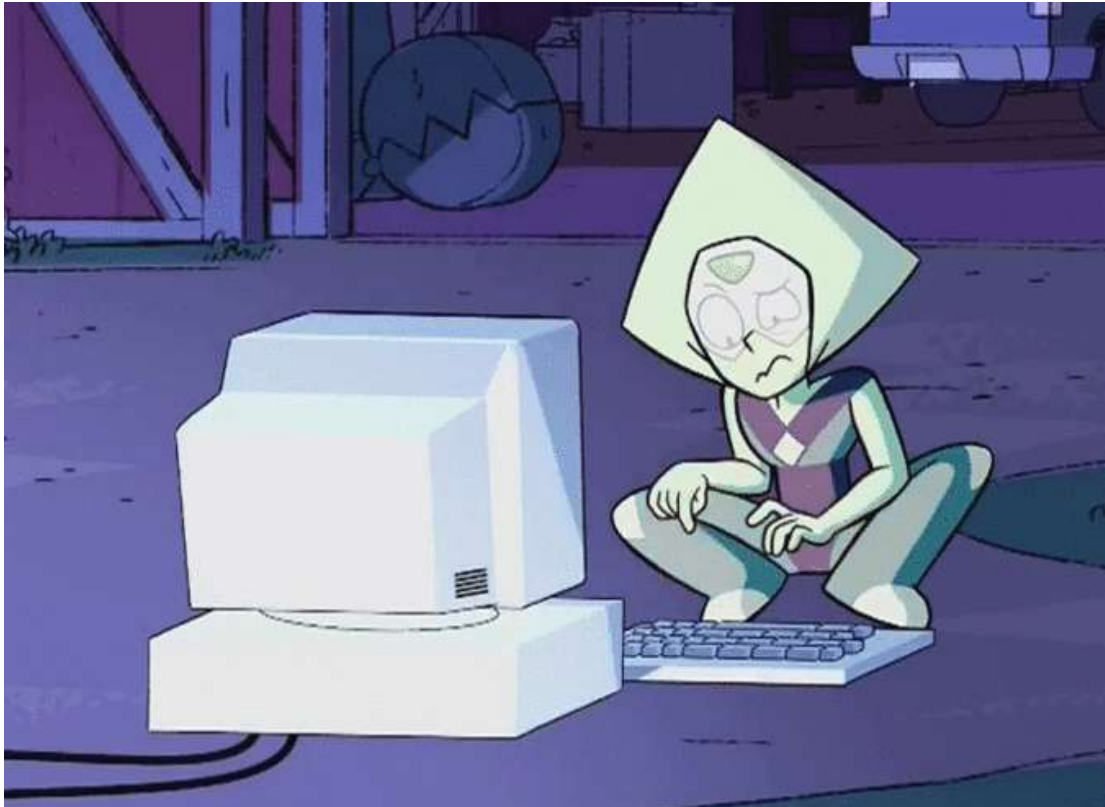
Field research

Advantages	Challenges
⋮ Detailed, accurate, real-life information ⋮ Brings individual accounts to foreground ⋮ Prioritizes adaptive research frames	⋮ Very time consuming ⋮ Harder to generalize ⋮ Especially sensitive to researchers' prior expectations ⋮ Messy data (?)

📖 **Secondary data analysis**

Secondary data analysis

Use data that already exists

- "Found data"
- Not designed to answer the researcher's question

Characteristics

- Often (but not always!) easy to obtain
- Rarely well structured for the research question— often requires extensive coding/processing
- Ubiquitous

Secondary data analysis

Repurposed research data

- Re-use data from another research project to answer a new question
- Meta-analysis of existing published research
- General-purpose data (e.g. Statistics Canada)

Data "in the wild"

- Anything recorded without scholarly intent
  - Literature
  - Meeting minutes
  - Recorded conversations / correspondence
  - Social media posts and interactions
- Very unstructured—variety of methods used to transform into usable data (e.g. content analysis, coding)

Secondary data analysis

Advantages

- Often inexpensive and fast to obtain
- No threat of *researcher* bias in the data itself
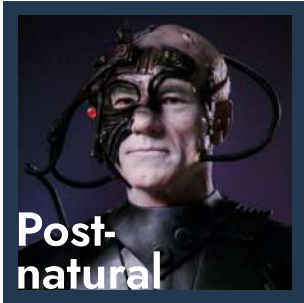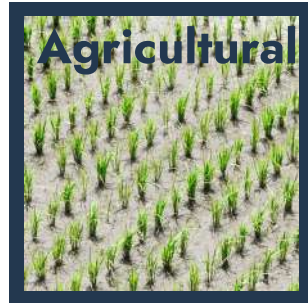- Often the only option for historical cases

Challenges
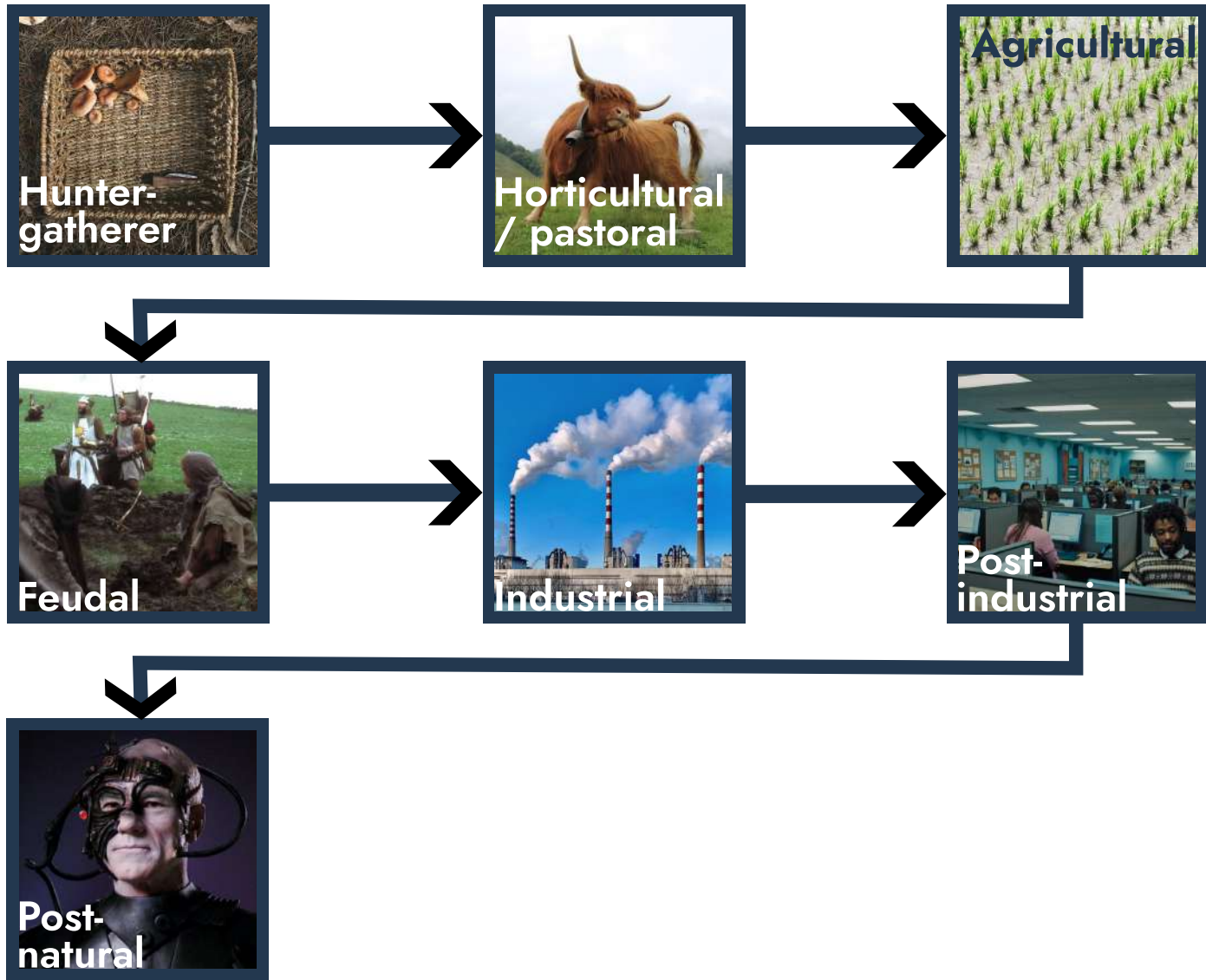
- Data not focussed on current research question
- Must take into account the social processes that created the data
- Context may be unavailable
- Processing may introduce hidden biases
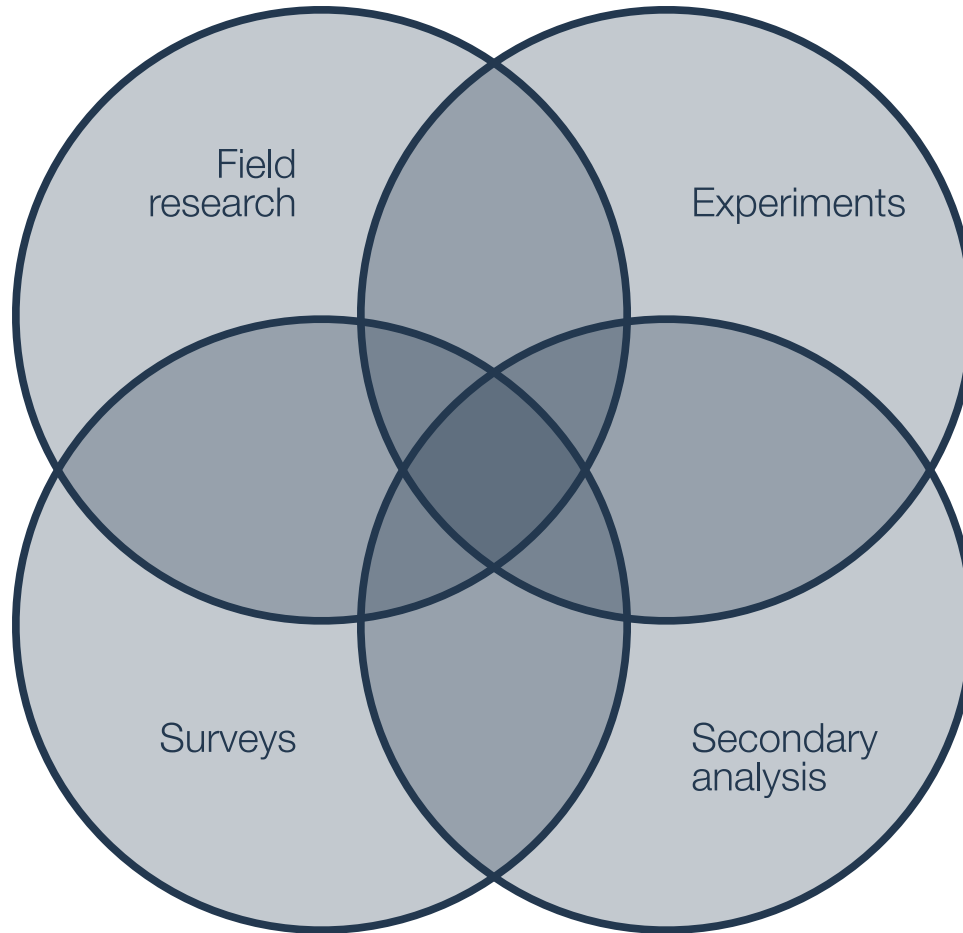
Research rarely falls cleanly into one methodological bin

Societal transformation

Hunter-gatherer

Horticultural / pastoral

Agricultural

Feudal

Industrial

Post-industrial

Post-natural

Hunter-gatherer → Horticultural / pastoral → Agricultural → Feudal → Industrial → Post-industrial → Post-natural

Problems with "progress" view

- Order not universal

- Some societal transitions have gone counter to assumed order

  !Kung San in Kalahari Desert in Southern Africa, e.g.

- Danger of "reading history sideways"
  Looking to current hunter-gatherers for insight into the lives of ancient hunter-gatherers

- Eurocentric categories

Usefulness of "progress" view

- Synchronicity
  Human history is very long, but agrarianism and industrialization emerged across the globe at similar times

- Asymmetric effects of societal transition

  It may be "easier" to industrialize than to de-industrialize, e.g.

Place & the nation-state

What is *a* society?

⋮ Tendency to use community or town as template

Relate to a group of people through shared trait: place

Center versus border

⋮ Two related ways to define a group

⋮ Who am I like? What makes us similar?

Idealized core of a group holding people together

⋮ Who am I not like? What makes them different?

Boundary of a group keeping non-members out

⋮ Two sides of same concept, but emphasizing one or the other makes big difference

The modern nation-state

- **Nation**:
  group of people sharing a cultural identity
- **State**:
  Territorial government
- Became de-facto political unit over the last 200+ years
- Currently seen as universal
  All land seen as territory

Center versus border of the nation-state

- Sense of unified identity often invoked, and sought by governments
- Geographic boundary usually prevails
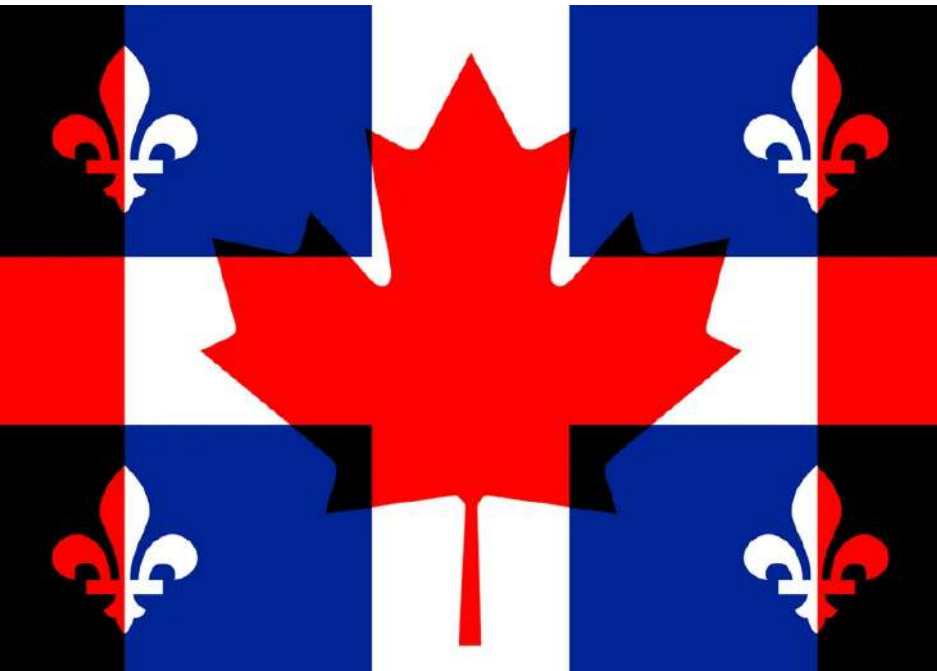
Conflicting Schemas

- Multiple identities at odds within single country
  Québécois in Canada
  Assamese in India

- Claims of unified identity used to question sovereignty
  Russian annexation of Crimea
  North and South Korean jurisdiction

Nationalism

- National unity can become a tool for dominance and oppression

- Internally
  Rwandan genocide
  North American Indigenous genocide

- Externally
  American exceptionalism
  Nazi Germany

European colonialism
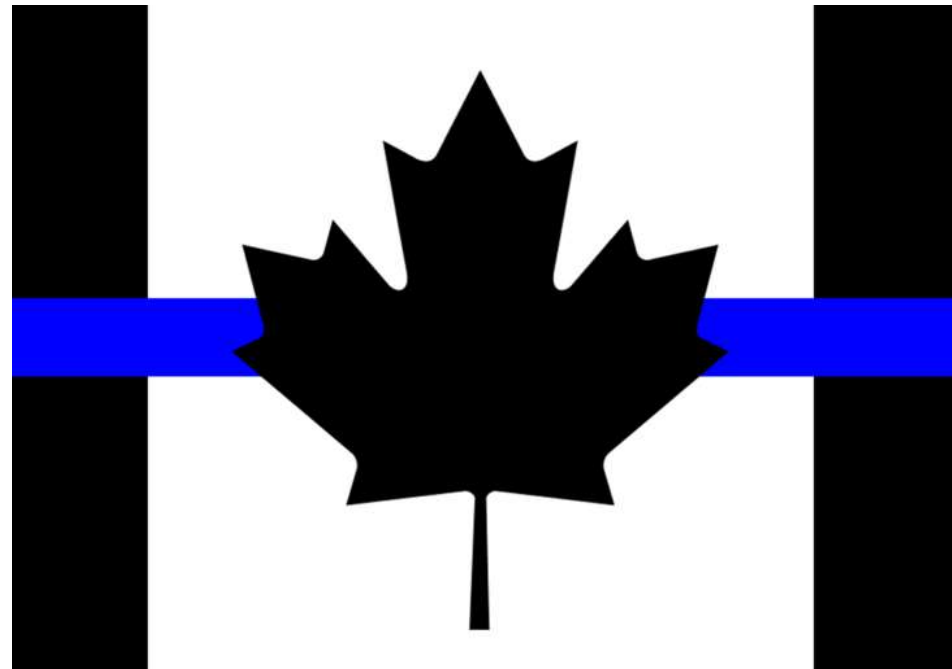
EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

A (*very*) brief outline of European colonialism

- 15th century: European empires take an interest in Americas
- Spain, Portugal, France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and others began sending ships across oceans
- Plundered resources (material and labor) and claimed land in North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania
- Exceptionally violent, resulting in death, injury, and illness of countless people
- Throughout 19th and 20th centuries, formal rule over most colonies by European metropoles ended
- Foundation of current global systems of commerce, governance, culture, etc.

1492

United Kingdom
France
Portugal
Spain

Russia

Turkey
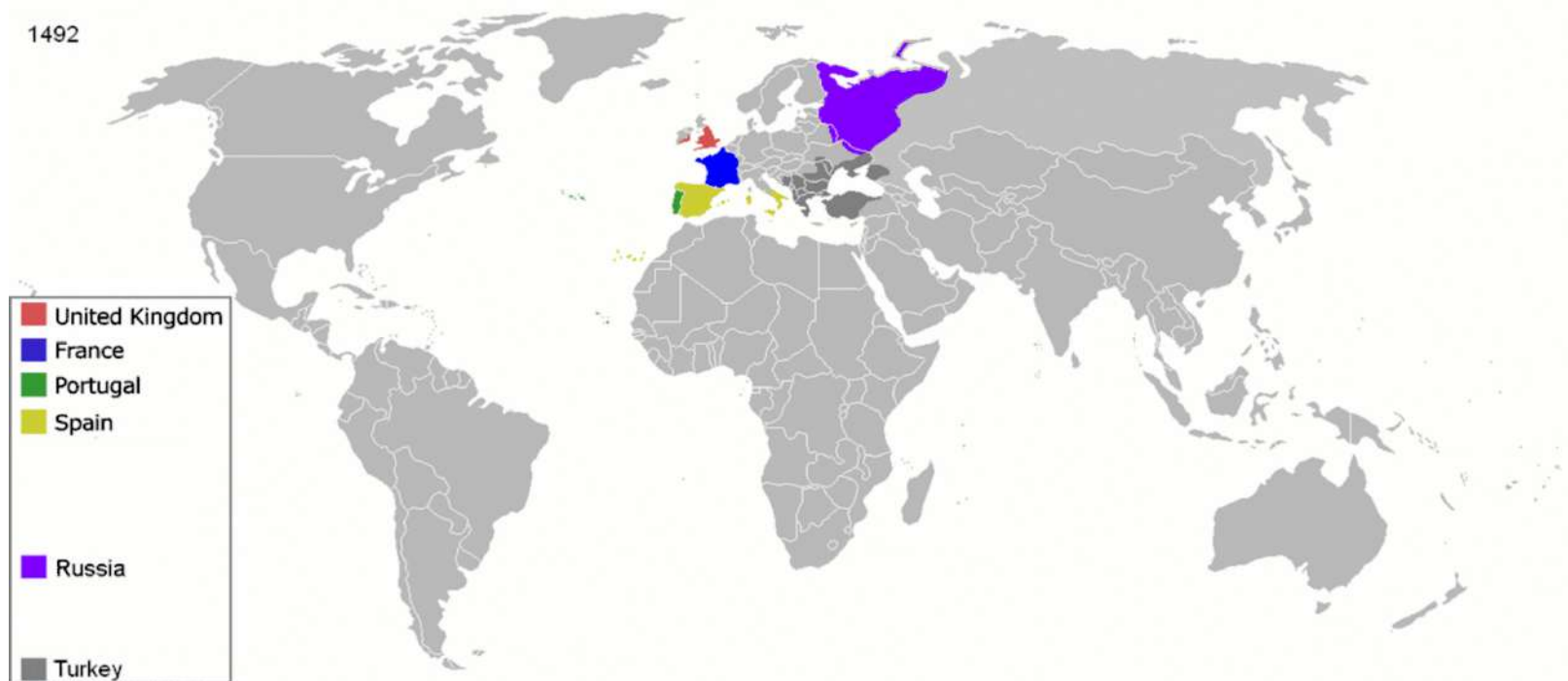
Major types of colonialism

- *Exploitation colonialism*
  - Colonized population monitored by minimal colonial settlement
  - Oversee extraction of resources for metropole
- *Settler colonialism*
  - Metropole establishes cities and moves population to colonized areas
  - *Terra nullius*
- *Neo-colonialism*
  - Economic and cultural exploitation

EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

Terra Nullius

- View of land without settlement or active cultivation as empty
- Language of conquest becomes language of discovery
  New World; Age of Discovery; Explorer

Manifest destiny

- Term specific to United States, but ideology widespread
- Colonized land is "culturally" empty
- Duty to "uncivilized" people to teach about true religion and proper society
- Characterized by Europeans as a burden or responsibility

Dehumanization

⋮ Conceptualization of non-European populations as less than human

⋮ Environmental determinism

⋮ Justifies both *terra nullius* and manifest destiny
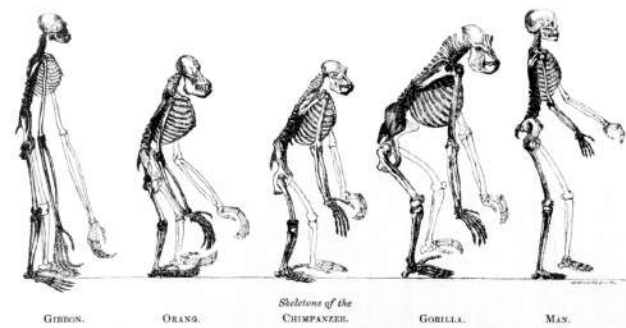
Geographical boundaries

⋮ Colonial powers viewed geographical delineation as primary

⋮ Not common in much of the world

⋮ Boundaries used to frame discourse both between colonial powers and between colonizer/colonized
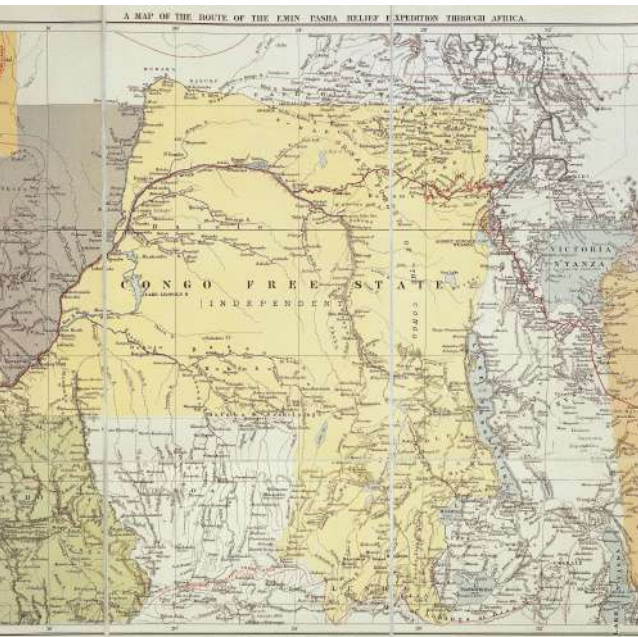
Destruction of cultures/societies

⋮ **Genocide**
Entire populations singled out and killed
Cultural frameworks systematically destroyed

⋮ **Internalization of colonial ideologies**
Ideologies of colonization became accepted (to varying degrees) by colonized cultures

Indigenous displacement

⋮ **Populated land claimed by settlers**
Existing nations forcibly displaced or replaced
Violently, formally, or informally

⋮ **Complicated by settler struggles for independence from colonial metropoles**
Simultaneous fight against colonial control and complicity in colonial domination

Race/racism

Modern understanding of race
Global slave trade made possible by and supported colonialism
Contemporary racial categories defined by colonial European thought

Institutions

Many "standard" modern institutions emerged in a colonial context
Legal frameworks (e.g. property rights)
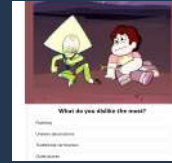Family
Education
Trade (domestic and international)

Current colonial presence in Canada

- **Continued British rule**
  Minimal real control, but symbolic and some de facto power

- **Violence against indigenous populations**
  Violent conflicts and disease killed large numbers of people living in Canada before European conquest
  Continued explicit and implicit violence

- **First Nations displacement**
  Existing nations forced to cede territory through conquest and (often reneged) treaty

- **First Nations sovereignty struggles**
  Continued view as subordinate and illegitimate

- **Cultural indoctrination**
  Widespread prejudice toward indigenous practices
  Residential schools

Indigenous (non-colonial) territories in Turtle Island (North America)

This map is a work in progress
For more information visit Native-Land.ca

Image credit

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 Screenshot from Cartoon Network ("Which Crystal Gem Are You?")
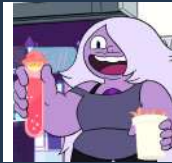
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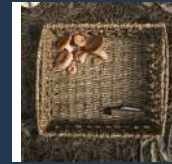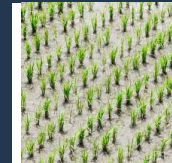
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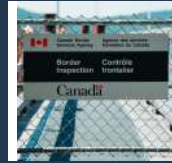
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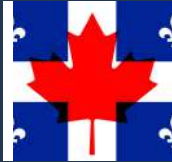
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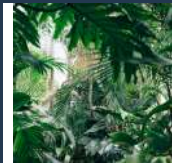Still from [Aguirre, the Wrath of God (1972)](#)

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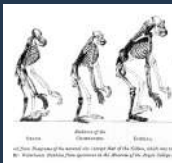Painting by Harold Copping (1916) via [The Wellcome Collection](#)

Image via [Wikimedia](#)

Map by Henry M. Stanley (1890) via [The Wellcome Collection](#)

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