After the general overview of colonial history in Chapter 3, I will in this chapter introduce and discuss five examples of the practice of colonialism. The examples illustrate different aspects of this period of history: Uganda of a rather peaceful but nevertheless in the long run destructive colonial reign, Congo of a vicious quest for minerals and other raw materials which undermined the future of the subjected peoples, Namibia of a genocide that left enduring traces, Kenya of a war of liberation that was violently suppressed, and finally India of how colonies and pseudo-colonies were integrated in the world market with problematic consequences for the countries’ own economic development. After giving a brief account of the five cases I will in the final part of this chapter demonstrate how they represent different problematic aspects of the legacy of colonialism.

Case 1: Uganda

We saw in the previous chapter that Africa was divided between the European nations at the end of the 19th century. After having conquered the kingdom of Buganda to the northwest of Lake Victoria in 1890, British colonizers aimed to also conquer the kingdom of Bunyoro, situated in the northern part of present-day Uganda. However, Kabalega, the king of Bunyoro, did not surrender to the British troops and it was not until 1897 that the British finally captured him. Meanwhile, the war devastated several areas of the kingdom and many natives starved to death.

As a punishment for Bunyoro resistance to colonialism, the British transferred land from Bunyoro to the Buganda kingdom. This led to tensions that have persisted up to this day. In fact, as late as in 2014 the...
Ugandan government started a process to return to Bunyoro land that is owned by absentee Ugandan landlords (Daily Monitor, 2014).

Why then did Britain colonize Uganda? There were different reasons for their conquest. Islam was expanding from the north and Uganda was a strategic link in the British struggle to limit Muslim influence in the region. Furthermore, transportation from the Indian Ocean to the source of the Nile was a boost for trade routes between India and Egypt and then further to Europe. Many British residents also thought that Britain had a duty so save Uganda from slavery, and finally, Uganda was a market for British products as well as a possible source of raw materials. Later, Ugandan cotton became a most important export crop (Thompson, 2003).

How did the British rule Uganda? Ultimately, as a colonial power, their rule rested on force. However, as historian Gardner Thompson shows, the rule was lenient and widely accepted by the Ugandans. As evidence, he adduces that the British authorities needed no more than three administrators to rule the 340,000 inhabitants of the Lango District (Ibid.). Thompson notes that until World War II “the British had tried only to administer, rather than to govern in the sense of fully exploiting the human, financial and material resources of a territory acquired...Coercion had been replaced by consent” (Ibid.: 69).

On the other hand, critics of British rule point at some highly problematic implications of the colonial period. Traditional social structures were dismantled without a sustainable replacement, estates for cotton and tobacco production were created at the expense of traditional farms, and this change in the mode of farming also led to the spread of the deadly tsetse fly (Pulford, 2007: 107).

Uganda became independent in 1962. Since then, the young nation has endured dictatorships, ethnic conflicts, civil wars, and political corruption. During the reigns of Idi Amin and Milton Obote the death toll is estimated to have ranged between 500,000 and 600,000 people (Meredith, 2005: 238).

According to Thompson, at independence Uganda was neither a nation nor a state. The country was characterized by regionalization and “tribalism” and had no national identity or national loyalty. The government was weak, there was no sense of civic duty, and the borders of the new state were disputed (Thompson, 2003: 339). The British left Uganda with a weak economy and the crops that provided export income were vulnerable to price fluctuations on the world market. Uganda is thus an example of the problematic legacy of colonialism that Lonsdale points at: artificial states with a vulnerable economy based on primary production (Lonsdale, 2011).