

Primary Source Packet

1. Painting, “The Secret of England's Greatness”

There are many paintings that represent the British empire, but “The Secret of England's Greatness” (1863) by Thomas Jones Barker is one of the most powerful. It depicts Queen Victoria presenting a bible to a kneeling African chief in the Audience Chamber at Windsor. In the background are her husband, Albert and members of the government. The painting was reproduced in engravings and was very popular at the time. Despite the frequent depiction of empire as a masculine world, the queen was the symbolic figure-head of the British empire, especially after she was crowned Empress of India in 1876. As you look at the painting try to imagine what it might suggest to someone living in Victorian Britain about the British empire. Do you think it possible for a Victorian to imagine switching the position of the two central figures, in other words, Queen Victoria kneeling to an African chief?

Source: Barker, Thomas Jones. *The Secret of England's Greatness*. 1863.



2. Painting, “The Children of Edward Hollen Cruttenden”

This 18th-century painting of the children of Edward Cruttendon depicted with their ayah was painted in Britain by Joshua Reynolds. The earliest immigrants from India came to Britain as the servants of employees of the East India Company. Many Indian women came to Britain employed as ayahs or nannies. British families who had spent time serving in India brought an ayah back with them to care for the children on the long journey back to Britain. If they no longer needed their services, they were expected to provide for the return voyage home—many did not. Some ayahs were able to return home to India by advertising in newspapers for a position with a family traveling to India. Some Indian women found themselves permanently stranded in Britain. It was not until 1897 that a home for ayahs was opened in London, providing them with a place to stay until they could get a return passage home.

Source: Reynolds, Joshua. *The Children of Edward Hollen Cruttenden*. 1759.



3. Letter, Mary Moffat

Mary Moffat (1795-1871) was the wife of Robert Moffat, the missionary for the London Missionary Society who established a mission center at Kuruman in southern Africa. Their daughter married David Livingstone. In 1816, Robert Moffat was ordained and accepted as a missionary by the London Missionary Society (LMS). The previous year, while working as a gardener, Moffat had proposed to Mary Smith, the daughter of his employer. Both young people were 20. Like Robert, Mary had attended a missionary meeting earlier in her life, and she shared his interest in missionary work. Initially, her parents objected to the match because they feared they would never see her again if she went overseas as a missionary wife. For a number of years, Robert Moffat worked as an itinerant preacher in the Cape Colony. On December 27, 1819, after waiting two years for her parents to agree to the match, Moffat married Mary Smith in Cape Town. In 1820, he was appointed to evangelize among the Tswana at the Kuruman mission station. Taking his new wife with him, Moffat moved to take up his new position, arriving after a long and exhausting journey of several months. Kuruman, the most northerly LMS mission station, was situated on the edge of the Kalahari desert, so the soil was sandy and the area was frequently short of water. Although Kuruman would eventually become a major center of missionary activity, when the Moffats arrived the mission had barely begun. In order to survive, Robert Moffat needed to be a hunter, farmer, builder and carpenter in an unstable frontier area, where struggles over land, labor, cattle and water between competing groups were endemic. Mary Moffat struggled along side him raising her growing family. On December 18, 1828, pregnant with her fourth child and feeling unwell and fearful that she might die in childbirth, Mary wrote to a friend (Mrs. Wrigley) expressing her concern that she would leave “a beloved partner with 3 or 4 small children in the midst of barbarians without a civilized female ...to keep up a civilized establishment in the midst of barbarians is attended with much care and labour on our parts.” Like other missionary wives, Mary Moffat was expected to create a domestic space, in keeping with evangelical values of domestic femininity. Robert Moffat retired from missionary service in 1870 and the couple returned to England. Mary Moffat died the following year in January.

Source: Letter from Mary Moffat to James Smith dated 30 December, 1828, in Schapera, I. *Apprenticeship at Kuruman*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1951. (OR, Rhodes House, Mss. Afr. t. 46.?)

“...Robert has been enabled to proceed in the work of translation. He is now going on with a little work of the Rev. W. Brown, entitled ‘A Selection of Scripture Passages’; it is very tedious, but he thinks it will be very useful in the school, as well as for public reading. The scholars are making tolerable progress, and the attendance on public worship is very good. A chapel must soon be built, Mr. Hughes dwelling house being much too small. The singing goes on charmingly, and to hear many of them repeat the catechism, with copious extracts from scripture, is very gratifying. The fixed and serious attention of some of them to the preacher induces us to hope that the Spirit is at work in their hearts. We have at present a candidate for baptism, who, may prove the beginning of a Christian church among them. It is Arend, of whom you have heard formerly, a slave

who ran away and sojourned many years in the interior, has some years ago purchased his own freedom with ivory, has since lived near the station, and has lately seen the necessity of a decided profession. He is an industrious pushing man, and we have reason to believe that he will be a good example, and that ere long there will be some of our poor people included also to come out and be separate. The temporal affairs of the station are very prosperous. Civilization is advancing. Nearly all our poor people have reaped good crops of wheat from their little gardens, and have now sown maize, which will have time to ripen before the first frost comes, if the locusts do not destroy them. They also grow much tobacco, which they exchange for cattle. Our own gardens are becoming beautiful. The fruit which is just ripening is very abundant; indeed, I am astonished to see what the willing earth yields in so short a time ...”

4. Painting, “Scotland Forever”

Painted by Elizabeth Butler, *Scotland Forever* (1881), depicts the charge of the Heavy Cavalry at the battle of Waterloo fought in 1815. The British victory at Waterloo ended the Napoleonic Wars, and ensured Britain’s position as the world’s most dominant imperial power. Elizabeth Thompson, later Lady Butler, was a leading artist of military scenes in the late nineteenth century, and she continued to exhibit at the Royal Academy until 1920. Her pictures depicting soldiers in battle led John Ruskin to admit that he’d been wrong in asserting that women could not paint military scenes. Married to Lieut. Gen. Sir William Butler, Elizabeth Butler took care to draw soldiers as accurately as possible. Although she never observed soldiers fighting in battle, she did watch soldiers training on maneuvers and took great care to correctly represent military uniforms. The enormous popularity of military paintings in the late 19th century, especially those depicting the Napoleonic period, suggests that there was a nostalgic desire to return to a past imagined as glorious and unchallenged.

Source: Butler, Elizabeth. *Scotland Forever*. 1881.



5. Diary, Lady Florentia Sale

Lady Florentia Sale (1790-1853), wife of Major-General Sir Robert Henry Sale, wrote a journal of her experiences during the First Afghan War. In January 1842, in what is usually seen as a humiliating defeat for the British army, 4,500 British and Indian troops with around 12,000 camp followers retreated 116 miles from Kabul back to the British garrison at Jalalabad. Within a month, the majority were dead from exposure due to the appalling winter conditions, starvation or bullet wounds. A few were captured, including Florentia Sale. She was held in captivity for nine months before being rescued by British forces dispatched from India. The British then withdrew from Afghanistan. Florentia Sale wrote her journal during her captivity, probably with the hope that one day she would publish it. In 1843, after her rescue, her journal was published rapidly becoming a bestseller in Britain. Notice that she is wearing a turban in the sketch.

Source: Sale, Florentia. *A Journal of the First Afghan War*. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1843.



“ ...We commenced our march at mid-day, the 5th N.I. in front. The troops were in the greatest state of disorganization: the baggage was mixed in with the advanced guard; and the camp followers all pushed ahead in their precipitate flight towards Hindostan ...The pony Mrs. Sturt rode was wounded in the ear and neck. I had fortunately, only *one* ball in my arm; three others passed through my poshteen near the shoulder without doing me any injury. The party that fired on us were not above fifty yards from us, and we owed

our escape to urging our horses on as fast as they could go over a road where, at any other time, we should have walked our horses very slowly ...The ladies were mostly traveling in kajavas, and were mixed up with the baggage and column in the pass: here they were heavily fired on; many camels were killed. On one camel, in one kajava, Mrs. Boyd and her youngest boy Hugh; and in the other Mrs. Mainwaring and her infant, scarcely three months old, and Mrs. Anderson's eldest child. This camel was shot. Mrs. Boyd got a horse to ride; and her child was put on another behind a man, who shortly after unfortunately killed, the child was carried off by the Affghans. Mrs. Mainwaring, less fortunate, took her own baby in her arms. Mary Anderson was carried off in the confusion. Meeting with a pony laden with treasure, Mrs. M. endeavoured to mount and sit on the boxes but they upset and in the hurry pony and treasure were left behind; and the unfortunate lady pursued her way on foot, until after a time an Affghan asked if she was wounded, and told her to mount behind him. This apparently kind offer she declined, being fearful of treachery; alleging an excuse that she could not sit behind him on account of the difficulty of holding her child when so mounted. This man shortly after snatched her shawl off her shoulders, and left her to her fate. Mrs. M's sufferings were very great; and she deserves much credit for having preserved her child through these dreadful scenes. She had not only to walk a considerable distance with her child in her arms through the deep snow, but had also to pick her way over the bodies of the dead, dying and wounded, both men and cattle, and certainly to cross the streams of water, wet up to the knees, pushed and shoved about by man and animals, the enemy keeping up a sharp fire, and several persons being killed close to her ..."

6. Painting, "In Memoriam"

In 1857, British rule in India was challenged when Indian sepoy troops of the British Indian Army, began a year-long insurrection against the British. To the British, the most shocking aspect of the events in India was the massacre of white women and children by Indian men. There was extensive coverage in the press and illustrated journals, which stimulated calls for revenge. Paton's famous painting "In Memoriam," was dedicated by the artist to the Christian heroism of "British Ladies in India during the Mutiny of 1857." In 1858, the first version of the painting, which depicted Indian sepoy troops bursting through the door, was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art in London. The painting aroused immediate debate as it was thought to suggest that British women were about to be raped by Indian soldiers. The review in *The Illustrated London News* on May, 15, 1858 stated: "The subject is too revolting ...The picture is one which ought not to have been hung." Although British women and children were known to have died during the insurrection, there was no evidence of rape. The artist painted out the Indian soldiers in the original painting, and substituted Scottish highlanders. It was this version that was engraved and sold, leaving intact the myth of the British woman women as sexually inviolable by colonial men.

Source: Paton, Sir Joseph Noel. *In Memoriam*. 1858.



7. Autobiography, Mary Seacole

In 1857, only 24 years after the British had abolished slavery in the empire, Mary Seacole (1805-1881) published her autobiography entitled the *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. Written in Britain, following Seacole's experiences working among sick and wounded British soldiers fighting in the Crimean War, the book became an immediate bestseller. Seacole, who had grown up in Jamaica, was the daughter of a Scottish soldier and a free woman of African descent who had taught her daughter the art of healing. Seacole traveled to the Crimea at her own expense and in the face of considerable opposition from the British War office who refused to support sending "a motherly yellow woman" to the Crimea so she could "nurse her sons." When she arrived in the Crimea she set up the British Hotel where she sold goods, supplied hot food, and gave medical help to officers and soldiers. Although Mary Seacole is less well known than her contemporary Florence Nightingale, her work earned her the love and respect of the soldiers who served in the Crimean War. This brief excerpt from her book highlights Seacole's representation of herself as a professional relied upon by soldiers for medical treatment, her attitude towards British soldiers and the war, and the opportunities available during a 19th century war for a determined woman. Seacole's book also complicates our understanding of colonial identities, and raises interesting questions about how a woman from a British colony could create a role for herself at the heart of an imperial war.

Source: Seacole, Mary. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. London: J. Blackwood, 1857.

"...Need I be ashamed to confess that I shared in the general enthusiasm, and longed more than ever to carry my busy (and the reader will not hesitate to add experienced) fingers where the sword or bullet had been busiest, and pestilence most rife. I had seen much sorrow and death elsewhere, but they had never daunted me; and if I could feel happy binding up the wounds of quarrelsome Americans and treacherous Spaniards, what delight should I not experience if I could be useful to my own "sons," suffering for a cause it was so glorious to fight and bleed for! I never stayed to discuss probabilities, or enter into conjectures as to my chances of reaching the scene of action. I made up my mind that if the army wanted nurses, they would be glad of me, and with all the ardour of my nature, which ever carried me where inclination prompted, I decided that I *would* go to the Crimea; and go I did, as all the world knows ...before very long I found myself surrounded with patients of my own, and this for two simple reasons. In the first place, the men (I am speaking of the "ranks" now) had a very serious objection to going into hospital for any but urgent reasons, and the regimental doctors were rather fond of sending them there; and, in the second place, they could and did get at my store of sick-comforts and nourishing food, which the heads of the medical staff would sometimes find it difficult to procure. These reasons, with the additional one that I was very familiar with the diseases which they suffered most from and successful in their treatment (I say this in no spirit of vanity), were quite sufficient to account for the numbers who came daily to the British Hotel for medical treatment ...Don't you think, reader, if you were lying, with parched lips and fading appetite, thousands of miles from mother, wife, or sister, loathing

the rough food by your side, and thinking regretfully of that English home where nothing that could minister to your great need would be left untried—don't you think that you would welcome the familiar figure of the stout lady whose bony horse has just pulled up at the door of your hut, and whose panniers contain some cooling drink, a little broth, some homely cake, or a dish of jelly or blanc-mange ... My first experience of battle was pleasant enough. Before we had been long at Spring Hill, Omar Pasha got something for his Turks to do, and one fine morning they were marched away towards the Russian outposts on the road to Baidar. I accompanied them on horseback, and enjoyed the sight amazingly. English and French cavalry preceded the Turkish infantry over the plain yet full of memorials to the terrible Light Cavalry charge a few months before; and while one detachment of the Turks made a reconnaissance to the right of the Tchernaya, another pushed their way up the hill, towards Kamara, driving in the Russian outposts, after what seemed but a slight resistance. It was very pretty to see them advance, and to watch how every now and then little clouds of white smoke puffed up from behind bushes and the crests of hills, and were answered by similar puffs from the long line of busy skirmishers that preceded the main body. This was my first experience of actual battle, and I felt that strange excitement which I do not remember on future occasions, coupled with an earnest longing to see more of warfare, and to share in its hazards."

8. Travel Narrative, Mary Kingsley

Mary Kingsley (1862-1900) is one of the best known British women to have visited West Africa during the period historians call the Age of New Imperialism. Her early life gave no indication of her future renown. She spent the early part of her life confined to her home taking care of an invalid father. In possession of a small income following the death of her parents, she made two trips to Africa, one in 1893 and then another two years later. While in West Africa she stayed with missionaries whose work she admired. She also traveled up rivers in a canoe collecting fish specimens for the British Museum and making ethnological observations on the people she met. On her return to Britain, she found people were fascinated by her experiences. She published a book *Travels in West Africa* (1897), and became a very popular speaker on the lecture circuit talking about her experiences in Africa. She died of typhoid during the South African War (1899-1902) having traveled to Africa to nurse British soldiers. Despite the fact that she made choices in her own life that challenged the accepted gender norms for middle-class Victorian women, she was not in favor of giving women the vote. She argued that women were not well educated and well informed enough to vote responsibly. This excerpt from a lecture Kingsley gave highlights her attitude to Africa and Africans. Imagine if you were in the audience what you might understand about racial difference and the importance of the role of the British empire in Africa.

Source: "Life in West Africa" in British Empire Series II. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Truber and Co., 1899.

“ ...Regarding the climate of West Africa, I have no hesitation in saying that it is a very deadly one for Europeans. This may seem a mere truism, but every now and again a dangerous nuisance of a person arises in England who says it is not so, leastways that it is no worse than India, and that men who did there have mainly got themselves to blame. People who say these things ought to go to West Africa and be buried there. I don't mind whether it is in a cemetery or in a swamp, but *somewhere*, because these foolish statements not only cost men who believe in them their lives, but detract from the hard-earned sympathy and honour due to the soldier, missionary, trade and government official who work for faith and country in West African regions ...Next we will take the native as a hindrance to improvement. In my opinion he is the greatest hindrance of all. I hardly dare express this opinion, for fear of being gone for by some of his more enthusiastic admirers; but as I am known to be an admirer of him myself, I will say it and take the consequences, for it seems to me that if the monogenity of the human race is granted, and had the African been that way disposed, there was nothing to have prevented his forming a great powerful culture state of his own before white aid or hindrance came. He flourishes in his climate; physically taken as a whole he is splendid; his country is fertile, rich in minerals from gold to coal, and well watered by a set of rivers which, also taken as a whole, you cannot surpass in the whole world. Mind, I do not say that it might have been expected he would turn out a European in form or civilization, because we will allow his climate is too warm; but if it had been in him, there is no outside hindrance that would have prevented him rising to the level in culture of the Asiatic, as the little boys would say, all out of his own head.

9. Fiction, Indian Tales of the Great Ones

Born in 1870, into a Parsee family in India, Cornelia Sorabji (1870–1954) became a writer and a lawyer. By the end of the Victorian period, many elite Indian men had traveled to Britain to study. Cornelia Sorabji, became the first female law student at Oxford University, where she studied from 1889-1894. Since women were barred from practicing as lawyers in Britain until 1919, after graduating she returned to India. There she used her legal skills to work for the interests of women property holders who lived in purdah. In 1923 she was called to the English bar, but continued to practice in India. She was in favor of continued British rule, and in later years lived in London. Apart from *Indian Tales of the Great Ones* written for children, she published a number of other works including *Love Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *India Recalled* (1936) and her memoir *India Calling* (1934).

Indian Tales of the Great Ones is a book of children's stories, which was published in Bombay, India, and London. The central elements of the story are based on Indian history. In 1236, following the death of her father, Raziya came to the throne after a succession struggle with her half-brothers. She only ruled for four years, before she was defeated in battle by opponents. However, she is remembered in Indian history as a wise and capable ruler, even though her gender handicapped her ability to rule in a Muslim world.

Source: Sorabji, Cornelia. *Indian Tales of the Great Ones*. Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1916.

Raziya was the daughter of Altamish, one of the Moghul slave kings of Delhi who lived in the thirteenth century. She is the only woman besides our own Queen Victoria who has ruled Delhi. Altamish had sons also; but when he was dying he said: "You will find no one better fitted to rule the kingdom than my daughter Raziya." And after his nobles had suffered for some time the cruelty and injustice of Raziya's half-brother, they began to see that the king was right. And Raziya herself helped them. The King had given order that anyone who had a petition to make should appear at the great Mosque in Delhi, on a Friday morning, wearing a coloured garment, and his petition would be heard forthwith. Now, on a Friday morning when all the men worshippers had assembled at the Mosque for the weekly prayer, Raziya made herself brave to go among them dressed in the veil of the Prophet's green—a figure whom none could miss. And the people remembered the custom of the good King who had denied a hearing to no one; and they said: "The King's daughter is herself to-day a beggar." So they listened, making it easy for Raziya to speak. And Raziya said: "My brother has killed his brother, and now he would slay me." And all the people, as one man, vowed to help her. And Raziya was put upon the throne of Delhi. And Raziya ruled as few men have ruled in Delhi. She loved justice and mercy, and she gave both to her people. She led them to battle, pitching her own tent in the place of greatest danger; she was generous and wise, and entirely forgetful of her woman's self. All this her people knew of her; and all this historians have said of her. But one old man, who wrote the longest tale of her gifts and virtues, tells us the reason of her failure to rule India: "She was a great monarch, but she was a woman, and she ruled as a man." The Moslem people of those days could not forgive her that. They could not forgive her that, being a woman, she came before them with a face unveiled; that, being a woman, she did successfully the work of a man, and asked no woman's reward. And so, though they took her love and protection for so long that they forgot the cruelty of her brother who had reigned before, they turned against her in the end and dethroned her, and put her in prison. From prison later, she escaped, and led an army to regain her kingdom. And perhaps one day she might have won it back, but for a sad thing that befell her. In the battle which she waged she was defeated, and fled alone to the jungles. Passing through a field, she saw an old peasant at work, and begged for some food, for she was starving. The man gave her a piece of bread, which she ate gladly; and then being worn out, she tied her horse to a tree and lay down in the field to take a short rest. She wore the dress of a man; but the peasant saw her jewels gleaming, as she slept unprotected in that lonely spot. He knew that she was a woman; and no more afraid of her, he killed her and buried her there, in a corner of a field outside the walls of that Delhi which she had ruled. So Raziya lost her kingdom because she was not enough of a woman to make her people love a woman ruler; and she died, because she was a woman, and without protection. And her story is told here, for the reason that that we know now that the old historian was wrong; and that a woman need not fail even in the great work of a sovereign, only because she is a woman. Raziya failed because she thought that for success she must put aside her womanhood. Our Queen Victoria succeeded. And one of the things we know

that she gave to her people was that same great heart of a woman and a mother, which poor Raziya believed that she must slay.”

10. Fiction, Nervous Conditions

In 1959, Tsitsi Dangarembga was born in Africa in the British colony known as Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe. From the age of two she spent four years living in Britain. On her return to Rhodesia she attended a missionary school in Mutare. In 1977, she went back to Britain to attend Cambridge University, but became disillusioned with life and politics in Britain returning home without completing her medical degree. She continued her education in University of Harare in psychology. In 1988, Dangarembga achieved success as a novelist with the publication of *Nervous Conditions*, the first novel to be published in English by a black Zimbabwean woman. In 1989, *Nervous Conditions* won the African section of the Commonwealth Writers Prize. Dangarembga took the title of her book from Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*: "The condition of native is a nervous condition."

From around 1850, British explorers, settlers, and missionaries moved north from southern Africa eventually leading to the creation of the colony of Rhodesia, named after Cecil Rhodes of the British South Africa Company. During the 1960s, demands by black Rhodesians to be included in the political process led a conservative white-minority government to declare independence from Britain. Under Ian Smith, white Rhodesians withstood British pressure, economic sanctions, and guerrilla attacks until 1980 in an attempt to cling to white supremacy. In 1980, the white minority finally consented to hold multiracial elections, and Robert Mugabe won a landslide victory. The country achieved independence on April 17, 1980, under the name Zimbabwe.

Nervous Conditions is set in Rhodesia in the 1960s. The central character is Tambudzai, a young Shona girl who lives on an impoverished farm. After the death of her brother, Tambu has the opportunity to live with her western educated uncle and to receive a missionary western education. The book depicts a picture of colonial domination from the perspective of a young girl.

In this excerpt, Tambudzai is on her way to attend the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart after receiving a scholarship.

Source: Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1989.

“...Excitement. Anticipation. Elation and exultation. It was all very much the same as it had been on that first day that I went to the mission, the day that I began my new life. Yes, it had begun so thoroughly that January afternoon two years ago when I went to the mission, and it was continuing. Everything was coming together. All the things that I wanted were tying themselves up into a neat package which presented itself to me with a flourish. There should have been trumpets, truly there should have been. For was I—Tambudzai, so recently a peasant, was I not entering, as I had promised myself I would, a

world where burdens lightened with every step, soon to disappear altogether. I had an idea that this would happen as I passed through the school gates, those gates that would declare me a young lady, a member of the Young Ladies College of the Sacred Heart. I was impatient to get to those gates. The drive was too long. The car had to go faster to get me there in time ... We found a parking space, though this was not easy, and disembarking, walked, taking the general direction of the stream of parents and pupils ahead of us, over crazy-paving of geometrically cut stone, through a corridor of creamy-white roses to the door that appeared to be the main entrance. Anticipation. Disappointment. I looked and looked and searched carefully through the crowd, but I could not find a single black face which did not belong to our party, except of course for the porters. The porters were carrying the trunks, but none of them offered to carry mine. At the door a nun, smiling beatifically, made us welcome by shaking our hands and asking us 'Which one is this?' before taking us up steps and down corridors to a room at the end of a long hallway. 'All the first-formers live on this corridor,' she explained as she led the way. 'And the Africans live in here,' she announced triumphantly flinging the door to my new life wide open. The room was empty. I was, it seemed, the first black first-former to have arrived. It was not a small room but then neither was it large. It certainly was not large enough for the six beds that stood in it, three along one wall and three along the other, all of necessity so closely arranged that there was barely space to walk between them....."

11. Fiction, Head Above Water

Buchi Emecheta was born in Nigeria in 1944 to Ibo parents. She was orphaned at a young age, and subsequently educated at a missionary school in Nigeria. She was married at the age of 16 to Sylvester Onwordi, a student she had been engaged to since childhood. In 1960, she moved to Britain with her husband and children where she worked as a librarian. Despite the difficulties she encountered living in Britain and raising her five children on her own, she not only received her doctorate in sociology, but she became a best-selling writer. Today she is an internationally renowned novelist who has published many books mostly set in Africa. She also published an autobiography about her life in Britain called *Head Above Water*, which documents her experiences as an immigrant in Britain in the 1960s.

Immigrants have moved to live in the British Isles from Africa and the Asian subcontinent for at least 500 years. However, the demographics of Britain only really began to shift after the second world war, when the British government encouraged immigration from commonwealth countries to help resuscitate a war-devastated Britain. In 1951, the population in Britain of African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian descent was estimated to be 74,500, by 1962 it was 500,000. This rapid rise in immigration created a climate of anxiety, and what came to be perceived in Britain as a 'social problem.' In 1958, the first "race riots" in Britain occurred in West London and Nottingham as white reaction to immigration began to escalate. Today Britain is a multiracial society. The 1991 General Census showed that 2.5 million or 4.5 % of the population were part of

minority groups. Ten years later in the 2001 census, the figures were higher with one in twelve Britons coming from an ethnic minority.

In this excerpt Buchi Emecheta describes her expectations before she arrived in Britain, and the very different reality she experienced.

Source: Emecheta, Buchi. *Head Above Water*. London: Ogwugwu Afo, 1986.

“.....I came to England in a plush first-class suite with a nurse for the children. I booked the best I could afford because I thought everybody lived like that in England. I thought people in England lived like they did in Jane Austen’s novels and that the typical Englishman was like Mr. Darcy, and the women like Mrs. Bennet and her daughters. So when, thirteen days later, the nurse came bubbling into my room and asked excitedly, ‘Have you seen it? Have you seen Liverpool? We’ve arrived in England’, I could be forgiven for dashing out on deck in a cotton housecoat. It was a grey, wet March morning. England gave me a cold welcome. As I said in *Second Class Citizen*, ‘If I had been Jesus, I would have passed England by and not dropped a single blessing.’ I felt like walking into the inside of a grave. I could see nothing but masses of grey, filth, and more grey, yet something was telling me that it was too late now. So I said quietly, ‘Pa, England is not the Kingdom of God you thought it was.’”

[For a while Buchi Emecheta worked in a youth club for black British youth called the Seventies mostly staffed by white British staff, including a woman called Amanda.]

“ ...Amanda was a very attractive and intelligent girl. A university girl who would do anything in the cause of ‘black.’ We read of such middle-class female products becoming victims of the very people they originally set out to help. Amanda really meant well, got herself attacked many a time, but was able to accept it longer than I. Maybe because she held the old ideas of the missionaries who came to Africa in the early days, hoping to bring Christianity to the savages, when in fact the black natives were benign prepared to meet their doom either at the hands of the slaver or the colonial officer. ...Most of these young people at the Seventies had been brainwashed into thinking that England was their mother country, that England belonged to them. At the time when the myth of the ‘mother country’ was being perpetuated, it was beyond the imaginings of the white colonials that one day the blacks would turn around and say to them, ‘Fulfil your promise.’ ...The colonial masters had not calculated on the possibility of such a system bringing out a large number of educated blacks, large enough to man their own local administration and to spill into London in search of middle-class jobs. History proved them wrong, just as they were proved wrong in the case of the Ugandan Asians. Those groups of Asian traders were not only promised the myth of the mother country, they were given British passports. When it came to fulfilling those promises, the poor Asians found themselves countryless. British diplomats found themselves running helter-skelter in search of homes for those with British passports. Many went to Canada, some were admitted into England and others remained in Uganda. But they were on the whole better off than most of the blacks in that at least they had some kind of wealth to start with. The black immigrants into England had nothing but their dreams ...”