

'*Culture & Imperialism* provides a profound, comprehensive and brilliantly detailed account of its topic. If one had to rely on any single source book about imperial culture, it would certainly be this encyclopedic study, which touches on practically every significant imperial venture in modern European history, and focuses with unprecedented subtlety on the 19th century elaboration of French and British colonial systems, moving across the spectrum of cultural production from novels to poetry to opera to contemporary mass media ... a brilliant, courageous and necessary book'

London Review of Books

'An urgently written and urgently needed synthesis of the work in the field, that more than any other critic

Edward W. Said has himself defined'

New York Times Book Review

'Ever since his monumental study *Orientalism*, Said has been arguing that Western culture is massively, invisibly shaped by the single fact of imperialism; and in this breathtakingly erudite new work his cosmopolitan imagination ranges from Verdi to Gramsci, Nietzsche to Neruda, Walter Scott to Wole Soyinka'

Terry Eagleton, *Guardian*

'If *Orientalism* was Said's *Midnight's Children*, then *Culture & Imperialism* is his *Satanic Verses*, an epic of migration and metamorphosis, a Boat People's *Iliad*'

The Nation

Edward W. Said

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actual contests over land and the land's people. What I have tried to do is a kind of geographical inquiry into historical experience, and I have kept in mind the idea that the earth is in effect one world, in which empty, uninhabited spaces virtually do not exist. Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

✦ A whole range of people in the so-called Western or metropolitan world, as well as their counterparts in the Third or formerly colonized world, share a sense that the era of high or classical imperialism, which came to a climax in what the historian Eric Hobsbawm has so interestingly described as 'the age of empire' and more or less formally ended with the dismantling of the great colonial structures after World War Two, has in one way or another continued to exert considerable cultural influence in the present. For all sorts of reasons, they feel a new urgency about understanding the pastness *or not* of the past, and this urgency is carried over into perceptions of the present and the future.

At the centre of these perceptions is a fact that few dispute, namely, that during the nineteenth century unprecedented power—compared with which the powers of Rome, Spain, Baghdad, or Constantinople in their day were far less formidable—was concentrated in Britain and France, and later in other Western countries (the United States, especially). This century climaxed 'the rise of the West', and Western power allowed the imperial metropolitan centres to acquire and accumulate territory and subjects on a truly astonishing scale. Consider that in 1800 Western powers claimed 55 per cent but actually held approximately 35 per cent of the earth's surface, and that by 1878 the proportion was 67 per cent, a rate of increase of 83,000 square miles per year. By 1914, the annual rate had risen to an astonishing 240,000 square miles, and Europe held a grand total of roughly 85 per cent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths.⁹ No other associated set of colonies in history was as large, none so totally dominated, none so unequal in power to the Western metropolis. As a result, says

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William McNeill in *The Pursuit of Power*, 'the world was united into a single interacting whole as never before'.¹⁰ And in Europe itself at the end of the nineteenth century, scarcely a corner of life was untouched by the facts of empire; the economies were hungry for overseas markets, raw materials, cheap labour, and hugely profitable land, and defence and foreign-policy establishments were more and more committed to the maintenance of vast tracts of distant territory and large numbers of subjugated peoples. When the Western powers were not in close, sometimes ruthless competition with one another for more colonies—all modern empires, says V. G. Kiernan,¹¹ imitated one another—they were hard at work settling, surveying, studying, and of course ruling the territories under their jurisdictions.

The American experience, as Richard Van Alstyne makes clear in *Rising American Empire*, was from the beginning founded upon the idea of 'an *imperium*—a dominion, state or sovereignty that would expand in population and territory, and increase in strength and power'.¹² There were claims for North American territory to be made and fought over (with astonishing success); there were native peoples to be dominated, variously exterminated, variously dislodged; and then, as the republic increased in age and hemispheric power, there were distant lands to be designated vital to American interests, to be intervened in and fought over—e.g. the Philippines, the Caribbean, Central America, the 'Barbary Coast', parts of Europe and the Middle East, Vietnam, Korea. Curiously, though, so influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism, and opportunity that 'imperialism' as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of United States culture, politics, history. But the connection between imperial politics and culture is astonishingly direct. American attitudes to American 'greatness', to hierarchies of race, to the perils of *other* revolutions (the American revolution being considered unique and somehow unrepeatable anywhere else in the world¹³) have remained constant, have dictated, have obscured, the realities of empire, while apologists for overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom. Graham Greene's character Pyle, in *The Quiet*

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American, embodies this cultural formation with merciless accuracy.

Yet for citizens of nineteenth-century Britain and France, empire was a major topic of unembarrassed cultural attention. British India and French North Africa alone played inestimable roles in the imagination, economy, political life, and social fabric of British and French society and, if we mention names like Delacroix, Edmund Burke, Ruskin, Carlyle, James and John Stuart Mill, Kipling, Balzac, Nerval, Flaubert, or Conrad, we shall be mapping a tiny corner of a far vaster reality than even their immense collective talents cover. There were scholars, administrators, travellers, traders, parliamentarians, merchants, novelists, theorists, speculators, adventurers, visionaries, poets, and every variety of outcast and misfit in the outlying possessions of these two imperial powers, each of whom contributed to the formation of a colonial actuality existing at the heart of metropolitan life.

As I shall be using the term, 'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory. As Michael Doyle puts it: 'Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire.'¹⁴ In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices.

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with such words and concepts as 'inferior' or 'subject races', 'subordinate peoples', 'dependency', 'expansion', and 'authority'.

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Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected. As for the curious but perhaps allowable idea propagated a century ago by J. R. Seeley that some of Europe's overseas empires were originally acquired absentmindedly, it does not by any stretch of the imagination account for their inconsistency, persistence, and systematized acquisition and administration, let alone their augmented rule and sheer presence. As David Landes has said in *The Unbound Prometheus*, 'the decision of certain European powers . . . to establish "plantations", that is to treat their colonies as continuous enterprises was, whatever one may think of the morality, a momentous innovation'.¹⁵ That is the question that concerns me here: given the initial, perhaps obscurely derived and motivated move toward empire from Europe to the rest of the world, how did the idea and the practice of it gain the consistency and density of continuous enterprise, which it did by the latter part of the nineteenth century?

The primacy of the British and French empires by no means obscures the quite remarkable modern expansion of Spain, Portugal, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and, in a different way, Russia and the United States. Russia, however, acquired its imperial territories almost exclusively by adjacency. Unlike Britain or France, which jumped thousands of miles beyond their own borders to other continents, Russia moved to swallow whatever land or peoples stood next to its borders, which in the process kept moving further and further east and south. But in the English and French cases, the sheer distance of attractive territories summoned the projection of far-flung interests, and that is my focus here, partly because I am interested in examining the set of cultural forms and structures of feeling which it produces, and partly because overseas domination is the world I grew up in and still live in. Russia's and America's joint superpower status, enjoyed for a little less than half a century, derives from quite different histories and from different imperial trajectories. There are several varieties of domination and responses to it, but the 'Western' one, along with the resistance it provoked, is the subject of this book.

In the expansion of the great Western empires, profit and hope of further profit were obviously tremendously important, as the

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attractions of spices, sugar, slaves, rubber, cotton, opium, tin, gold, and silver over centuries amply testify. So also was inertia, the investment in already-going enterprises, tradition, and the market or institutional forces that kept the enterprises going. But there is more than that to imperialism and colonialism. There was a commitment to them over and above profit, a commitment in constant circulation and recirculation, which, on the one hand, allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples *should* be subjugated, and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the *imperium* as a protracted, almost meta-physical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples. We must not forget that there was very little domestic resistance to these empires, although they were very frequently established and maintained under adverse and even disadvantageous conditions. Not only were immense hardships endured by the colonizers, but there was always the tremendously risky physical disparity between a small number of Europeans at a very great distance from home and the much larger number of natives on their home territory. In India, for instance, by the 1930s 'a mere 4,000 British civil servants assisted by 60,000 soldiers and 90,000 civilians (businessmen and clergy for the most part) had billeted themselves upon a country of 300 million persons'.¹⁶ The will, self-confidence, even arrogance necessary to maintain such a state of affairs can only be guessed at, but, as we shall see in the texts of *A Passage to India* and *Kim*, these attitudes are at least as significant as the number of people in the army or civil service, or the millions of pounds England derived from India.

✓ For the enterprise of empire depends upon the *idea* of *having an empire*, as Conrad so powerfully seems to have realized, and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture; then in turn imperialism acquires a kind of coherence, a set of experiences, and a presence of ruler and ruled alike within the culture. As an acute modern student of imperialism has put it:

Modern imperialism has been an accretion of elements, not all of equal weight, that can be traced back through every epoch of history. Perhaps its ultimate causes, with those of war, are

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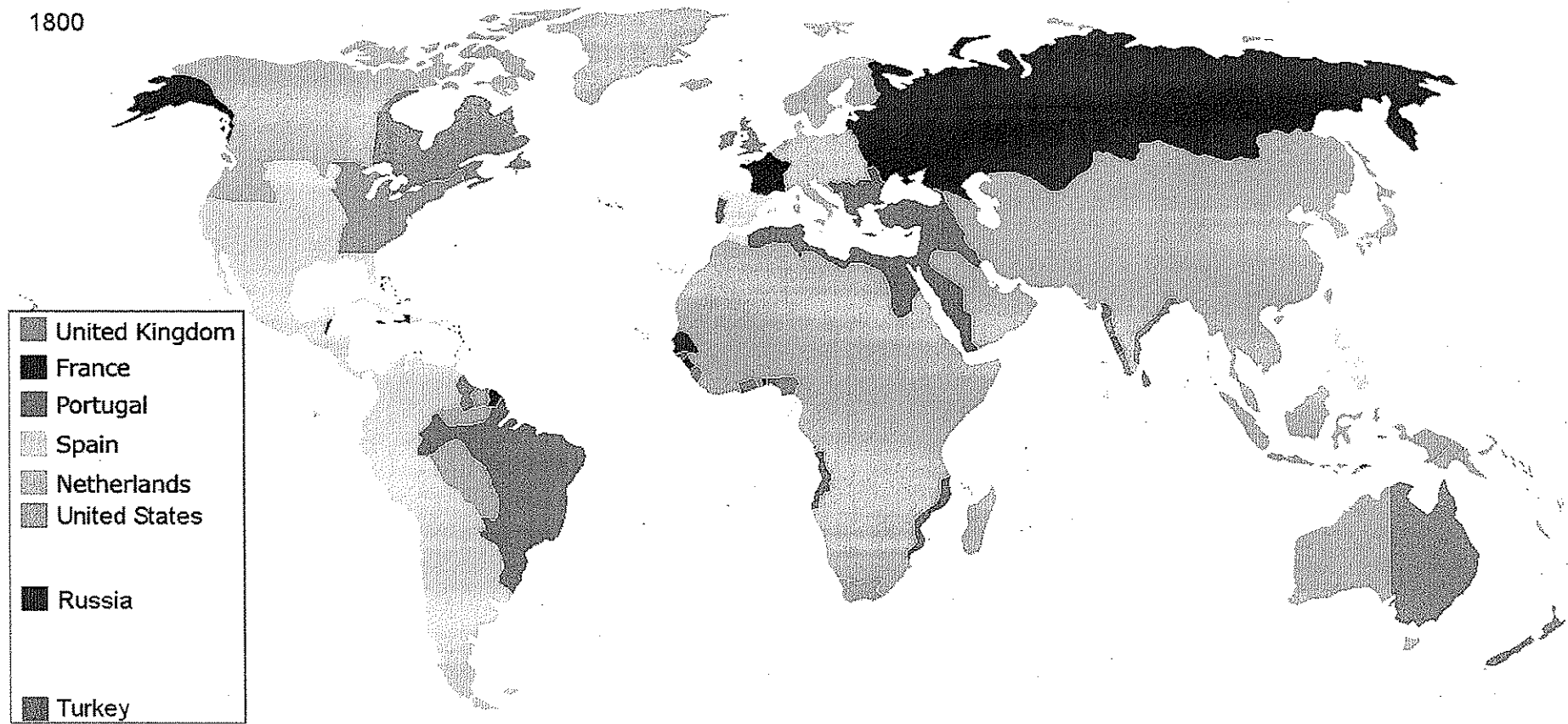
to be found less in tangible material wants than in the uneasy tensions of societies distorted by class division, with their reflection in distorted ideas in men's minds.¹⁷

One acute indication of how crucially the tensions, inequalities, and injustices of the home or metropolitan society were refracted and elaborated in the imperial culture is given by the distinguished conservative historian of empire, D. K. Fieldhouse: 'The basis of imperial authority,' he says, 'was the mental attitude of the colonist. His acceptance of subordination—whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative—made empire durable.'¹⁸ Fieldhouse was discussing white colonists in the Americas, but his general point goes beyond that: the durability of empire was sustained on both sides, that of the rulers and that of the distant ruled, and in turn each had a set of interpretations of their common history with its own perspective, historical sense, emotions, and traditions. What an Algerian intellectual today remembers of his country's colonial past focuses severely on such events as France's military attacks on villages and the torture of prisoners during the war of liberation, on the exultation over independence in 1962; for his French counterpart, who may have taken part in Algerian affairs or whose family lived in Algeria, there is chagrin at having 'lost' Algeria, a more positive attitude toward the French colonizing mission—with its schools, nicely planned cities, pleasant life—and perhaps even a sense that 'troublemakers' and communists disturbed the idyllic relationship between 'us' and 'them'. 

To a very great degree the era of high nineteenth-century imperialism is over: France and Britain gave up their most splendid possessions after World War Two, and lesser powers also divested themselves of their far-flung dominions. Yet, once again recalling the words of T. S. Eliot, although that era clearly had an identity all its own, the meaning of the imperial past is not totally contained within it, but has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology, and policy still exercises tremendous force. Frantz Fanon says, 'We should flatly refuse the

Colonialism in 1800

1800



Colonialism in 1945

