

INTRODUCTION

Agricola [governor of the new Roman colony of Britain 78–85 AD] had to deal with people living in isolation and ignorance, and therefore prone to fight; and his object was to accustom them to a life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities.

[Before the battle of Mons Graupius (83 or 84 AD) the Caledonian resistance leader Calgacus addressed his men as follows.] Pillagers of the world, they have exhausted the land by their indiscriminate slaughter, and now they ransack the sea. A rich enemy excites their cupidity; a poor one, their lust for power ... To robbery, butchery, and rapine, they give the lying name of 'government'; they create desolation and they call it peace.

TACITUS, *THE AGRICOLA AND THE GERMANIA*¹

Two great phenomena have transformed the world in a spectacular fashion in the last five centuries. One is European colonialism; the other is the development of modernity. Modernity and colonialism are loose, baggy concepts, related to one another in multifaceted and complex ways, the nature of which is controversial among scholars. This book outlines their intertwined histories and scholarly debates about them, and investigates some aspects in more detail.

Imagine a time lord from another star system, curious about our species, who visits earth every 500 years to see how we are doing. *Homo sapiens* emerged a few hundred thousand years ago and coexisted for most of the time thereafter with other human species, the last of which became extinct only 30 000 years ago. For hundreds of visits, the time lord

observes humans living in small family groups, and getting food by gathering, hunting and fishing. They use fire for heating and cooking, and from plants, animals and stone make clothing and shelter, and artefacts for carrying, hunting and preparing food. Slowly they spread from Africa to the rest of the Afro-Eurasian landmass, adapting to new environments, gradually refining and adding to their material cultures. Eventually, probably about 20 000 years ago, some people cross the Bering Strait and their descendants rapidly populate the Americas.

Not long afterwards, independently in different parts of the world, a few plants and animals that had long been useful to humans have been so changed by close association with human communities, and the selective breeding that accompanied it, that they become domesticated. Instead of gathering plants and following animals, people start to plant crops and herd various animals. These practices spread to other regions, as do the plants and animals concerned. In the same period, the so-called Neolithic, people begin to make polished stone tools, sew with needles, fire earthenware pots and weave cloth.

From then on, nearly every time the time lord visits there are more humans, making more numerous and sophisticated things. Great stone fortresses, tombs and walls are erected. Alluvial rivers like the Nile, the Indus and the Huang He become centres of great civilisations. Writing, and the extraction and smelting of metals to make tools and weapons, also emerge. Despite some vicissitudes – for example, human population may have fallen between 500 AD and 1000 AD – the trend is towards higher population densities living in larger and more complex societies, based on increasingly intense exploitation of natural resources. From about the middle of the first millennium BC, the religious practices of many cultures are fundamentally altered by the sudden success of salvation religions. Two in particular – first Buddhism, then Christianity – come to dominate large areas of Eurasia. After 700 AD, they are put on the defensive by a new salvation religion, Islam.

In spite of these changes, the human world in 1400 AD was essentially similar to the world thousands of years earlier. Urban settlements were still small and basic, the muscle power of animals and humans was the main form of energy for production and transport, and most of the world's people lived by hunting and gathering, planting short-term garden crops in forest clearings, or driving sheep or cattle from pasture to pasture. However, the rate of technological change was beginning to accelerate, especially in China. Between 1000 and 1500, world population

doubled to about 400 million. At that unprecedented growth rate, it would still have taken until 3500 AD to reach six billion.

In 1400 there were great empires yet to be built by non-European states: the Ottoman, Mogul and Qing. European societies, however, were about to embark upon a course that would bring them, and the societies they spawned in America and elsewhere, to global ascendancy. Over the following centuries, the 'West' became richer, its armies more successful, its languages spoken in more places, and its governments more powerful. The peoples of Europe multiplied and migrated to distant shores. Human productivity and consumption of raw materials and generation of waste increased vastly, and accelerated to the accompaniment of momentous political, social and cultural changes. At the same time, the population of the world as a whole grew enormously and became closely interlinked by ramifying economic and cultural interdependence.

On the time lord's next visit in 2000 AD, he would find that the global population had already reached six billion. In a mere 500 years, less than a quarter of one per cent of the time that the human species has existed, its organisation and ecology changed almost beyond recognition. Mining of fossil fuels, intensive mining of metals, the development of artificial materials, quicker and more efficient building, transport and communication techniques, and a proliferation of artefacts whose properties would have seemed supernatural to people of earlier periods, conferred unprecedented power on humans for both creation and destruction. Mechanised and fertilised agriculture fed a population over twelve times that of 1500, and subsistence economies almost disappeared. National states and complex administrative, financial, educational and scientific institutions had replaced tribes, feudal monarchies and imperial dynasties ruling polyglot empires. There were hundreds of cities larger than any city that had ever existed before. Work and production had changed past recognition, and depended on vast global trading networks. Innovative bodies of knowledge had given rise to new understandings of human relationships and the nature of the universe. The world was now 'modern', and becoming more modern at such a hectic rate that growing numbers feared its approaching collapse.

Our interplanetary visitor would also notice that between 1500 and 2000 another seemingly distinct series of changes had occurred in human languages, demographics and geopolitics. There were an enormous number of languages in use throughout the world in 1500, most confined to a small number of speakers. A few were used to communicate across

great geographical and cultural distances, chiefly Latin in Western Europe, Persian in much of central and southern Asia, Arabic in the Middle East, parts of Africa and southeast Asia, and the Chinese script in East Asia. Of these only Arabic was still used for that purpose in 2000. Other languages knitted the world together. Nearly all were European: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian. In addition, all over the world, 'national languages' supplanted or supplemented local languages and dialects. Those with the largest number of speakers were in Asia: Putongwa (Mandarin) in China, Hindi and Urdu in South Asia, and Malay/Indonesian in South-East Asia.

By 2000, the population of Europe had fallen back to a similar proportion of the global population to what it had been in 1500, but in the meantime, people of European descent had displaced most of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas and Australasia, and there were significant numbers in southern Africa. There had also been considerable movement of non-Europeans, notably of large numbers from Africa to the Americas.

Finally, Western governments and business corporations dominated global politics and economics. Most of the international regulating bodies that had come into existence, like the United Nations, the World Bank, UNESCO and the International Court of Justice, were located in the West, and depended on its financial support and administrative expertise.

These features of the contemporary world are consequences of European colonialism. From the 16th until the 20th century, European governments invaded and annexed considerable territories outside Europe, and large numbers of Europeans migrated to them. Europeans and their descendants achieved global military, political and cultural ascendancy. The process involved an extraordinary variety of people – spice merchants in their fragrant warehouses, Muslim bandits who captured people from African villages and dragged them in chains to sell to Christians to ship to American slave markets, captains of the stinking slave boats, reluctant seamen flogged into submission, soldiers who conquered empires, landed aristocrats who owned shares in slaving companies, and heirs of defunct empires kept under close house arrest far from their own lands. There would be convicts who became rich farmers, survivors of famines groaning in steerage, clerks from modest London families who became powerful civil servants, families down on their luck who dug for gold in California or the Transvaal, and millions who died of disease, overwork, malnutrition and violence. Why did so many

Europeans leave their homelands to trade, steal, fight, rule, organise, work and settle far away? For many it was very dangerous, especially in the first few centuries. Before the 19th century, the death rate among sailors from disease, shipwreck and fierce military discipline was extremely high. And what were the reasons for the extraordinary dominance they achieved over the world's many peoples?

Colonialism officially ended decades ago, and Western power and influence is slowly waning. However, the colonial legacy is still very powerful: the colonial systems of language, capital, patronage, immigration, trade, education and cultural influence are still intact and even in some respects stronger, while many conflicts around the world, from the Caucasus to Fiji, stem directly from the colonial period.

Colonialism and Modernity is addressed to the growing numbers of readers and students of world history, international relations, globalisation, comparative literature and cultural studies. It has four main aims:

- To tell a history of the utmost relevance for understanding why the contemporary world is as it is.
- To foster empathy with the people caught up in colonisation and modernisation: colonial intruders and indigenous rulers, soldiers and seamen, convicts and refugees, settlers and aboriginal peoples, kings and revolutionaries, merchants and industrialists, servants and workers, slaves and scientists.
- To illustrate some of the ways in which historians, anthropologists, sociologists, cultural theorists, philosophers, political leaders, novelists, poets, artists and musicians have reacted to colonialism and modernity, now and in the past.
- Finally, to outline something of the nature and scope of the enormous literature that has appeared about these subjects in recent decades for students and others who wish to explore them further.

Part I tells a double history, of the rise to global dominance of people from Europe and the coming of modernity. This story can be told in many ways. Our telling combines a sketch of the last 500 years of world history with some more specific discussions of the sociology or intellectual background of relevant topics. The focus is on Europe because Europeans and their descendants colonised so extensively in recent centuries, and because nothing like the modernity of today would have happened without Europe. More attention is paid to the maritime colonialism of Western

Europe than to the territorial expansion of Russia and of European settler societies into the Americas and Australia, because there is a consensus that Western Europe was where the first modernities matured, and were recognised and assessed as such.

'Big picture' treatments provide necessary perspective, but they run the risk of over-generalisation. Part II examines selected issues in more detail. Chapters 5 and 6 elaborate aspects of the historical narrative of chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 5 examines past European debates about the ethics of colonialism, with an eye to their continuing relevance. Chapter 6 discusses anti-colonial nationalisms, focusing on the effects of nationalism, decolonisation and modernity on postcolonial societies. Chapter 7 examines the complex relationships of colonialism and culture, in particular how the cultures of the colonised were imbued with both emulation and resistance to colonising cultures. The next two chapters are concerned with the crucial roles played by race and gender in colonialism, and how constructions of race and gender are entangled not only with the dominant discourses of colonialism and modernity, but with resistance to them. Chapter 10 reviews some of the enormous changes in the understanding and use of time that have accompanied the advent of the modern.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, drawing on the intellectual frameworks called history, philosophy, political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, literary studies, and the more recent cultural and postcolonial studies. These fields of scholarship work with different terminologies, assumptions about knowledge and research methods, and are sometimes hostile to one another. Nevertheless, the boundaries between them are problematic, and could well be superseded by a future synthesis. We have drawn eclectically upon all of them.²

Some sections are called 'Hot Topic' or 'Case Study'. Hot Topics address contentious conceptual and theoretical issues, and frequently reach beyond the period or issue that is being discussed. Case Studies examine in more detail specific illustrations of situations or arguments under discussion. Both are intended for students and teachers to follow up in further research and discussion. Other readers can safely treat them as part of the text.

Part I

Histories

5

DEBATING THE ETHICS OF COLONIALISM

No vision, any more than any social system, has total hegemony over its domain ... Whether by popular support or cabal, [colonial lobbies in Europe] could press the nation into more scrambling for land and more natives being compelled into imperial service, with little at home to stop or inhibit the process. Yet there are always resistances, however ineffective.

EDWARD SAID, *CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM*¹

Since World War II, colonialism has been a subject of blame, guilt and controversy. It is widely condemned as an immoral and exploitative enterprise that bears considerable responsibility for continuing global poverty, violence and cultural dislocation.

Debates about the morality of colonialism did not begin in recent decades. Many of today's issues have been discussed for centuries. Although the maintenance of colonialism did not need the majority of people and institutions in Europe to support it actively, it did require at least the tacit acceptance of large numbers of decision-makers and people of influence. The colonial project created moral conflicts among those directly involved, who needed to justify to themselves what they were doing, and to persuade others that it was legitimate, useful or necessary.

Intellectuals and creative artists participated in these debates, in Europe and its colonies. This chapter reviews some of their contributions, from the 16th century until decolonisation in the 20th. The debates took place against a changing political context. At the beginning of the colonial period, the European states involved were absolute monarchies.

Political issues were debated mostly in dynastic or Christian terms. Mass literacy, newspapers and political parties began to appear in the 18th century, but it was not until the 20th century that Western states assumed their present form, with universal education, democratic franchise and powerful, image-driven mass media. Debates about the morality of colonialism also took place against the background of competing philosophies about the nature and source of ethical principles. As the hold of Christianity loosened in Europe in the 18th century, philosophers proposed replacing divine law with guidelines for action based on the power of reason or human nature.

Spreading the Gospel

The first European colonists perceived the worlds they encountered and attacked through lenses shaped by the noisy polemics of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. In his memoir of Cortez's conquest, the conquistador Bernal Diaz (c1492–1581) shows little of the reflex contempt of later adventurers. He recalls with admiration Aztec Mexico's great causeways, aqueducts, bridges and towers, the rich clothes of the aristocrats, the dazzling splendours of the palace, the novelties of chocolate and tobacco, the elaborate courtesy of the people, and the wonderful marketplace, of which he writes that 'some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so full of people'. When he turns to the human sacrifices that were an integral part of the Aztec religion, however, his tone shifts. He describes how the priests cut open their victims with flint knives, tore out their hearts and cut up their bodies, some parts of which were eaten, with horror and indignation. The walls of their temples, he wrote, 'were so splashed and caked with blood that they and the floor too were black. Indeed, the whole place stank abominably'.

In his first meeting with the Mexican emperor Moctezuma II (c1466–1520), Cortez launched into a long exposition of Christian doctrine – the worship of one God, the creation of the world, original sin and the passion of Jesus – adding that the Mexicans should 'give up the worship of idols and make no more human sacrifice – for all men are brothers'. When they conquered the city, the Spaniards demolished every one of the temples of blood, and were delighted to discover precious metals and jewels buried in their foundations. They replaced the temples with churches.²

Christianity places on its followers an obligation to evangelise. Although missionaries were sometimes involved in resistance to colonialism, more often they approved of it because they saw it as aid to spreading God's word. Sometimes they incited it. In the 1870s, John G Paton, of the New Hebrides Mission, wrote urging Britain to annex the islands now known as Vanuatu. In the last decades of the 19th century, Vanuatu was subject to 'blackbirding', the aggressive recruiting of indentured workers to work in Australia. Paton, however, makes only passing reference to this practice. Annexation, he urged, would complete British occupation of the island chain between Fiji and New Guinea. He claimed that the natives were all for Britain and hated the French. Most Europeans on the islands were British, the soil was rich and a potential source of agricultural wealth, the strategic harbours might constitute a threat to British interests if taken over by a hostile nation, and the work of the British (Protestant) missionaries might be lost if it fell into French (Catholic) hands.³ His letter was dismissed. France and Britain, in a unique agreement, administered the islands jointly after 1887.

Making the Earth Fruitful

Colonialism did not usually involve theft of land where there were state structures and documented systems of legal tenure, as in India, South-East Asia and some parts of Africa. However, where indigenous populations were small and lived nomadically or by subsistence means, large numbers of Europeans often settled permanently, driving them off the lands they had previously occupied. This happened in much of the Americas and Australia.

The 17th century liberal philosopher John Locke outlined a justification for the occupation of land in such circumstances. On the basis of 'natural law', he argued, the people were only entitled to ownership of the land if they made proper use of it:

As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property ... God, when He gave the world in common to all mankind, commanded man also to labour, and the penury of his condition required it of him. God and his reason commanded him to subdue the earth – i.e., improve it for the benefit of life and therein lay out something upon it that was his own, his labour. He that, in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him ...

God gave the world to men in common, but since He gave it them for their benefit and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed He meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (and labour was to be his title to it); not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious.⁴

Locke's argument implied that farming land created a natural right of possession, whereas hunting – a common pastime of the European nobility in their ancestral lands, but a vital means of livelihood for many indigenous peoples – did not. In Europe this was an anti-feudal position, placing a question over the land rights of monarchs and aristocrats who did not put their lands to productive use. Applied to the colonial frontier, it put a similar question over the rights of far more vulnerable hunter-gatherers.

To the debatable extent that it informed jurisprudence, Locke's argument helped actualise the perception that indigenous peoples had no rights in the land they occupied. Because they did not engage in European-style agriculture, they did not really own land, but merely ranged over it. However, colonists had no need of Locke to justify occupying the lands of 'savages'. They already had the Biblical exhortations to 'fill the earth and subdue it'.⁵

Law and Order

In the prescient essay 'Perpetual Peace' (1795), Immanuel Kant suggested the maintenance of global peace by a league of sovereign nations. He argued that this was impossible unless governments were neither despotic nor arbitrary, but 'republican', by which he meant lawful. To republicanism, Kant opposed 'savage' (lawless) freedom. Savage freedom lumped together the old European aristocracy and indigenous peoples, as Locke's argument had. Neither kind of society met Kant's criteria for good government:

The chief difference between European and American savages lies in the fact that many tribes of the latter have been eaten by their enemies, while the former know how to make better use of their conquered enemies than to dine off them; they know better how to use them to increase the number of their subjects and thus the quantity of instruments for even more extensive wars.⁶

Colonisation was usually accompanied by the imposition of European legal systems. In the eyes of many, including Kant, this imposition was a force for peace and justice. It is true that European legal systems, which derived from Roman law and other traditions, were highly developed. In some cases they brought security to societies that lacked statute law and effective policing. The suppression of endless blood feuds and brutal edicts from rulers, for example, were often welcomed. On the other hand, even when law and order were administered benevolently, it was by or under the oversight of foreign conquerors. This was hardly a satisfactory state of affairs from Kant's point of view.

A related argument for colonisation observed that Europeans often settled countries in the absence of legal protection of those countries by another European power. Armed with superior weapons, with plentiful opportunities for deception and bribery, and beyond the range of their nation's laws, settlers were free to commit acts of violence and injustice upon indigenous populations which could only be controlled by annexation of the territory concerned. This sounded persuasive, but in reality colonial states had limited powers to control pioneer settlers. In any case, many settler colonies soon fell into the hands of the settlers themselves. A version of the argument continues to be used today. According to neo-liberal commentator Robert Kagan, 'the truth is that the benevolent hegemony exercised by the US is good for a vast portion of the world's population. It is certainly a better international arrangement than all realistic alternatives'.⁷

Social Darwinism

In the 19th century, there was much speculation about the idea of evolution, in biology and natural and historical phenomena generally. The concept was put on a sound scientific basis by Charles Darwin (1809–1882). His *Origin of Species* (1859) detailed abundantly that biological species had not been created in their present forms, but evolved from earlier ones by a process of selection favouring the characteristics of individuals that best survived and reproduced. The theory was the intellectual sensation of the century, and rivals Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (1687) as the most influential scientific work of all time.⁸

Darwinism had a powerful but ambiguous impact on ideas of progress. In the popularisation of Darwin's ideas, the phrases 'struggle for existence' and 'survival of the fittest' were often used to summarise its complicated content. They suggested that the process was, for all its

cruelty, essentially benevolent, since it led to the triumph of the strong and the fit. Nature, like the West, was on the side of 'progress'. Some appealed to the theory to reject altruism and defend self-interest. Social Darwinism, associated with Herbert Spencer, held that some classes and races were fitter than others. The fit dominate the rest, just as some species multiplied and others become extinct in evolution. Since it seemed evident to many in the 19th century that whites were 'fitter', it was possible to conclude that they had a 'natural right' to colonise and dominate.

Social Darwinism merged with European notions of progress, civilisation, religion and race to yield the paternalism of Kipling's famous poem 'The White Man's Burden' (1898). This classical rationale of colonialism – one of the most-quoted of poems in a period when verse was far more influential than it is today – depicts the dark races as irrational, excitable and cruel. They require the control and guidance of patient, responsible, self-sacrificing white men to bring them to civilisation:

Take up the White Man's burden –
Send forth the best ye breed –
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child ...⁹

For several decades the slogan 'survival of the fittest' penetrated the consciousness of Westerners of all political persuasions. It fed the eugenics movement, which sought to improve humankind by encouraging those judged 'fit' to breed and discouraging or preventing the 'unfit' from doing so, and supported racist attitudes until the near-successful Nazi program to wipe out European Jews shocked the world into a different paradigm.

Darwin, however, had cautioned that 'I use the term Struggle for Existence in a large and metaphorical sense including dependence of one being on another'. Natural selection does not imply that aggression and selfishness are the best ways to survive. Nor is there any good reason why evolution should lead to progress, since what is best at surviving might as well be degenerate as advanced.

Evolutionary theory and the idea of progress ... should have been in tension with one another. One eliminated purpose from nature, the other asserted a reassuring and predictable

continuity. But, although they were formally contradictory, they came to be seen as synonymous. In the imperial context they merged into one powerful 'ethic of conquest'.¹⁰

Criticisms of Colonialism

From the start, indigenous peoples found sympathisers in the colonising nations. One of the first literary products of Spain's subjugation of the Americas, Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's (1533–1594) *The Araucana* (1589), celebrates the Spanish conquests, but also displays considerable empathy for the heroic struggle of the indigenous Chileans and castigates the immorality of the conquerors.

If my own opinion errs not,
Too much blood as here been lavished
To destroy their total riches
Of this fructifying region.
Acts inhuman have exceeded
War's determined laws and limits.
Brute, unparalleled malevolence
Has polluted our invasion.¹¹

A common criticism of colonialism charged that it was morally corrupting for the colonisers. This is the main point of some stanzas in the fervent evangelist William Cowper's poem 'Expostulation', published in 1782:

Hast thou, though suckled at Fair Freedom's breast,
Exported Slav'ry to the conquer'd East,
Pulled down the tyrants India serv'd with dread,
And rais'd thyself, a greater, in their stead?

...

With Asiatic Vices stor'd thy mind,
But left their Virtues and thine own behind;
And, having truck'd thy soul, brought home the Fee,
To tempt the Poor to sell himself to thee?¹²

A later illustration of this accusation is the diary of the diplomat, traveller and writer Wilfred Scawen Blunt:

9th Jan. 1896 ... the British Empire is the greatest engine of evil for the weak races now existing in the world ... I should be delighted to see England stripped of her whole foreign possessions.

We were better off and more respected in Queen Elizabeth's time, the 'spacious days,' when we had not a stick of territory outside the British Islands, than now, and infinitely more respectable. The gangrene of colonial rowdiness is infecting us, and the habit of repressing liberty in weak nations is endangering our own ...

22nd Dec. 1900 ... The whole white race is revelling openly in violence, as though it had never pretended to be Christian. God's equal curse be on them all! So ends the famous 19th century into which we were so proud to have been born ...¹³

An atheist who championed Irish Home Rule and sympathised with Islam, Blunt hoped for, and predicted, the end of British imperialism.

Christian Dissent

Christian dissent was a recurring theme of colonisation. Christianity, with its central images of a persecuted people chosen by God, and of Christ persecuted and sentenced to death by an imperial government, contains a powerful appeal to the oppressed. Christian imagery frequently inspired rebellion against colonial oppression, just as it inspired rebellion against oppression in Pre-Modern and Early Modern Europe. Missionaries had an ambivalent relationship with other colonists, supporting and even leading them insofar as they made possible the spread of the Gospel, but sometimes disapproving of their brutality.

On arrival in Paraguay in 1588, Jesuits converted the indigenous Guarani and persuaded them to live in European-style missionary towns ruled by priests. When these towns became the target of slavers from Brazil, the Jesuits pleaded in vain with the Pope and the monarchs of Portugal and Spain to stop the raiding. Eventually the Jesuits were expelled from Paraguay and the Guarani became serfs of local landholders. Portugal, Spain and France suppressed the order in their domains, and for forty years it was dissolved by the Pope, before being restored in 1814.

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, was a radical Protestant movement founded by George Fox during the English Civil War. With many other Quakers, Fox was gaoled for long periods for refusing to join the revolutionary army. 'I knew from whence all wars arose, even from lust, according to James's doctrine ... I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion for all wars.'¹⁴ Fleeing persecution, many Quakers migrated to the American colonies, where a group led by William Penn set off to found the colony that is now the state of

Pennsylvania. His 1682 address to the indigenous people there shows the abhorrence some Christians felt for violence:

The Great Spirit who made me and you, who rules the heavens, and who knows the innermost thoughts of men, knows that I and my friends have a hearty desire to live in peace and friendship with you, and to serve you to the utmost of our power. It is not our custom to use hostile weapons against our fellow creatures, for which reason we have come unarmed ... I will not do as the Marylanders did, that is, call you children or brothers only; for parents are apt to whip their children too severely, and brothers sometimes will differ ... but I will consider you as the same flesh and blood with the Christians, and the same as if one man's body were to be divided into two parts.¹⁵

The theme of resistance by a minority of Christians to the brutalising effects of colonialism recurs throughout its history. In late 19th century Australia the Anglican clergyman John Gribble became known as the 'Black Fellow's Friend'. He wrote that his feelings of pity for Australia's Aborigines 'grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength' as he was 'confronted with the terrible wrongs to which they had been subjected'. Gribble received abuse and death threats and died a bankrupt, but also inspired considerable popular support.¹⁶

The Abolition of Slavery

The anti-slavery movement of the 18th and 19th centuries was the greatest and most successful moral struggle of the colonial era.¹⁷ Slavery was an essential element in the mercantile system. However, only the governments of Western nations had the power to seriously disrupt the slave trade, and the campaign was premised on their being prepared to do so. Abolition only altered the course of colonialism, it did not end it.

The campaign to abolish slavery was long and difficult. In 1791, six days before his death, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote to the abolitionist William Wilberforce (1759–1833):

... O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by the circumstance, that a man who has black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no

redress; it being a LAW in our Colonies that the OATH of a black man against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this!¹⁸

By then, several thousand Africans were living in Britain, including many ex-slaves who had fought for the British in the American War of Independence because they had been offered their freedom. There were also many runaway slaves, and several examples of Britons defending them against their owners, either by buying them to free them, or by arguing that the law did not permit the ownership of people in Britain.¹⁹ There was an active abolitionist movement called the Sons of Africa. Two ex-slaves in London, Olaudah Equiano (c1745–c1797) and Ottobah Cugoana (1757?–1801?), wrote popular abolitionist books. Both claimed to have been taken from Africa when young (although doubt has been cast on whether this was true of Equiano).²⁰ Later they were sold to Englishmen who freed them, and learned to read and write. Their harrowing descriptions affected many.

I was early snatched away from my native country, with about eighteen or twenty more boys and girls, as we were playing in a field. We lived but a few days' journey from the coast where we were kidnapped, and consigned to Grenada. ...

But it would be needless to give a description of all the horrible scenes which we saw, and the base treatment which we met with in this dreadful captive situation, as the similar cases of thousands, which suffer by this infernal traffic, are well known. Let it suffice to say that I was thus lost to my dear indulgent parents and relations, and they to me. All my help was cries and tears, and these could not avail, nor suffered long, till one succeeding woe and dread swelled up another. Brought from a state of innocence and freedom, and, in a barbarous and cruel manner, conveyed to a state of horror and slavery, this abandoned situation may be easier conceived than described ...²¹

William Wilberforce introduced a motion to outlaw slave trading by British subjects for 18 years in a row until it was finally passed by parliament in 1806. Britain outlawed the sale and involuntary transportation of people in its dominions in 1807. The United States followed shortly afterwards, in 1808. By 1850, nearly all European nations had followed. However, the situation of people who were already slaves or born into slavery was not affected by this legislation. In 1834, Britain was the first country to free all slaves. France followed in 1848 and Holland in 1863.

The United States only did so in 1867 after the Civil War, and Brazil not until 1888. See also page p.43.

Two present-day African nations owe their existence to Western discomfort with slavery. In 1787 the British government seized on an offer by abolitionists to establish a 'province of freedom' for the ex-slaves living in London. After negotiations to buy land from chiefs in Sierra Leone, thousands migrated there. The project encountered violent resistance from locals, and economic difficulties, and fell into the hands of corrupt officials. Britain annexed the territory in 1808. Not long afterwards, ex-slaves from the United States began to settle in neighbouring Liberia under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, a society of Southern slave-owners. The Society bought, leased or extorted land from the local inhabitants, and assisted freed slaves to return to the land of their ancestors. Fearing British annexation, the settlers declared Liberia the 'land of the free', an independent republic in 1847.

In Sierra Leone and Liberia, the new settlers were known as 'Americans'. They treated the indigenous Africans much as whites had treated them. Both nations have experienced ruinous civil wars fuelled by the hostility between the two social groups.

CASE STUDY: JAMAICA

The world historian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto reminds us that for all the depth of its moral passion, the success of the anti-slavery movement was less a triumph of Christian compassion or Enlightenment autonomy than of capitalism.²² Economies boomed after abolition, and the demise of the rich syncretic traditions that had become encrusted around the institution was more traumatic for the ex-slaves than for their masters. Many ex-slaves became sharecroppers paying exorbitant rents to the landowners who had once owned them, while others joined the impoverished urban proletariat whom Marx had dubbed 'wage slaves'. Slavery, and related forms of serfdom and bondage, persists to this day in some places.

In the decades following abolition in Jamaica, most blacks remained desperately poor and disenfranchised. A two-year drought in the early 1860s caused starvation and a crime wave. People feared that the planters intended to restore slavery, and radicals called for the distribution of land to ex-slaves. In 1865 there was an uprising known as the Morant Bay rebellion.

The governor of Jamaica at the time was Edward Eyre (1815–1901). As a younger man he explored Australia – its largest salt lake is named after him – and acquired a reputation for benevolence as the Protector of Aborigines in South Australia. Eyre responded to the rebellion ferociously. Troops were sent to hunt down the poorly-armed rebels, and burnt down many houses. Nearly 1000 rebels were killed. Eyre also took advantage of the emergency to settle accounts with a leading opposition politician, George William Gordon, who was arrested and hanged.

These events caused an outcry in Britain, the arbitrary execution of Gordon exciting particular outrage. Eyre was dismissed by the Liberal government and was twice charged with murder, but neither case was proceeded with. Much of the public support for Eyre was openly racist. When he returned to Britain in August 1866 he was welcomed at Southampton by his admirers. A public banquet was held in his honour, picketed by an opposition rally. Demonstrators who opposed Eyre burnt effigies of him in public.

The Eyre affair demonstrated how attitudes that sustained the European slave trade for centuries continued to flourish after its abolition, and perhaps even hardened. Prominent intellectuals such as Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892), Charles Dickens (1812–1870) and John Ruskin (1819–1900) joined the committee for the defence of Governor Eyre. Carlyle commended him for 'saving the West Indies and hanging one incendiary mulatto, well worth gallows, if I can judge'.²³ Catherine Hall discusses the Morant Bay rebellion and the subsequent scandal in an important study of how Empire figured and continues to figure in the British imagination. She points out that British understandings of slavery, freedom and 'the African' were first debated in the context of Jamaica and the Caribbean. The major cultural figures, political leaders and missionaries who took part in the public debate about Eyre were all involved in a project of imperial creation that required constant argument, revision and affirmation. Throughout the 19th century, Baptist missionaries in Jamaica became increasingly frustrated in their attempts to instil their stereotype of imperial subjection – meek, grateful and eager for self-improvement – among Jamaicans. Both liberal and abolitionist participants in the debate had absorbed these deep-seated assumptions about racial difference and hierarchy. But were the differences inherited or a consequence of environment and education? Of the two logics of racialism, the biological and the social, in the 1860s the former was in the ascendant.²⁴ (See chapters 3 and 8.)

The Call of Progress: Mill and Marx

A member of parliament who was deeply involved in the ultimately unsuccessful struggle to have Eyre brought to trial recalled later that:

It was clear that to bring English functionaries to the bar of a criminal court for abuses of power committed against Negroes and mulattos was not a popular proceeding with the English middle classes ... As a matter of curiosity I kept some specimens of the abusive letters, almost all of them anonymous, which I received while these proceedings were going on. They are evidence of the sympathy felt with the brutalities in Jamaica by the brutal part of the population at home. They graduated from coarse jokes, verbal and pictorial, up to threats of assassination.²⁵

The parliamentarian was John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), the great liberal thinker of the 19th century. While campaigning tirelessly for free speech, the rule of law, the extension of democratic institutions, and the rights and freedoms of women, blacks and the poor, Mill also made a formidable contribution to the philosophical foundations of liberalism.

His ambivalent position on colonialism illustrates problems in the application of liberal thought. In *Representative Government* (1861), Mill denounced colonialism in the past as 'vicious', but expressed the hope that British colonialism at least was improving. Like Kant, he saw benefits in Western law and government.

Nothing but foreign force would induce a tribe of North American Indians to submit to the restraints of a regular and civilised government. The same might have been said, though somewhat less absolutely, of the barbarians who overran the Roman Empire. It required centuries of time, and an entire change of circumstances, to discipline them into regular obedience even to their own leaders ...²⁶

The superiority of European civilisation was taken for granted even by its most radical critics, such as Karl Marx (1818–1883). Marx had no illusions about the violence and exploitation of colonialism. However, he believed in progress, and *Capital, Volume 1*, his magnum opus, maintains that progress is always accompanied by force.

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East

Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production ...

In England at the end of the 17th century, they [the colonising nations] arrive at a systematical combination, embracing the colonies, the national debt, the modern mode of taxation, and the protectionist system. These methods depend in part on brute force, e.g., the colonial system. But, they all employ the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power.²⁷

In his journalism, Marx defended British policy in India against its American critics. British rule was bringing positive changes, creating a modern physical infrastructure (the railways), and a centralised government apparatus. Like Hegel, Marx believed that 'Asiatic' societies were static, and needed foreign intervention to throw off 'Oriental despotism'. For all their differences with the imperialists, Marx and Mill shared their deep sense of European superiority. As Marx himself wrote, 'The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.'

Disillusionment and Moral Relativism

A sense of futility and disgust began to haunt European consciousness in the late imperial period. It is evident in Joseph Conrad's (1857–1924) *Heart of Darkness* (1902), with its last words those of the obsessed African adventurer Kurtz: 'The horror, the horror.'²⁸ A chorus of anti-imperial dissent arose from socialists, vegetarians, anarchists, aesthetes, folklorists, occultists and futurists. The threnody of guilt and resistance, strengthened by the catastrophes of 1914–1945, helps account for the haste with which European nations wound up their colonial operations. However, the scepticism and the bad conscience of a minority of intellectuals could not by itself produce significant changes in the imperial system, especially since these emotions were part of a wider sense of futility and disorientation about the purpose of life in general that was to become characteristic of the modern condition in the 20th century.

'If God does not exist, then everything is permitted,' exclaims a character in a 19th century novel.²⁹ Science affirmed the primacy of matter over

mind and spirit, whereas religion located moral conscience in the mind and spirit. Many saw in the rise of science and its challenge to religion the triumph of materialism and the end of moral certainty. If nature and matter held any moral lesson, it was the hard one of survival of the fittest.

In 1850 the popular poet Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) reflected on the moral character of a world that was neither God-centred nor human-centred. Being nothing more or less than the self-generated development of matter, it must be alien to human concerns. People wanted the universe to be a benevolent place of love, truth and justice, but 'Nature, red in tooth and claw ... shriek'd against' this creed. In the end, we would 'be blown about the desert dust'.³⁰

Tennyson's sense of moral disorientation and the ultimate meaninglessness of life oppressed many late Victorians. Some sensed that the self-righteous complacency of their time and place could not last. The world, wrote Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) in 'Dover Beach' (1867):

... which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.³¹

In 1897 the novelist Joseph Conrad wrote a letter to the crusading journalist Cunningham Graham. They would soon become close friends. Graham had published an article called 'Bloody Niggers,' a bitter rebuke of colonial genocide and complacency: 'Niggers have no guns, so no rights ... The hypocritical British heart beats for all except those their own empire drowns in blood. The God who created people like us – must he not have been a fool?'³²

Yes, it's good, your piece [Conrad wrote] [but] [w]hy preach to the converted? I am being stupid. Honour, justice, compassion and freedom are ideas that have no converts. There are only people, without knowledge, understanding or feeling, who intoxicate themselves with words, repeat words, shout them out, imagining they believe them without believing in anything else but profit, personal advantage and their own satisfaction. Words fly away – and nothing remains, do you see? Absolutely nothing,

CASE STUDY: 'THE DRUNKEN BOAT'

A vivid expression of disillusionment with colonialism was written by a teenager who never ventured beyond the triangle of Brussels, Paris and London until he abandoned writing poetry, when he went to Africa to become a colonial merchant and made a small fortune by gunrunning. Arthur Rimbaud's (1854–1891) 'The Drunken Boat' (1871) uses the image of a boat lost at sea, or a child's toy, as a metaphor of spiritual quest, at the same time describing the voyage of one of Europe's trading ships in mingled tones of ecstasy and disgust.

As I was floating down unconcerned Rivers,
I no longer felt myself steered by the haulers;
gaudy Redskins had taken them for targets,
nailing them naked to coloured stakes.

I cared nothing for all my crews,
carrying Flemish wheat or English cottons.
When, along with my haulers, those uproars were done with,
the Rivers let me sail downstream where I pleased.

...

I have seen archipelagos of stars! and islands
whose delirious skies are open to sailors: –
Do you sleep, are you exiled in those bottomless nights,
Million golden birds, O Life Force of the future?

But, truly, I have wept too much! The Dawns are heartbreaking.
Every moon is atrocious and every sun bitter:
sharp love has swollen me up with heady langours.
O let my keel split! O let me sink to the bottom!

If there is one water in Europe I want, it is the black
cold pool where into the scented twilight
a child squatting full of sadness launches
a boat as fragile as a butterfly in May.

I can no more, bathed in your langours, O waves,
sail in the wake of the carriers of cottons,
nor undergo the pride of the flags and pennants,
nor pull past the horrible eyes of the hulks.³³

you man of good faith! Nothing at all. One moment, and nothing remains – except a lump of dirt, a cold, dead lump of dirt thrown out into black space, spinning round an extinguished sun. Neither thought, sound nor soul. Nothing.³⁴

Anti-colonial Protest in the Colonies

Protest from the colonies gained strength during the 19th century. Anti-colonial political movements sprang up. Bengal experienced a great spiritual and cultural renaissance in the late 19th century. The Indian National Congress, which would eventually recruit tens of millions of activists, was formed in 1885. José Rizal's (1861–1897) novel *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), a scathing indictment of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines, found a large readership. Rizal was executed by the colonial government of the Philippines. *Noli Me Tangere* was the precursor of many 'national novels', including Egyptian Naguib Mahfuz's (1911–) *Palace Walk* (1956) and Pramodya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* (1975).³⁵

The 20th century saw resistance to colonialism influenced by social science. ED Morel's (1873–1924) *Black Man's Burden* (1920) is an indignant response to Kipling's poem that foreshadows Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon in linking political economy with racism:

It is [the Africans] who carry the 'Black man's burden' ... What the partial occupation of his soil by the white man has failed to do; what the mapping out of European political 'spheres of influence' has failed to do; what the Maxim and the rifle, the slave gang, labour in the bowels of the earth and the lash, have failed to do; what imported measles, smallpox and syphilis have failed to do; whatever the overseas slave trade failed to do, the power of modern capitalistic exploitation, assisted by modern engines of destruction, may yet succeed in accomplishing.

For from the evils of the latter, scientifically applied and enforced, there is no escape for the African. Its destructive effects are not spasmodic: they are permanent. In its permanence resides its fatal consequences. It kills not the body merely, but the soul. It breaks the spirit. It attacks the African at every turn, from every point of vantage. It wrecks his polity, uproots him from the land, invades his family life, destroys his natural pursuits and occupations, claims his whole time, enslaves him in his own home ...³⁶

Non-violent Resistance

A widely influential contribution to moral debates about colonialism, and politics in general, was made by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948). Gandhi turned a marginal form of protest – non-violence – into a mainstream one, permanently affecting relationships between rulers and ruled around the world. He did this through a brilliant weaving that combined astute analysis of contemporary politics with elements from South Asian sacred texts, from Christianity, and from earlier traditions of political resistance.

An important influence on Gandhi was the American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). In 1846 Thoreau refused to pay a poll tax as a protest against slavery and was briefly gaoled. Later he wrote a defiant and lucid essay on civil disobedience (1849).³⁷ Thoreau advocated a stance of self-reliant refusal: neither support nor accept support from an immoral government. Harpinder Kaur writes that the essay was 'Gandhi's textbook for his civil disobedience campaign in India'.³⁸

Gandhi believed in 'turning the other cheek' as a path of spiritual redemption. At the same time he perceived that voluntary submission to the violence of authority could be used to undermine that authority if combined artfully with acts of defiance. He called his application of non-violent resistance *Satyagraha*, 'truth-power'. *Satyagraha* was pursuit of truth in practical political action.

The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law – to the strength of the spirit. I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For *Satyagraha* and its offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering.³⁹

Gandhi believed that non-violence was a self-purifying activity, a sacrifice to truth. He urged his followers to be prepared to risk their lives at all times for what is right, and to tolerate violence without retaliation or anger. While always being prepared to sacrifice his own possessions and life, a *satyagraha*, one who practices *Satyagraha*, must be prepared to risk his life to save the possessions and lives of others, even to protect government agents from fellow protesters. For him truth included acknowledging that humans ought to share a respectful consciousness of one another. The practice of non-violence thus revealed the political insight that the power of a government depends on the consent of the governed, and how coordinated mass resistance could render the ruler powerless.

Gandhi insisted on the importance of open dialogue with the enemy as an essential adjunct to political struggle.

Gandhi first experimented with these ideas as a leader of the Indian community in South Africa in the 1890s. His ideas evolved over time and shifted with the political context. In India, he led a large-scale civil disobedience campaign following a massacre by British troops of protesters in Amritsar in 1919. The campaign achieved little success, and Gandhi brought it to a halt when it became violent. In 1930, he defied the British tax on gathering salt by walking 320 kilometres to collect his own salt. Many of the thousands who followed him were beaten up by police, and subsequently tens of thousands were imprisoned for breaking the salt laws. The salt laws remained, but the British were humiliated and the cause of Indian independence had achieved an enormous moral victory.

Gandhi undertook many hunger strikes in prison. Others, notably the suffragettes who campaigned for women's right to vote, had pioneered this form of non-violent resistance, but Gandhi helped bring it to the world's attention. Techniques of civil disobedience had a profound affect on oppositional politics in the second half of the 20th century. Nelson Mandela (1918 –) in South Africa, Martin Luther King (1929–1968) in the United States, Václav Havel (1936 –) in the Czech Republic, and Aung San Suu Kyi (1945 –) in Burma are well-known figures who display his influence.

In some situations – in war, for example, or in confrontation with a ruthless or fearful state – non-violent resistance is of no use, its most likely outcome for the determined protester being torture or death. It is most effective against rulers who are in some doubt about their right to rule, but at the same time do not live in terror of what will happen to them if they cease to do so. In other words, it is best used when circumstances have weakened authority, but not by too much.

Gandhi was against industrial technology, believing machinery eroded human morality and spirituality. He celebrated rustic simplicity, and photographs of him spinning cotton in pre-industrial style have become iconic. However, although he idealised the Indian past, his antipathy to modernity was not a simple opposition to the West, and he was strongly opposed to the traditional Indian caste system. He advocated home-based production and community cooperation along lines also advocated by some European anarchists. One of Gandhi's biographers, David Hardiman, calls this an 'alternative modernity'.⁴⁰

After Decolonisation

Since decolonisation, evaluation of colonialism has begun to merge with discussion of political power and violence in general. In recent decades it has also shifted from abstract investigations of ethical principles to specific analysis of acts and events. There has also been a shift away from narrowly political questions to issues of health, education, information and quality of life. In particular, 'body horror' – extreme malnutrition, torture, traumatic destruction, death and genocide – has become a topic of attention.⁴¹ Why do people inflict body horror on one another? What are its effects on victims and witnesses? How is it memorialised or forgotten?⁴²

A vast array of international apparatuses is concerned with such issues today. There are the United Nations agencies (e.g. UNESCO), international charity organisations (e.g. Oxfam and World Vision), health and medical emergency organisations (e.g. the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and Médecins sans Frontières), War Crimes tribunals, the International Labor Organization (ILO), human rights organisations like Amnesty International, and so on. Most significantly, financial aid is given by wealthy states to poor ones, usually tied to specific projects or policies. Like many well-meant 19th century Western interventions in the colonies, a moral ambiguity haunts these institutions. To be effective they must depend on the very system of power that perpetuates global inequality and exploitation, the worst effects of which they are seeking to ameliorate.

Debates about the nature of colonialism, and its legacy, will continue. In many cases the matters involved go to the heart of personal or ethnic identity, as weeping wounds or tokens of honour or shame. They raise deep and puzzling questions – about violence, power and authority, historical causation, the relation between motive, intention and effect, and the difficulties of intercultural contact. Efforts to resolve them will remain ambiguous and controversial.