

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: being at home with the Empire

Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose

What was the impact of the British Empire on the metropole between the late eighteenth century and the present?¹ This is the question addressed in a variety of ways and across different timescales in this volume. Such a question has a history that perhaps needs remembering: for it is both a repetition and a reconfiguration of a long preoccupation with the inter-connections between the metropolitan and the imperial. Was it possible to be 'at home' with an empire and with the effects of imperial power or was there something dangerous and damaging about such an entanglement? Did empires enrich but also corrupt? Were the expenses they brought worth the burdens and responsibilities? These questions were the subject of debate at least from the mid-eighteenth century and have been formulated and answered variously according both to the historical moment and the political predilections of those involved.

The connections between British state formation and empire building stretch back a long way, certainly into the pre-modern period.² It was the shift from an empire of commerce and the seas to an empire of conquest, however, that brought the political and economic effects of empire home in new ways. While the American War of Independence raised one set of issues about native sons making claims for autonomy, conquests in Asia raised others about the costs of territorial expansion, economic, political and moral.³ From the 1770s questions about the effects of empire on the metropole were never entirely off the political agenda, whether in terms of the worries about the impact of forms of Oriental despotism or the practice of slavery abroad on the liberties of Englishmen at home, debates as to the status of British subjects and British law across the empire, or

¹ Thanks to the contributors to this book for comments on this piece and to Bill Schwarz.

² For a discussion of some of the relevant material see David Armitage, 'Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?' *American Historical Review*, 104 (2) (1999), 427–55. See also his *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).

³ See, for example, Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2000); P. J. Marshall, 'Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 15 (2) (1987), 105–22.

hopes for a 'Greater Britain' that could spread across the world.⁴ During the period that we cover in this book there were moments of profound controversy about the empire – about what form it should take, and what should be its purpose. How Britain's imperial stance was envisaged was always contested and changed over time. But there were few if any voices arguing the Empire should be disbanded, and that Great Britain should no longer remain an imperial nation. Important issues were seen as at stake in the metropolitan/colonial relation and both supporters and critics of empire recognised that Britain's imperial power could have consequences for her native population, never mind the effects on populations farther afield.

The chapters in this book are not solely concerned, however, with the political or ideological debates over empire, critical as these were. Rather, we argue that empire was, in important ways, taken-for-granted as a natural aspect of Britain's place in the world and its history. No one doubted that Great Britain was an imperial nation state, part of an empire. J. R. Seeley famously argued that the British 'seemed to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind'.⁵ In commenting on this Roger Louis notes that 'he was drawing attention to the unconscious acceptance by the English public of the burdens of Empire, particularly in India'.⁶ It is this 'unconscious acceptance', whether of the burdens or benefits of empire, that we are in part exploring in this volume. The Empire's influence on the metropole was undoubtedly uneven. There were times when it was simply there, not a subject of popular critical consciousness. At other times it was highly visible, and there was widespread awareness of matters imperial on the part of the public as well as those who were charged with governing it. The majority of Britons most of the time were probably neither 'gung-ho' nor avid anti-imperialists, yet their everyday lives were infused with an imperial presence. Furthermore, important political and cultural processes and institutions were shaped by and within the context of empire. Our question, therefore, is not whether empire had an impact at home, fatal

⁴ See, for example, on Hastings, Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); on slavery, David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, 1975); on Morant Bay, Bernard Semmel, *The Governor Eyre Controversy* (London, 1962); on the tradition of radical critics of imperialism, Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19 (1) (1991), 1–23.

⁵ J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London, 1883), 10.

⁶ Wm. Roger Louis, 'Introduction', in Robin W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. V: *Historiography* (Oxford, 1999), 9.

or not.⁷ Rather, we ask how was empire lived across everyday practices – in church and chapel, by readers at home, as embodied in sexualities or forms of citizenship, as narrated in histories? To what extent did people think imperially, not in the sense of political affiliations for or against empire, but simply assuming it was there, part of the given world that had made them who they were?

This question is possible precisely because we are no longer ‘at home’ with an empire. It is both the same and different from the questions which preoccupied both supporters and critics of empire prior to decolonisation. It is a reconfiguration – a new way of seeing associated with a different historical moment. Empire was always there between the eighteenth century and the 1940s, albeit in different forms with varied imperatives according to the particular conjuncture, different questions provoking debate about the metropolitan/colonial relation. But the questions were all thought within an imperial paradigm. After decolonisation that frame had gone and the end of empire has brought with it new concerns and pre-occupations. In the 1940s and 1950s the Empire was decomposing, despite attempts by Churchill and others to hold on. Capturing public imagination at the time were the sectarian and inter-tribal conflicts taking place as independence was granted to former dependencies. Decolonisation was figured by the government and in much of the press as relatively conflict-free. Unlike the French who were fighting an all-out war to keep Algeria French, the British public generally understood that Britain was making a graceful exit, defending the Commonwealth and keeping the interests of colonised peoples at the forefront of their policies. Yet we now know and to a certain extent it was known then but not always consciously registered, that the leave-taking from Malaya and Kenya was anything but peaceful. In the case of Kenya, as has recently been demonstrated, the Mau Mau rebellion was portrayed in the press as an outbreak of utter savagery on the part of the Kikuyu in the name of nationalism gone wild. It was repressed with horrific brutality by the Colonial administration with the full knowledge and complicity of the British government.⁸ Those suspected of active participation with Mau Mau were tried and hanged at the very same time that Parliament was debating the abolition of capital punishment by hanging in the metropole.⁹ Many thousands more, including women and

⁷ The reference is to P.J. Marshall, ‘No Fatal Impact? The Elusive History of Imperial Britain’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 March 1993, 8–10.

⁸ Caroline Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London, 2005).

⁹ David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York, 2005), 7.

children, were herded into detention camps where they suffered starvation, disease and death. Caroline Elkins has illuminated this terrible story, indicating that the facts about these camps were debated in parliament and received some coverage in the press. Yet, there was no public outcry. The reason for this, she argues, was that Mau Mau had been portrayed in the press and by the government as African savagery at its most primitive and violent.¹⁰ Some Afro-Caribbean migrants, arriving in England during this period, discovered that they were perceived through a Kenyan lens: 'Are you a Mau Mau lady?' Beryl Gilroy was asked.¹¹

The Empire had gone and was best forgotten. The West Indians and South Asians who were arriving were thought of as postwar migrants rather than imperial subjects with a long history connecting them to Britain. In the aftermath of the Second World War it was the great struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union that dominated global politics. Britain, no longer an imperial power, was drawn into the Cold War, a loyal supporter and friend of the USA, part of the West now united against communism. Modernisation would solve the problems of underdevelopment now that colonies were a thing of the past. It was not until the 1980s that questions about 'after empire' became high on the political agenda. This was associated with both the emergence of new forms of globalisation and, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the now substantial second-generation communities of black Britons in the inner cities making claims for equality and recognition. At the same time acknowledgement of the failure of new nations established after decolonisation brought with it a critique both of the limits of nationalism, and the recognition that while the political forms of empire had been dismantled, neo-colonialism and colonial ways of thinking were alive and well. This was the reconfiguration that made possible the emergence of a postcolonial critique from the 1980s – lifting the veil of amnesia about empires and making it imperative to recognise the persistence of their legacies. As Derek Gregory has put it, postcolonialism's critique disrupted the 'unilinear and progressive trajectory of episodic histories that dispatch the past to the archive rather than the repertoire'.¹² The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War meant that the United States now emerged as *the* superpower and questions of empire began to arise anew, alongside reconfigured languages of civilisation and barbarism. The

¹⁰ Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, 307–9.

¹¹ Beryl Gilroy, *Black Teacher* (London, 1976), 121, cited in Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939–1965* (Oxford, 2005), 123.

¹² Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Oxford, 2004), 265.

dam that had earlier been erected against the memory of the British Empire broke down and in recent years books, television and radio programmes have poured out exploring that legacy in innumerable different ways. In this moment after one kind of empire (the British), and contemplating another (that of the United States), it has become not only possible but necessary to rethink the imperial relation in the light of the present, no longer inside but outside an imperial although postcolonial paradigm.

We are all too well aware of the dangers of focusing yet again on the British, to the neglect of the lives of colonial peoples across the Empire. Yet our object here is the metropole and the ways in which it was constituted in part by the Empire. Thus our focus in this book is on the period when the Empire existed and was a presence in metropolitan life: not on the equally important topic of the effects of empire after decolonisation. It is British history which is our object of study. Imperial historians have always thought in a variety of ways about the metropole, the seat of government and power, but British historians, those concerned with the national and the domestic, have seriously neglected the place of empire on that history. British history, we are convinced, has to be transnational, recognising the ways in which our history has been one of connections across the globe, albeit in the context of unequal relations of power. Historians of Britain need to open up national history and imperial history, challenging that binary and critically scrutinising the ways in which it has functioned as a way of normalising power relations and erasing our dependence on and exploitation of others. In exploring the ways in which the British were 'at home' with their empire, we aim to destabilise those relations and explore the dangerous parameters of white British culture.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

It is important that we define the terms that we are using here. This is no easy task for as any number of scholars have suggested, the central terms of 'empire' and 'imperialism', 'colony' and 'colonialism', 'race and racism' are slippery, contested, and their historical referents have changed over time. This is not the place to review and assess all of the different uses of these terms on offer. Instead, we will draw upon the work of other scholars in clarifying what we mean when we use these terms.

Empire is a large, diverse, geographically dispersed and expansionist political entity. A central feature of this unit is that it 'reproduces

differentiation and inequality among people it incorporates'.¹³ Thus, at its heart, empire is about power, and is 'usually created by conquest, and divided between a dominant centre and subordinate, sometimes far distant peripheries'.¹⁴ In challenging the traditional focus on the centre/periphery relation scholars have recently emphasised the importance of connections across empires, the webs and networks operated between colonies, and the significance of centres of power outside the metropole, such as Calcutta or Melbourne. Thus, 'webs of trade, knowledge, migration, military power and political intervention that allowed certain communities to assert their influence ... over other groups' are constitutive of empires.¹⁵ Empires also may be considered as 'networks' through which, in different sites within them, 'colonial discourses were made and remade rather than simply transferred or imposed'.¹⁶

Imperialism, then, is the process of empire building. It is a project that originates in the metropolis and leads to domination and control over the peoples and lands of the periphery.¹⁷ Ania Loomba helpfully suggests that colonialism is 'what happens in the colonies as a consequence of imperial domination'. Thus, she suggests that 'the imperial country is the "metropole" from which power flows, and the colony ... is the place which it penetrates and controls'.¹⁸ One might add that the penetration often has been extremely uneven and that resistance on the part of the colonised has been central to that unevenness. As Guha has aptly put it, '(I)nsurgency was ... the necessary antithesis of colonialism'.¹⁹

As Robinson and Gallagher argued long ago, imperialism can function without formal colonies, but the possession of colonies is essential to what is termed colonialism.²⁰ Colonies, themselves, differ enormously even within a particular empire such as the British Empire. The process of colonisation involves the takeover of a particular territory, appropriation of its resources and, in the case of the British Empire, the migration of people from the metropole outward to administer or to inhabit the

¹³ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 26.

¹⁴ Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002), 30.

¹⁵ Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2002); see also Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, 'Introduction', in Ballantyne and Burton (eds.), *Bodies, Empires and World History* (Durham, NC, 2005), 3.

¹⁶ Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001), 4.

¹⁷ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd edn (London, 2005), 12. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983), 2.

²⁰ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 6 (1) (1953), 1–15.

colony as settlers. Regardless, colonisation involves various forms of dispossession of those who lived on the lands prior to their being colonised.²¹ As Loomba has put it, colonisation meant ‘*un-forming* or *re-forming* the communities that existed there already’, often violently, and that would be the case whether or not people from the metropole went there to form their own permanent communities. Furthermore, colonial empires such as the British Empire were not omnipotent. They had to administer and assert control under constraints ‘intrinsic to the vastness and diversity of imperial spaces’ that inevitably aroused discontent among those who were subordinated in the process. At the same time imperial authority attempted to insist upon the idea that the Empire was a ‘legitimate polity in which all members had a stake’.²² One mode of exerting imperial power depended upon negotiating with existing colonial wielders of power, whether Indian *rajahs*, African ‘chiefs’, or mercantile or cultural elites, thus aligning the Empire with pre-existing social and cultural hierarchies. But this strategy coexisted both with attempts to offer all subjects of empire a form of belonging and with the persistent deployment of racial distinctions as a way of underscoring their superiority.²³

Although as James Donald and Ali Rattansi argue, people continue even today to act as if race was a fixed, objective category, most scholars recognise that not only is race not an essential, ‘natural’ category, but that the meanings and valence of race have changed historically.²⁴ Both during the heyday of the British Empire and its aftermath, race, in its many guises, ‘naturalises difference’ and reinscribes the always unstable distinction between coloniser and colonised. As a number of scholars have demonstrated, ideas about colonial difference became increasingly influential as they ‘intersected with, and helped to reformulate, British domestic discourses of class, ethnic and gender difference’.²⁵ Furthermore, the process by which the meanings of race became the focus and

²¹ Howe, *Empire*, 31. ²² Cooper, *Colonialism*, 28. ²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds.), *Race, Culture and Difference* (London, 1992), 1–4.

²⁵ Alan Lester, ‘Constructing Colonial Discourse’, in Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan (eds.), *Postcolonial Geographies* (London, 2002), 38. See also Ann L. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC, 1995), 104; Leonore Davidoff, ‘Class and Gender in Victorian England’, in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan and Judith R. Walkowitz (eds.), *Sex and Class in Women’s History* (London, 1983), 17–71; Joanna de Groot, ‘“Sex” and “Race”: The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century’, in Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Manchester, 2000), 37–60.

product of scientific inquiry was intimately bound up with empire.²⁶ And although there was contestation about the fixity of racial distinctions over the course of the period covered by this book, the grounding of difference in 'scientific' authority and the creation of 'the natural' was a political process involving both colony and metropole.²⁷ Historically, racism and the 'scientific' authority behind the notion of immutable, biologically based difference were co-constitutive. The idea of race, like that of essential differences between women and men, was to become so widespread as to be part of the 'taken-for-granted' world in which the people of the metropole lived their lives. As G. R. Searle has put it, 'the superiority of "whites" over "blacks" was widely treated as self-evident'.²⁸ This, however, does not mean that everyone was a racist just as everyone was not an imperialist. In Britain open conflict between people of different 'racial' or 'ethnic' origins was anything but constant, and, as Laura Tabili's essay in this volume suggests, racial violence and antagonism may well have been the product of particular moments of economic and imperial crises. She argues that outside of these particular conjunctures people of different ethnicities could and did live relatively harmoniously. Yet when conflict did erupt Britons adopted and adapted 'commonsensical' or 'taken-for-granted' views of 'natural' difference that had been and continued to be present in metropolitan culture.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The end of the European empires, the construction of new nation states and the major changes that took place in the world in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in shifts in patterns of historical writing, both in Britain and elsewhere. Here we are concerned with those effects in the writing of British history. Once Britain was no longer the centre of an empire and a great power, long-established assumptions about the writing of national history began to dissolve. A binary divide between nation and empire had been central to the nationalist historiography that emerged in mid-nineteenth-century Britain and survived for much of the twentieth. It was challenged by Seeley in the 1880s when he made the case for England's past, present and future being intimately associated with that of its

²⁶ Catherine Hall, 'Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire', in Hall (ed.), *Cultures*, 19.

²⁷ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (London, 1982); also see her 'Race, Gender, Science and Citizenship', in Hall (ed.), *Cultures*, 61–86.

²⁸ G. R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2004), 32.

empire.²⁹ His intervention, however, far from producing a more connected history, was significant in the development of imperial history as a separate subject. 'The disjuncture between national and extra-national histories has been particularly abrupt within the history of Britain', as David Armitage has argued.³⁰ English exceptionalism has indeed been difficult to dismantle built as it was on wilful amnesia, as Catherine Hall suggests in her essay on Macaulay in this volume. In the last twenty-plus years, however, efforts to reconnect the histories of Britain and empire and to challenge both the myopia of nationalist histories, and those forms of imperial history that do not engage with the metropole, have come from a variety of different sources and perspectives. Some are critical of the whole project of empire, others more revisionist in their focus, while some defend the imperial legacy.³¹ The various contributors to the debate over national history and its relation to the imperial have engaged with the different literatures to different degrees. What is clear is that this is a most productive area of historical research and one with which many of the protagonists feel passionately, albeit with very different investments and positions.

The 1960s and 70s saw a flowering of social history in Britain, but that work was for the most part resolutely domestic in its focus. By the 1980s increasingly sharp debates over questions of race and difference, riots in Britain's inner cities, and the Falklands War put issues of empire firmly back on the historical agenda. Racism, as Salman Rushdie argued at the time, was exposing Britain's postcolonial crisis.³² In this context some British historians who had been focused on the nation began to think more about empires. Work by anthropologists, themselves engaged in critical reflection on their discipline and its origins in colonial knowledge, provided important insights. Their refusal of the established lines of division between history and anthropology, one dealing with 'modern' peoples, the other with 'primitive' peoples, understood as without a history, destabilised conventional understandings. In 1982 Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf, both influenced by Marxism, published classic texts which

²⁹ Seeley, *The Expansion of England*.

³⁰ Armitage, 'A Greater Britain', 428; Peter Mandler, *History and National Life* (London, 2002).

³¹ Obviously there have been crucial international influences – especially postcolonial theory and Subaltern Studies. But here we are confining our attention to the efforts by historians to reconnect the domestic and the imperial. We are also not discussing all the ideas that have come from historical geographers, those working in literary and visual culture etc., as this would have been a major essay in its own right.

³² Salman Rushdie, 'The New Empire within Britain', in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981–1991* (London, 1991).

insisted on the importance of grasping the connections between peoples in different parts of the globe, the power relations between them, and the circuits of production, distribution and consumption within which they lived.³³ Mintz traced the history of sugar, from luxury to everyday commodity, in the process exploring the plantation as one of the formative sites of modern capitalist production. Sugar, he argued, was one of the first commodities to define modern English identities.³⁴ Wolf argued that it was no longer enough to write the history of the dominant or the subjugated. The world of humankind was a totality: it was the specialised social sciences which had insisted on separating out the parts. He aimed to 'delineate the general processes at work in mercantile and capitalist development, while at the same time following their effects on the micro-populations studied by the ethnohistorians and anthropologists'. In his account, 'both the people who claim history as their own and the people to whom history has been denied emerge as participants in the same historical trajectory'.³⁵

Another anthropologist, Bernard Cohn, again someone who was pre-occupied with the relationship between history and anthropology, has been a key figure in reshaping imperial history, bringing it into the same field as the history of early modern and modern South Asia.³⁶ One of his central preoccupations has been with the development of classificatory systems and the ways in which India was utilised as a laboratory for new technologies of rule. Long before the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted, Cohn 'was teaching his students in Chicago some of the fundamentals of the relation between knowledge and power' that shaped colonialism in South Asia and beyond.³⁷ His work, along with that of Thomas Metcalf, who has emphasised the play of similarity and difference as central to British conceptions of India, has significantly shifted understandings of the Raj.³⁸ Since the East India Company was London based, its shareholders, proprietors and Directors

³³ Mintz and Wolf were both drawing on the radical-Marxist critique of empire, which also informed work going on in Britain. See, for example, Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism* (London, 1963); V. G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (London, 1969).

³⁴ Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, 1985). David Scott, 'Modernity that Predated the Modern: Sidney Mintz's Caribbean', *History Workshop Journal*, 58 (2004), 191–210.

³⁵ Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (London, 1982), 23.

³⁶ Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1990); *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, 1996).

³⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Foreword', in *The Bernard Cohn Omnibus* (Oxford, 2004), x–xi.

³⁸ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1994).

interested in enjoying an income at home, the history of the Company has required a direct engagement with domestic issues. This work has informed a new generation of British historians trying to understand the connected histories of Britain and its empire. Some, while challenging the metropolitan/colonial divide, have remained inside an imperial paradigm, assuming that empire is 'a legitimate political and economic form'.³⁹ P. J. Marshall, one of the most influential of British scholars of India, has insisted on seeing the connections between Britain and India while placing both in a larger imperial frame.⁴⁰ At the same time he has downplayed the centrality of colonial ideology to the emergence and expansion of a territorial empire, in part because of his interest in private trade and in the significance of Bengali merchant groups and cultural brokers.⁴¹ Following this trajectory Philip Lawson, for example, both in his history of the East India Company and his later work, brought together India and Britain. He argued that the Company was inextricably bound up with the development of a fiscal-military state in the eighteenth century and that 'the most striking and rewarding aspect of studying the East India Company's experience is that it confounds nationalist histories of one sort or another'.⁴²

From a different but connected perspective, one that has insisted on connection and collaboration, C. A. Bayly's *Imperial Meridian* marked the beginning of an attempt to map the complicated history of the British Empire from the late eighteenth century, considering the domestic in relation to the imperial.⁴³ His starting point was the transformations of the Islamic empires of Eurasia and the decline of Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman authority. It was this that paved the way for the expansion of British power, and an aggressive imperial strategy driven by the army, the military-fiscal state and the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth century. New forms of absolutism and a revived ruling class were critical to this 'Second Empire'. More recently, Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* has again insisted on the interconnected and global

³⁹ Dirks, *Scandal*, 329.

⁴⁰ P. J. Marshall, *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. II, part 2: *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India, 1740–1828* (Cambridge, 1987); *Trade and Conquest: Studies in the Rise of British Dominance in India* (Aldershot, 1993).

⁴¹ Thanks to Tony Ballantyne for advice on Marshall and Bayly.

⁴² Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London, 1993), 164; *A Taste for Empire and Glory: Studies in British Overseas Expansion, 1660–1800* (Aldershot, 1997).

⁴³ C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian* (London, 1989); 'The British and Indigenous Peoples, 1760–1860: Power, Perception and Identity', in Martin Daunt and Rick Halpern (eds.), *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (London, 1999), 19–41; *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Oxford, 2004).

processes associated with the West's rise to power in the nineteenth century, even though he minimises the significance of key axes of division such as race, class and gender to this process. A. G. Hopkins has also argued for a reconnection of the imperial and the domestic, again from the perspective of an interest in globalisation, and an insistence that globalisation has a complicated history that includes the epoch of the European empires.⁴⁴ Another historian of empire, Stephen Howe, was one of the first to raise the issues of decolonisation in relation to metropole and colony in his work on anti-colonialism and the British left. More recently, he has emerged as a strong critic of postcolonial work and a sceptic on questions of the impact of the Empire on metropolitan life.⁴⁵

The Manchester University Press 'Studies in Imperialism Series' has marked a sustained effort to turn away from the institutional and high political traditions of imperial history writing to a greater focus on the social and the cultural, both in their 'domestic' and imperial contexts. Edited by John MacKenzie and inaugurated in 1985 with his *Propaganda and Empire*, it has transformed our knowledge of many aspects of the Empire at home. Of the sixty volumes now published, at least half deal with aspects of Britain's imperial culture – from his own classic edited volume *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, to work on children's and juvenile literature, the army, music, representations of the Arctic, considerations of the end of empire, and the place of West Indian intellectuals in Britain.⁴⁶ This constitutes a body of work that has significantly shifted the parameters of knowledge about the interplay between the domestic and the imperial. In an evaluation of the debates over empire and metropolitan culture written for the *Oxford History of the British Empire* (a series that had almost nothing to say on the subject), MacKenzie discussed the arguments of those sceptics who see 'no impact' and concluded that 'Empire

⁴⁴ A. G. Hopkins, 'Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History', *Past and Present*, 164 (1999), 198–243; (ed.) *Globalization in World History* (London, 2002).

⁴⁵ Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918–1964* (Oxford, 1993); *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford, 2000); 'Internal Decolonisation? British Politics since Thatcher as Postcolonial Trauma', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14 (2003), 286–304.

⁴⁶ These include John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* (1984); John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (1986); Jeffrey Richards (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (1989); Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism Through Children's Books* (1996); Rob David, *The Arctic in the British Imagination, 1818–1914* (2000); Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953* (2001); Stuart Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (2001); Bill Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (2003); Heather Streets, *Martial Races and Masculinity in the British Army, 1857–1914* (2004).

constituted a vital aspect of national identity and race-consciousness, even if complicated by regional, rural, urban, and class contexts'.⁴⁷ Other historians of Britain have also been part of the turn to integrating the domestic with the imperial. Miles Taylor's body of work on nineteenth-century imperial ideas and their connections with other traditions of political thought, alongside his investigation of the impact of empire on 1848, stands out here.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, historians of Scotland, Ireland and Wales have been concerned to explore the relation between empire and the making of the United Kingdom. John MacKenzie raised these questions for Scotland, at a time when issues of Scottish national identity (and therefore separate and specific contributions to empire) had come to the fore in the context of devolution. Both Tom Devine and Michael Fry have adopted a somewhat celebratory note, and both suggest that access to empire was a very significant reason for Scotland to stay in the Union. The Scots, Devine argues, were particularly important in the Caribbean and he concludes that 'the new Scotland which was emerging in the later eighteenth century was grounded on the imperial project. The Scots were not only full partners in this grand design but were at the very cutting edge of British global expansion.'⁴⁹ The complex position of Ireland, both part of the UK and colonial, has been a subject of much debate among historians. Christine Kinealy argues in this volume that Ireland continued to be treated as a colony by successive British administrations after the Act of Union, despite its constitutional position within the United Kingdom. 'Ireland's rulers in the nineteenth century,' as David Fitzpatrick concludes, 'whether grim or benevolent, tended to regard the Irish as a separate and subject native population rather than an integral element of a united people.'⁵⁰ Furthermore, as many have noted, Ireland provided an important model for imperial government, as the debates over landownership and taxation in Ireland and India demonstrate. But as Keith Jeffery has suggested for Ireland, and Aled Jones and Bill Jones for

⁴⁷ John M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in Wm. Roger Louis (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1998–9), vol. III: *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (1999), 292.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Miles Taylor, 'Imperium et Libertas?'; 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England 1712–1929', *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), 93–128; 'The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire', *Past and Present*, 166 (2000), 146–80.

⁴⁹ John M. MacKenzie, 'Essay and Reflection: On Scotland and the Empire', *International History Review*, 15 (1993), 714–39; T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600–1815* (London, 2003), 360; Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (Edinburgh, 2001).

⁵⁰ David Fitzpatrick, 'Ireland and the Empire', in Porter (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century*, 495–521.

Wales, the Irish and the Welsh were often content to be British in pursuit of imperial lives across the Empire.⁵¹

Linda Colley has been in the forefront of arguing for a global context for British history. Her classic work on the centrality of France and of Protestantism to Britons' notions of a distinctive national identity was followed up with an important essay that linked Britishness to questions of empire. More recently her focus has been on captivity as a lens through which to consider what she defines as the fragility of empire and the vulnerability of 'the small island' at the heart of the imperial web.⁵² David Cannadine has also ventured into the debates over reconnecting the metropolitan and the colonial. His *Ornamentalism*, conceived as a popular intervention in the current debates over empire, sees imperialism as a safety-valve for Britain's aristocracy.⁵³ Questions of race, he argues, have been given far too much emphasis to the exclusion of the class dynamics of empire, a position which has earned the book much deserved criticism. As many commentators have noted, Cannadine's focus on the role of the elite in empire building has masked issues of power, violence and exploitation.⁵⁴ Even more controversially, Niall Ferguson's recent work provides an apology for empire, with an ideologically driven account that refuses the complexities of imperial histories.⁵⁵

Feminist historians of Britain, alongside those working in the fields of literary and visual representation, have also been in the forefront of exploring the imperial legacy. This scholarship is often more interested in interdisciplinary approaches than other historians would countenance. In the past fifteen years a large body of research, much of it influenced by postcolonial as well as feminist theory, has challenged the domestic/imperial divide from an explicitly theoretical and anti-colonial position and has established the salience of empire from the beginnings of modernity. Fanon has been a critical influence here, with his insistence on the

⁵¹ Keith Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996); Aled Jones and Bill Jones, 'The Welsh World and the British Empire, c. 1851–1939', in Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (eds.), *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London, 2003), 57–81.

⁵² Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992); 'Britishness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (4) (1992), 309–29; *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London, 2002). For a thought-provoking critical review of *Captives* see Miles Ogborn, 'Gotcha!', *History Workshop Journal*, 56 (2003), 231–8.

⁵³ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London, 2001).

⁵⁴ For a number of incisive critical evaluations see the special issue of *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 3 (1) (2002), 'From Orientalism to Ornamentalism: Empire and Difference in History'.

⁵⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2002).

racialised systems of imperial rule and his recognition of the ways in which 'Europe' was created by colonialism.⁵⁶ Thanks to this recent scholarship we now know a great deal about the ways in which representations of the imperial world and its peoples circulated in the metropole, about the place of written and visual texts in producing and disseminating racial thinking, about the significance of museums and exhibitions in representing peoples of the empire to the metropolitan public, and about the place of empire in the construction of English/British identity. We also know some of the ways in which the management of colonial sexuality was central to British rule at the intersection of national and imperial interests, about how debates over key political questions, such as suffrage, intersected with empire, about the impact of the two world wars on understandings of nation, race and colonialism, about debates over the category of British subject and the issue of nationality, and about the presence of colonised subjects in the metropole.⁵⁷ Work on the legacy of empire in the period after decolonisation has also been critical to challenging the idea that since the Empire was disbanded without significant debate at home, this provides evidence for the notion that the British were not really affected by it. Bill Schwarz's work on the memories of empire alongside Wendy Webster's analyses of popular culture have effectively disrupted any claim that the end of empire was unremarked in metropolitan culture and politics.⁵⁸

An initiative from a group of historians working on the dominions has resulted in an effort to place the 'British World' back at the centre of concerns. This was the world first described by Dilke in his *Greater*

⁵⁶ Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London, 1967).

⁵⁷ Because of space we can cite only a small portion of this literature, see, e.g. Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, 1998); Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in World War II Britain* (Oxford, 2003); esp. chs. 3 and 7; Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2003); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003); Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000); Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall and Philippa Levine (eds.), *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London, 2000); Laura Tabili, 'We Ask for British Justice': *Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, 1994); Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford, 1999); Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850–1900* (London, 2000); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1994).

⁵⁸ Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire* (Oxford, forthcoming); Webster, *Englishness and Empire; Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945–64* (London, 1998); Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire*.

Britain and taken up by Seeley in his *Expansion of England* – the world created by British migration and settlement.⁵⁹ In 1974 Pocock, thinking from a New Zealand perspective, raised questions about the possibilities of a new form of British, not English, history. He was troubled by the new enthusiasm for Europe and the forgetting of empire and Commonwealth. British history, he argued, needed to be reinvested with meaning; a remapping of historical consciousness was required which would result in more plural and multicultural accounts. The new history should be one of contact and penetration, encompassing the three kingdoms, and the settlements in east and west. It needed to be ‘post Commonwealth, extra European and highly internationalist’.⁶⁰ One effect of this can be seen in the turn to ‘four nations’ histories. Another long-term effect of this may have borne fruit in the sequence of ‘British World’ conferences and publications. Some of the energy for these has come from those working in the white colonies of settlement and struggling with the silence on empire in societies where the effort to create a national history has resulted in a repudiation of the significance of the imperial past.⁶¹

Most recently Bernard Porter has raised the issue of ‘how much’ the Empire mattered. The British generally, argues this king of the sceptics, were not much interested in or affected by empire. A particular kind of imperialism – blatant, ‘dominating imperialism’ – did not saturate British society and the ‘everyday life’ of Britain that included consuming the products of empire was not an effect or manifestation of ‘dominating imperialism’.⁶² It was sugar, for example, that rotted the teeth of the people, not the Empire. Nor did other forms of Britain’s involvement in the wider world, such as travel, necessarily have imperial undertones. Porter is concerned with how much, or how significantly (in comparison to other factors such as class) empire (specifically ‘dominating imperialism’) affected the British people and how imperialist it made them. He is also concerned with whether empire or imperialism can be seen as the

⁵⁹ Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries During 1866–7* (London, 1869); Seeley, *The Expansion of England*.

⁶⁰ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘British History: A Plea for a New Subject’, *New Zealand Historical Journal*, 8 (1974), repr. in *The Journal of Modern History*, 47 (4) (1975), 601–21; ‘The Limits and Divisions of British History: In Search of the Unknown Subject’, *American Historical Review*, 87 (2) (1982), 311–14.

⁶¹ Roundtable on ‘Was there a British World?’, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 6 December 2005. Bridge and Fedorowich (eds.), *The British World*; Philip Buckner and Doug Francis (eds.), *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005); Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne, forthcoming).

⁶² Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (Oxford, 2004), 313.

origin of particular aspects of British life, including the development of racism. Andrew Thompson's recent assessment of the impact of imperialism on Britain is closer to the position that we take in this book.⁶³ Like MacKenzie he argues that there was no single or monolithic imperial culture in Britain. While the effects of empire may at times have been 'relatively discrete', he suggests, 'in certain areas of British public life they were so closely entwined with other influences and impulses as to become thoroughly internalised'.⁶⁴

From a very different perspective historians of Britain's population of colour have worked to recover 'hidden histories' and dismantle the metropolitan/colonial binary by documenting the presence of black and South Asian peoples in Britain over a long period and exploring the complex diasporan histories of different colonised peoples. Since the 1980s there have been sustained efforts to open up these histories, demonstrating the diverse ways in which subjects of empire have challenged racial hierarchies and claimed a place as citizens both in the metropole and on multiple imperial sites.⁶⁵ This work has helped to undo the erasures that have been part of the practice of historical writing in Britain, for, as Trouillot argues, 'the production of traces is always also the creation of silences' and history is always 'the fruit of power'.⁶⁶

Many of the historians working in these varied initiatives share the impulse to reconnect the histories of Britain and empire. Yet the developments in this field have been hotly contested and a site for 'history wars' over interpretation. In part this has to do with politics and the new salience of debates over race and empires. It also has to do with the demarcations of the discipline and the anxieties evoked by new developments that threaten long-established boundaries. While imperial historians are concerned by the claims of some historians of Britain to move on to their terrain, plenty of British historians are alarmed by the decline of national history and the increased demand, particularly in the United States, for transnational skills. At the same time the interdisciplinary nature of the new scholarship, fed as it is by literary, visual, anthropological and geographical concerns, has

⁶³ Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow, 2005).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5, 6.

⁶⁵ Classic texts include, Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984); Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London, 2002); for a recent example see Jan Marsh (ed.), *Black Victorians: Black People in British Art 1800–1900* (Manchester and Birmingham, 2005).

⁶⁶ Michel-Rolphe Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 29, xix.

raised other issues. Interdisciplinarity, as we have learned, means more work, the hard discipline of engaging with different bodies of scholarship.

THIS BOOK'S PERSPECTIVE

The authors writing in this volume have come to questions of metropole and colony variously influenced by feminism, Marxism and post-colonialism. The inspiration to engage with imperial history came from feminist politics and the politics of race both in the UK and the USA from the 1980s. Questions of class had been made more complex by gender. The category of gender was disrupted in its turn as issues of race and ethnicity became increasingly pressing in British society. Once the empire had 'come home', the geographical gap between metropole and colony destabilised by the arrival of large numbers of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian men and women, questions about the legacy of imperial power in the heartlands of London, Birmingham or Glasgow became more pressing. What was the place of race in British society and culture? What was the relation between feminism and imperialism? Were constructions of masculinity in Britain and in other parts of the Empire connected and if so, how? These were some of the first questions to occupy feminist historians who began to explore the relation between an imperial past and a postcolonial present.⁶⁷

Transnational feminism, with its focus on the construction of racialised and gendered subjects, was critical to this work, but so was Fanon, as we suggested earlier, Said (for his insistence that the colonial was at the heart of European culture), Foucault (for new understandings of the nature of power and the technologies of governmentality) and many others.⁶⁸ At the centre of the common project of colonial critique was a focus on the politics of difference – how difference, meaning inequality (as it did in colonial societies), was produced and reproduced, maintained and contested. What was the imperial 'rule of difference' at any given historical

⁶⁷ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, 1994); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995); Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992); Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London, 1992); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992).

⁶⁸ M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (eds.), *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York, 1997); for two accounts of some of the influences at work see Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire*, esp. 12–16; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects* (Cambridge, 2002), 8–20.

moment? And while empires certainly did not create difference they thrived on the politics of differences – not just those associated with race and ethnicity but also those of gender and of class, of sexuality and religion.⁶⁹

Grammars of difference and hierarchies of inequality existed of course long before the late eighteenth century. Property ownership, gender and forms of religious belonging marked subjects centuries before the languages of class or of separate spheres were codified. Cultural essentialism in early modern England, Ania Loomba argues, did the ideological work that race later did. Associations between Islam and blackness were already established in medieval and early modern writing and outsiders were never safely outside, as the figures of Othello and Shylock so evocatively demonstrate.⁷⁰ By the eighteenth century colonial encounters had produced forms of racial thinking as a body of scholarship has now shown – and Englishmen and women understood themselves in relation to multiple others of the nation, empire and beyond.⁷¹

But a new historical conjuncture at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century brought with it reworked conceptions of race, nation and empire – the starting point for our volume. Revolutionary thinking and religious revival, the defeat of Napoleon's empire, the end of one British Empire and the expansion of another, engendered new forms of colonial rule.⁷² Systems of classification became more central, partly associated with new technologies of measurement such as the census. As Nancy Stepan argued long ago, once slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834 new ways had to be found of explaining inequalities between peoples – the language of race was a key instrument in this process.⁷³ Increased classification may also be associated, as Frederick Cooper has suggested, with the shift from ascribed status associated with land to a new polity associated with rights, though such an argument might work better for France than for England.⁷⁴ After 1815 British colonial officials and their collaborators explicitly constituted

⁶⁹ For Partha Chatterjee's notion of 'the rule of colonial difference' see *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), 10.

⁷⁰ Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford, 2002).

⁷¹ E.g. Kathleen Wilson, 'Citizenship, Empire and Modernity in the English Provinces, c. 1720–90', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 29 (1) (1995), 69–96; *The Island Race*; Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660–1840* (Cambridge, 2004); Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth Century English Narratives* (Baltimore, 1995); Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000); Colley, *Captives*.

⁷² Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*. ⁷³ Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*.

⁷⁴ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 28.

populations into ethnically specific, gendered subjects, marked peoples as different and ruled them according to those differences. They utilised categories and classifications that legitimated inequalities of power. The marking of difference across the Empire was never only about race, and never only the binary of coloniser/colonised. Rather there were multiple axes of power. But race was critical to imperial power because empires were constituted of diverse peoples, living in varied sites, some of whom ruled others. 'Race is a foundational colonial sorting technique', as Ann Stoler argues, and 'like all classificatory techniques, it is based on establishing categories and scales of comparison'.⁷⁵ These could work on the register either of biology or of culture. Such differences never could be fixed for they were neither natural nor self-evident. And the British Empire with its complex mapping of difference across European, South Asian, African, Caribbean, Antipodean and North American territories never produced a set of stable dichotomies of coloniser and colonised, citizens and subjects: rather these were always matters of contestation. Since empires depended on some notion of common belonging, there was a constant process of drawing and redrawing lines of inclusion and exclusion. The British Empire was held together in part by the promise of inclusion, all British subjects were the same, while at the very same time being fractured by many exclusions. These included the practices of citizenship and sexuality as the chapters by Philippa Levine and Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose show in this volume.

The classification of subjects across the Empire was also a process of positioning in a social space demarcated by notions of the metropolitan and the colonial – here/there, then/now, home/away. Dissolving these idealised dualities and insisting on considering metropole and colony within the same analytic frame has been a concern for many historians in the past decades as we have seen. The chapters in this book dissolve the metropole/colony binary, a fiction that was at the very heart of the taken-for-granted view of Britain as an imperial power by showing how, in different ways that varied over time, the British metropole was an *imperial* 'home'. As Alan Lester has argued, 'colony and metropole, periphery and centre, were and are, co-constituted'.⁷⁶ We maintain that while 'home' – metropolitan Britain – was a part of the Empire, it was imagined by those within the metropole as a place set apart from it in spite of Britain's role

⁷⁵ Ann L. Stoler, 'Haunted by Empire: Domains of the Intimate and the Practices of Comparison', in Stoler (ed.), *Haunted by Empire* (Durham, NC, forthcoming).

⁷⁶ Lester, 'Constructing Colonial Discourse', 29.

within it. This imagined sense of impervious boundaries allowed for and was promulgated by a historical sensibility portraying Britain as an 'island nation' mostly untroubled by its imperial project.

Historical specificity is also critical to our project in this book. The detail of how relations shifted in time and place, the varied chronologies – of political ideologies, of racial thought, of traditions of resistance and contestation, of patterns of production and consumption, of religious belief, of class and gender relations and family forms, of popular culture – all of these and many other variables need to be explored if we are to properly comprehend the place of empire in metropolitan life. The essays in this book focus on the nineteenth century, in part because this has been the period which has been most researched to date. Those that do consider the twentieth century rarely go beyond the 1930s, and only Philippa Levine and Cora Kaplan make connections with the postcolonial period. Fortunately work is now in progress on the twentieth century and in the next few years our grasp of the impact of empire both in the interwar period and in the second half of the century, when the Empire came home, is bound to increase.

As was so clear at that moment of 'coming home', empire linked the lives of people in the metropole to global circuits of production, distribution and exchange, to the exploitation and oppression of millions of other imperial subjects. National and local histories were imbricated in a world system fashioned by imperialism and colonialism. We need, as Mrinalini Sinha argues, 'a mode of analysis that is simultaneously global in its reach and conjunctural in its focus'.⁷⁷ At the same time, prior to decolonisation, 'being imperial' was simply a part of a whole culture, to be investigated not as separate from but as integral to peoples' lives. Britain's imperial project affected the everyday in ways that shaped what was 'taken-for-granted' and thus was not *necessarily* a matter of conscious awareness or deliberation. With the exception of those in some official or quasi-official roles, for most people, empire was just there – out there. It was ordinary.⁷⁸ We do not argue that empire was the sole influence on the constitution of 'Britishness', which was always an unstable form of national belonging or identity. Influences from the Continent and after the late eighteenth century from the United States, Russia, Turkey and Japan were felt at home in Great Britain. It is important, however, to

⁷⁷ Mrinalini Sinha, 'Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History', *Signs*, 25 (4) (2000), 1077–82.

⁷⁸ Gail Lewis, 'Racialising Culture is Ordinary', in Elizabeth B. Silva and Tony Bennett (eds.), *Contemporary Culture and Everyday Life* (Durham, 2004), 111–29.

keep in mind that during the period that we cover in this book, European empires were critical in a world-historical perspective and on occasion had a direct impact on the British metropole as Laura Tabili's essay in this volume emphasises.

Even when Britishness, itself, was rejected by people within Great Britain as a national identity, that very rejection could well indicate the insidious presence of imperial Britain in the lives of its inhabitants. For example, when Raymond Williams was asked if he recalled from his childhood if the Welsh thought of themselves as British, he replied, 'No, the term was not used much, except by the people one distrusted. "British" was hardly ever used without "Empire" following and for that nobody had any use at all, including the small farmer.'⁷⁹ While this might appear to indicate that empire had no influence in early twentieth-century Wales, Williams' statement suggests that it helped to shore up a Welsh national identity in contrast to a British/English one.

EMPIRE AND THE EVERYDAY

Empire was omnipresent in the everyday lives of 'ordinary people' – it was there as part of the mundane – of 'a familiar and pragmatic world which under normal circumstances, is taken for granted, neither questioned nor especially valued', to quote Patrick Wright.⁸⁰ Britain's imperial role and its presence within the metropole shaped peoples' identities as Britons and informed their practical, daily activities.⁸¹ It was a part of what Michael Billig has termed, 'banal nationalism'.⁸² Billig suggests that people are reminded in many little ways 'of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building.'⁸³ Racial thought was

⁷⁹ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London, 1979), 26. For a discussion of Williams' statement in connection with an idealised English/British 'home', see Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness* (New York, 1996), 28–9.

⁸⁰ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (London, 1985), 6. We thank Geoff Eley for reminding us of Wright's discussion of the nation and everyday life.

⁸¹ These ideas draw upon those of Pierre Bourdieu – and, to use his language, we are arguing that Britain's status as an imperial nation and the presence of the Empire within the metropole shaped what Bourdieu has called the *habitus* or set of more or less durable predispositions that lead individuals to act in particular ways. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1990); for a helpful introduction to Bourdieu's ideas see John B. Thompson's 'Introduction' to Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. Thompson (Cambridge, 1991).

⁸² Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995). ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 8.

also part of the everyday, intimately linked with though not contained by the imperial. The colour of skin, the shape of bones, the texture of hair as well as less visible markers of distinction – the supposed size of brain, capacity for reason, or form of sexuality – these were some of the ways that modern metropolitans differentiated between themselves and others. ‘Race yet lives’, as Thomas Holt puts it, ‘because it is part and parcel of the means of living.’⁸⁴ The story of how race was naturalised, made part of the ordinary, is both linked to and overflows from that of the Empire. But as a number of the chapters in this volume suggest, there are particular historical moments when those everyday, taken-for-granted ideas become questioned or consciously underlined. These include times of imperial crises such as the Indian Mutiny, the Morant Bay uprising and the Amritsar massacre, periods when fears became rampant that ‘hordes’ of ‘aliens’ were threatening the national fabric, moments of widespread political debate over fraught imperial issues such as Home Rule for Ireland or in wartime when the imperial nation and the Empire were threatened or were perceived to be under threat. As Paula Krebs noted, for example, the contradictions of imperialism were exposed to public view during the Boer War ‘through the publicity awarded by newspapers to the concentration camps’ that housed Boer women and children.⁸⁵ As a consequence, ideas such ‘as the right of the British to control Africa seem to have moved from the sphere of ideological hegemony into the openly negotiable realm of public opinion’.⁸⁶ The extraordinary is present within the everyday, but it is only at particular moments – instances of disruption or some intense experience – that it provokes conscious awareness and the possibility of critique.⁸⁷ Thus the everydayness of empire held within itself a potential for visibility and contestation that its ordinariness disguised.⁸⁸

It is this ‘everydayness’ or ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of empire in the British metropole that we are underlining by giving this volume the title, *At Home with the Empire*. Being *at home* has a number of different resonances. The word ‘home’ means a ‘domestic’ space that refers to both the ‘private’ domain of family whose members are related to one another

⁸⁴ Thomas C. Holt, ‘Race, Race-making and the Writing of History’, *American Historical Review*, 100 (1) (1995), 1–20.

⁸⁵ Paula Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge, 1999), 35.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London, 2002), 115. Highmore is drawing here on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth B. Silva and Tony Bennett, ‘Everyday Life in Contemporary Culture’, in Silva and Bennett (eds.), *Contemporary Culture and Everyday Life*, 5.

by virtue of kinship and the imperial metropole.⁸⁹ The term ‘domestic’ also has a number of different resonances. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, from 1545 it pertained to one’s own country or nation; internal, inland home; from 1611 its meaning included belonging to the home, house or household; household, home, family; and from 1660 it also came to mean indigenous, home-grown and home-made. In a very provocative discussion, Amy Kaplan writes, “‘Domestic’ and “‘foreign’” are . . . not neutral legal and spatial descriptions, but heavily weighted metaphors imbued with racialized and gendered associations of home and family, outsider and insider, subjects and citizens.”⁹⁰ She suggests that ‘domestic has a double meaning that links the space of the familial household to that of the nation, by imagining both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual borders of home’.⁹¹ The metaphorical connections between domestic, home and nation on the one hand, and their opposition to the Empire on the other, were especially evocative during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the Empire expanded and the ideology of domesticity in middle-class England held sway. Towards the end of the nineteenth century as the ideology of domesticity was threatened by the growth of feminism and as the imperial nation was perceived to be in danger of degeneration on the one hand, and competition from other imperial nation states on the other, and later by nationalist movements in the colonies, the emotional power of the connection between home, the domestic and the imperial metropole, if anything, was strengthened. These were places of safety and security, of family and emotional bonds.

It signifies the comfort of being taken into the bosom of one’s family as well as being utterly at ease with a subject or issue and being on familiar ground. As Guha has suggested, it is a world of ‘known limits’, and as such it is a space of ‘absolute familiarity’ outside of which is its opposite – the ‘unimaginable and uncomfortable’.⁹² The outside, in other words, is imagined as the world of difference. Home is built upon a ‘pattern of select inclusions and exclusions’.⁹³ This is a utopian vision as difference is also uncomfortably present within the familiar, familial home divided as it is by gender and age differences – differences that unsettle an imagined

⁸⁹ For a helpful discussion of this point see Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London, 2005), esp. ch. 4.

⁹⁰ Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹² Ranajit Guha, ‘Not at Home in Empire’, *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (3) (1997), 483.

⁹³ Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-century Fiction* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 3.

sense of absolute unity signified by the word 'home'. Just as the nineteenth-century distinction between the domestic or private sphere and the public sphere was an imagined one, so too is the boundary between 'home' and its 'outside' illusory. Indeed, the association between 'home' and comfort and ease or security and protection may be understood within the realm of fantasy. As such, it is always unstable and a space that must be defended. As Morley and Robins have put it, 'home'

is about sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness. To belong in this way is to protect exclusive, and therefore, excluding identities against those who are seen as aliens and foreigners. The 'Other' is always and continuously a threat to the security and integrity of those who share a common home.⁹⁴

Furthermore, to be 'at home' with the Empire is to imagine the imperial world under control by the metropole and a state of affairs that one can and does 'live with'. But that sense of being in control is persistently haunted by the consequences of the violence upon which that control is based.

Ironically, being 'at home' with the Empire, being comfortable with the idea of being imperial, being accustomed to its sometimes shadowy presence fostered and was dependent upon a geographical imagination that bifurcated the political and economic space of empire into a bounded 'home' which was physically and culturally separated from the colonised 'other'.⁹⁵ As Rosemary Marangoly George has put it, 'ultimately . . . distance in itself becomes difference'. As a home place, a place that was thoroughly familiar, it was imagined to be essentially impervious to the Empire of which it was a part. Home kept the 'other' peoples of the Empire at a distance, 'their' strange climates, fruits and vegetables and peoples of colour were living in places that were incommensurable. As for the temperate zones, there it was easier to imagine a home from home – but always marked by difference, for Australia had its sugar plantations and rainforests as well as its sheep, its Aboriginal peoples as well as its hardy settlers. And yet, the notion of 'home' was informed by tropes of material comfort associated with food, cleanliness, etc., themselves dependent upon imperial products.

The history of home was to be comprehended as one that was internally driven by special virtues that inhered in a homogeneous people

⁹⁴ David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity, Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London, 1995), 89.

⁹⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), 55. For further discussion see Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, 17.

as Catherine Hall's essay on Macaulay suggests. The imagined boundedness of the metropolitan 'home' was based on a common-sense geographical history of an island nation mostly untroubled by its imperial project. This imagined geography of separation was a crucial logic of difference that enabled the Empire to persist and then to dissolve, doing so in ways that inexorably shaped metropolitan life.

Henri Lefebvre has helpfully theorised the difference between the subjective and objective aspects of space. Subjectively social space is the environment of the group and of the individual within the group. It appears as 'the horizon at the centre of which they place themselves and in which they live. Objectively . . . social space is made up of a relatively dense fabric of networks and channels. This fabric is an integral part of the everyday.'⁹⁶ As Doreen Massey has argued, notions of a geographical place 'called home' often were popularly associated with a sense of belonging that depended on notions 'of recourse to a past, of a seamless coherence of character, of an apparently comforting bounded enclosure'.⁹⁷ Such views, she suggests, occur especially with nationalism, and, we would argue, are central to an imperial nationalism that must maintain an imaginary impervious boundary that distinguishes and distances metropole from colony; home from empire. 'Such understandings of the identity of places', Massey writes, 'require them to be enclosures, to have boundaries and – therefore or most importantly – to establish their identity through negative counterposition with the Other beyond the boundaries.'⁹⁸ Along with Massey we are arguing that what distinguishes Britain as a place, as a 'home place', 'does not derive from some internalised history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interaction with the "outside" . . . [I]n part it is the presence of the outside within which helps to construct the specificity of the local place.'⁹⁹

At the same time as Great Britain has been imagined to be a geographically bounded home comprised of a homogeneous people, the Empire was frequently and quite insistently understood to be 'a family affair'.¹⁰⁰ The metaphor of the imperial family was a useful one in a number of different ways. It could be used to suggest, as in the frequently deployed term 'kith and kin', that the settler colonies, the Dominions,

⁹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 2 vols. (London, 1991–2002), vol. II: *Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. John Moore (2002), 231.

⁹⁷ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, 1994), 168. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169–70. ¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Percy Hurd, *The Empire: A Family Affair* (London, 1924).

were *naturally* related to one another and to the 'mother country'. In his book published in 1924, Percy Hurd, a former Tory MP wrote:

Great Britain is the Family Hearth, the Homeland. Close round it stand the Dominions, the Five Free Nations of the Empire – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Newfoundland ... the Five ... owe allegiance to the same Sovereign; have common traditions with the people of Great Britain, a common Citizenship and common interests. All rests upon free consent and good will.¹⁰¹

So for these areas of the Empire, the family metaphor hinted at 'blood ties' and an allegiance based upon 'free consent and good will'. Hurd went on to say, 'A Dominion is a daughter in her mother's house and mistress in her own.' However, 'Crown Colonies are still under parental care.'¹⁰² And as benevolent parents, it was Great Britain's responsibility to train the people of these colonies 'to become self-dependent "when the time was right"'. As Elizabeth Buettner has put it, '[l]ove, trust, worship, reverence, gratitude: all were recurring terms for depicting coloniser/colonised interactions as at once harmonious and hierarchical'.¹⁰³ Thus familial language marked 'both kinship and a gap between individuals and groups with vastly unequal access to power'.¹⁰⁴ The trope of the family naturalises social hierarchies and helped to foster the domestication of Britain's imperial relations on the home front. In other words, the homely terms of family helped to make empire ordinary and a part of everyday life.

Gender difference was complexly involved in the construction of the familial trope of empire. Great Britain was portrayed as the 'mother country', and yet, as an imperial nation raising up its offspring to some future independence, the family metaphor speaks of a patriarchal paternalism. Symbolically, empire building and maintenance was a masculine task whereas the home-place was feminised. British women's roles in the colonies were envisioned as making new homes away from home. The 'mother country' was 'home' to her children who would be educated and helped towards self-dependence 'when the time was right' by imperial men in the colonies. Such metaphors used in various metropolitan discursive arenas also helped to naturalise and to make ordinary Britain's imperial relations.

Gender was relevant in other ways to making metropolitans at home with their empire. The chapters by Philippa Levine and Jane Rendall are

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 3. ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004), 262.

¹⁰⁴ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 19.

concerned with women and sexuality. Philippa Levine examines how and why empire was a crucial source of anxiety about and a site for the construction of female sexuality. Jane Rendall explores the place of empire in women's writings and how perceptions of gender relations in the Empire served as a 'rule of difference' distinguishing metropole from colony.¹⁰⁵

There were numerous other avenues through which empire became commonplace. As we have already suggested, John MacKenzie and his colleagues have demonstrated the infusion of matters imperial into the cultural life of the metropole. Other scholars have stressed the role of schooling, especially in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Importantly, from the 1880s as Stephen Heathorn has shown recently, young children first learned to read in primary school classrooms from readers featuring stories of imperial adventure, 'racial others' and images of their national home.¹⁰⁶ He argues that these texts were 'used to promote literacy among children still in the early stages of their formal schooling'.¹⁰⁷ Heathorn proposes that the 'boundaries of student subjectivity were circumscribed by the vocabulary and syntax of identity presented to them in the process of becoming reading literate ... Learning to read the alphabet and learning to read the nation, therefore, went hand-in-glove'.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, he maintains that imperialist ideas were 'an integral part of an evolving hegemonic nationalist ideology that

¹⁰⁵ The issue of masculinity is a theme in the chapter, below, by Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose, and in James Epstein's discussion, below, of the significance of imperialism to upper-class life. As there is a rich literature that explores how imperialism shaped masculinity at home and conceptions of masculine 'others' in the colonies we do not include a chapter specifically on men and masculinity. Because of space we can cite only a small portion of this literature, see, e.g. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999), esp. ch. 8; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994); Hall, *Civilising Subjects*; A. James Hammerton, 'Gender and Migration', in Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 156–80; Richards (ed.), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, esp. chapters by Richards and John Springhall; Robert H. MacDonald, 'Reproducing the Middle-Class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys' Magazines, 1892–1914', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989), 519–39; Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855–1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), esp. 123–52; John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society, 1883–1940* (London, 1977); J. A. Mangan (ed.), 'Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism (Manchester, 1988) and *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialisation and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1990); Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London, 1991); John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military* (Manchester, 1992).

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Heathorn, *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880–1914* (Toronto, 2000). On schooling see also, Valerie E. Chancellor, *History for their Masters: Opinion in the English History Textbook, 1900–1914* (Bath, 1970); J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge, 1981); J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (Harmondsworth, 1986); Alan Penn, *Targeting Schools: Drill, Militarism and Imperialism* (London, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Heathorn, *Home, Country, and Race*, 19. ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

was . . . a fundamental feature of the curriculum. Imperial-nationalism was a major constituent, in other words, of the parameters of the contemporary cultural hegemony.¹⁰⁹ Along with Heathorn we argue that the culture of everyday life was infused with imperial nationalism structured around logics of difference that operated in ‘*both* a conscious *and* unconscious manner’.¹¹⁰ As Bob Crampsey reflected on books, films and texts to which he was exposed in his years growing up in Glasgow in the 1930s, ‘(t)he Asian seamen we met on the Glasgow streets, shuffling through the winter weather in freezing, bewildered, miserable groups, were simply “the coolies”. There was nothing whatever consciously demeaning or pejorative in our use of this word for them, we just knew no other.’¹¹¹

Religion, consumption and literature were other routes through which empire became commonplace. Given the significance of religion to Victorian society, as Susan Thorne discusses in her essay in this volume, missionary activity brought the Empire home so that parishioners, even those who were not devout evangelicals, might become a part of the missionary endeavour through their routine religious lives. As Thorne puts it, ‘the foreign missionary movement constituted an institutional channel through which representations of colonised people and sometimes colonised people themselves were displayed to British audiences on a scale unrivalled by any other source emanating from the colonies’. Furthermore, people consumed the products of empire as well as the advertisements that portrayed the spaces and places over which the British flag was flown. As they shared in the fruits of empire, the exotic was domesticated and made ordinary as Joanna de Groot suggests in her essay. Imaginative literature, as Cora Kaplan argues, provided a space in which wishes relating to empire and its discontents could be expressed as heightened and highly condensed stories and figures, soldering together disparate elements in the national imaginary. Readers absorbed and identified with the charged poetics of empire so that the social fantasies embedded in fiction and poetry became woven into their own subjectivities and so into their everyday lives.

Thus far we have highlighted the ‘ordinariness’ of empire – how the imperial nation became lived and part of what was simply ‘taken-for-granted’ at home in Great Britain. Antoinette Burton’s essay in this volume, in contrast, shows how and in what sense empire was anything but background or ordinary. Instead, she focuses on nineteenth-century

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 211. ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 212. Emphasis in original.

¹¹¹ Bob Crampsey, *The Empire Exhibition of 1938: The Last Durbar* (Edinburgh, 1988), 18, 20.

imperial politics where empire was visibly in the foreground. Her essay highlights the yet untold or little examined political events and processes that a new focus on how empire affected metropolitan life reveals. Among other issues she takes note of the imperviousness of histories of left-liberal politics to matters imperial, and discusses the benefits of extending what has become a transnational study of social reform and welfare state development to include the colonies. Empire was not ordinary either to women who participated in both pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist movements, and through their activities brought imperial matters into the heart of the metropole as Clare Midgley discusses in her essay. Midgley suggests how an examination of women's imperial activism adds significant insight into the ways that gender shaped ideologies of class, and argues that many upper- and middle-class women were fully aware of how the domestic and imperial were intertwined. James Epstein's essay takes a less often travelled historical route to explore how empire unevenly inflected British class relations, meanings and identities. As other historians have suggested, imperial influence was arguably most visible and significant in fashioning elite power, but Epstein also reviews the complex ways that the anti-slavery movement affected class politics. He also suggests that perceptions of empire and class identities were mutually constitutive, although not in uniform ways, for working-class soldiers who served in the imperial army. Finally he explores how attitudes towards the poor were shaped by imperial concerns and suggests the possibility that the racial language of 'Anglo-Saxonism' may have penetrated metropolitan thinking in ways that cut across the class divide. Importantly, we argue, the 'taken-for-grantedness' of empire enables the mobilisation of imperial concerns in metropolitan debates about such 'domestic' issues as women's suffrage, as Keith McClelland and Sonya Rose explore in their essay.

CONCLUSION

The chapters in this book, then, explore the different ways that Britain's status as an imperial power became a part of the lived lives of Britons. And they trace some of the contributions of that imperial hegemony to significant historical processes. The importance of the Empire for the British 'at home' did not depend on whether or not Britons were consciously 'imperialist' or if they applauded or denounced imperialism. Empire mattered to British metropolitan life and history in both very ordinary and supremely significant ways: it was simply part of life. This

was always recognised, as we argue in this volume, and contemporary critics of empire, while frequently making powerful critiques of the operation of imperial power, rarely challenged empire itself. In returning to the question of the place of empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in this period after the end of the British Empire but when neo-colonialism and new forms of imperial power are all too evident in the world, we hope to direct attention to the damaging effects and the treacherous silences that follow from being 'at home' with empire.