1   Introduction: writing the history of European colonialism

In the summer of 1701, around 1,300 representatives of almost forty nations gathered in Montreal to sign what became known as the Great Peace of Montreal. Only one of the nations present, the French who hosted the gathering, was European. The others were Native Americans, come to Montreal hoping to resolve a generation of conflict in the North American back country. Amid furious negotiations, great pomp and ceremony, and an outbreak of disease that killed one of the principal negotiators, these representatives concluded a peace treaty that marked an end to decades of armed conflict and brought together the French and the Indian nations of the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes regions.

Sitting astride one of the few entry points into the North American continent, the St. Lawrence River, the host city was the center of a trading network that linked the French who had founded the city some sixty years earlier with Indians further west. Bartering for furs with weapons, ammunition, other manufactured goods, and brandy, *voyageurs* from Montreal linked the markets of Montreal and Europe to the Native Americans of the interior. They were joined by missionaries who tried to convert the Indians to Catholicism, and by French authorities who concluded alliances with peoples in the Great Lakes region (the *pays d'en haut*) and beyond. These alliances recognized the French as a paternal provider and mediator, called Onontio by the Algonquians. While the French would not have accorded their allies the same sovereign status they gave themselves or other European nations, those Indian nations themselves were insistent on their independence from Onontio.

France desperately needed to be recognized as Onontio to support and defend the colony of New France. France's Indian allies were much better at fighting on the terrain of North America than were French soldiers, and they provided valuable military assistance in the French wars of the late seventeenth century with the English and their Iroquois allies. The conference at Montreal came about because at the end of the seventeenth century it proved possible to negotiate an end not only

1

to a conflict in Europe known as the War of the League of Augsburg, but also a series of conflicts in North America. With this prospect, the conference in Montreal attracted a wide range of participants. The governor-general of New France, Louis Hector de Callière, was there, as were Abenakis from Acadia and Algonquians from around the Great Lakes. Iroquoians from the area around Montreal, allies of France, were there as well. In the early summer canoes arrived from up the St. Lawrence River bearing chiefs and representatives of Native Americans from further to the north and west: Crees; Huron-Petuns; Timiskamings from the source of the Ottawa River; Miamis of the St. Joseph River; Missisaguas, Nipissings, Odawas, Ojibwas, Potawatomis, Sauks, and Winnebagos; and Illinois from the Mississippi valley. Leaders of the Iroquois Confederation, representing the Onondaga, Seneca, Oneida, and Cayuga from south of the St. Lawrence, were also there. Often enemies of the French, they had been brought to the bargaining table by the exhausting effects of decades of war.[1]

The French diplomats who negotiated the Great Peace of Montreal of 1701 viewed it as a major diplomatic achievement. The terms of the treaty increased French power in North America, giving them control of the fur trade in the west. It facilitated French entry into the interior of the North American continent, and made the French the arbiters of differences among the peoples of the Great Lakes region. Those peoples, the French hoped, would become an important reserve army for France in its conflict with England. With their support, New France, extending to the new colony of Louisiana on the lower Mississippi, would be a barrier to English penetration of the interior of the continent. The Iroquois who came to Montreal in 1701 were also vital to the French plan. The proponents within the Five Nations of a francophile policy that itself waxed and waned in influence, they had risen in power in the last decade of the seventeenth century as, with French help, warriors from the *pays d'en haut* dealt the Five Nations defeat after defeat. The Great Peace of Montreal brought security for the French by guaranteeing Iroquois neutrality in a war between the French and the English, yet kept the Five Nations strong enough to act as a buffer between the Indians of the interior and the English fur entrepôt at Albany and between New France and the English colonies in New England and New York.

But Callière and his fellow French officials were deceived. At virtually the same time as they were concluding the Peace in Montreal,

[1] The Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederation included the Mohawk, but they were not represented at Montreal.

anglophile Iroquois, another faction of the Five Nations, were in
Albany negotiating an agreement with the English. Just like the French
in Montreal, the New Yorkers who left this Albany conference were
convinced that the Iroquois were "intirely … fix'd … in their obedi-
ence to his Majesty." Yet the Iroquois in Albany neglected to mention
their commitment to the French to remain neutral in European wars.
Agreeing to a massive cession of land – from western Pennsylvania to
Detroit, the Chicago Portage and Michilimakinac – these Iroquois
"brightened" their long-standing agreements with the English, known
as the Covenant Chain, to gain English diplomatic and military protec-
tion against the French. In what some historians have called the Grand
Settlement of 1701, the Iroquois were able to achieve their own goals by
convincing both the French and the English of their support.[2]

I begin this account of European colonization with the Great Peace
of Montreal because the event brings together many aspects of the proc-
ess of colonization in the modern era. Certainly some colonial officials
thought they were involved in conquest, but Callière made no pretense
of subjugating in any other than symbolic form the indigenous peo-
ples of North America whose representatives were at Montreal. Rather,
as the representative of the Sun King in Versailles, he created a form
of partnership that brought those peoples into a diplomatic system
that was concerned with, among other things, limiting the power of
France's neighbor across the English Channel. He was also seeking to
ensure the primacy of French trade in the region, a move that would
benefit both the French state and its merchants and manufacturers.
The Great Peace therefore underscores the continuing importance of
European Great Power diplomatic and economic concerns in colonial
expansion, something we will see not only in the Americas but also in
Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. But as a consequence of the Great Peace
the French themselves took on a role in the diplomatic system of North
America. They committed themselves to provide the Algonquians and

[2] Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in
the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal:
McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Origins of Iroquois
Neutrality: The Grand Settlement of 1701," *Pennsylvania History* 24 (1957), 223–35;
Daniel K. Richter, *The Ordeal of the Longhouse* (Chapel Hill: University of North
Carolina Press, 1992), 211–12, and *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History
of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 156–57; Francis
Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest*
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), and, *The Ambiguous Iroquois
Empire: The Covenant Chain Confederation of Indian Tribes with English Colonies from its
Beginnings to the Lancaster Treaty of 1744* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984); Daniel K.
Richter and James H. Merrell (eds.), *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their
Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600–1800* (Syracuse University Press, 1987).

other native peoples with the European goods they needed to maintain and extend their own power and with military and diplomatic support against their enemies.

It also reminds us of the power and agency of indigenous peoples in colonization. Often these peoples made their presence known not by words that were recorded, archived, and now made available to us, but through their actions. Nonetheless, the diplomatic, economic, and political interests of the peoples that Europeans met in the course of their colonial ventures were of comparable significance to those of the Europeans. Callière was implementing a policy formulated at the court of Versailles by Louis XIV and his ministers. But in the St. Lawrence River valley, he had to reach agreement with Amerindians who lived throughout the northeastern part of North America, from the western edge of the Great Lakes, into the *pays d'en haut*, east to Acadia, and south into the Ohio valley and New York. That the Hurons, Algonquians, Iroquois, and others came to Montreal at all was the result of decisions, taken far from the view of Versailles, that it was in their interests to stop the conflicts that had marked that part of North America for decades, and those who came to Montreal calculated that the Peace would increase their own political influence. The events in both Montreal and Albany in 1701 also demonstrate the significance of cultural interactions between imperial powers and indigenous peoples. The two ceremonies drew not on the European ceremonial tradition, as elaborate as it was, but on an equally elaborate and significant collection of American ceremonies. Like many colonial relationships, they were, as Gilles Havard has noted, "a spectacular expression of this spirit of adaptation and of the intensity of cultural exchange in the diplomatic sphere."[3] Over time, these cultural exchanges would be one of the most important aspects of colonialism, moving from diplomatic negotiations to include the most intimate aspects of human lives, and mobilizing resources among both colonizers and colonized to manage those exchanges.

The diplomatic settlements at Montreal and Albany in 1701 therefore vividly display the entangled histories that made up the history of colonialism. These, we will see in the course of this book, took place at different sites, and the ways in which historians have written about colonialism reflect emphases on one or another aspect of the process. How to tell this story is not a new issue: a history of European empires has existed virtually since the first European conquest, as explorers, monarchs, and commentators sought to explain and justify the expansion

---

[3] Havard, *Great Peace*, 181.

of their power. Until recently, European imperialism and colonialism
were portrayed in military, naval, and political terms, processes in
which European states projected their power into other parts of the
world and Europeans settled in the newly acquired territories. The sub-
jects and actors in this narrative were overwhelmingly Europeans who
acted upon the rest of the world. If indigenous peoples appeared at all,
they were faceless and nameless participants in the process of colonial-
ism. Non-European states were, for the most part, non-existent. But
colonialism was also thought of as a phenomenon that occurred away
from Europe, with only an occasional intrusion on Europe itself.

It was, in many of these accounts, the courage and daring of European
explorers who "discovered" the Americas, Oceania, Asia, and Africa,
and planted the flags of European nations in those parts of the world.
European soldiers, sailors, and missionaries consolidated those hold-
ings and opened the way for the colonists who followed and established
the settlements that brought European civilization to the rest of the
world. European statesmen made the diplomatic agreements that estab-
lished the framework within which European colonialism could occur
and which acknowledged each successive addition to empire. European
capitalists developed the resources of the colonies. In these views, the
colonial narrative has often followed an arc of growing European con-
quest and control, with an early modern peak that ended with the revo-
lutions of the late eighteenth century. This was followed by the apogee
of the "New Imperialism" in the late nineteenth century, and then a
sudden decline and end after 1945. This approach marked historians'
writings about empire in the generation after World War II, even as
those empires were facing – and losing – battles with nationalist move-
ments in the colonies.[4]

Some studies have distilled the historical experience of imperialism
and colonialism into typologies. These emerged even as colonization
itself proceeded. In the late nineteenth century the French political
economist Paul Leroy Beaulieu distinguished between commercial,
agricultural, and plantation colonies. British imperialists at the same

---

[4] See, for example: J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1966);
D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires* (London: Macmillan, 1966), and *Economics and
Empire, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973); Henri Brunschwig,
French Colonialism 1871–1914 (New York: Praeger, 1966); Trevor Lloyd, *Empire: The
History of the British Empire* (London: Hambledon and London, 2001); Niall Ferguson,
Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power
(New York: Basic Books, 2003); Jean Meyer, Jean Tarrade, Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer,
and Jacques Thobie, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990,
1991); Gilbert Comte *et al.*, *L'aventure coloniale de la France,* 2 vols. (Paris: Denoël,
1988, 1990).

time spoke of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa (even including sometimes the United States) as "settler colonies," ignoring the presence of those who inhabited those parts of the world before the British arrived. These were seen as not only distinct from other colonies, such as India or even Ireland, but also as potential parts of a "Greater Britain" that would rescue fading British power. Some more recent academic studies also see such typologies as analytically useful. Jürgen Osterhammel, for example, describes exploitation colonies, maritime enclaves, and settlement colonies, while other historians have proposed other ways of categorizing them.[5] These certainly draw attention to common features of colonies in different empires and eras, but have a tendency to downplay the specific contexts of different colonies.

If these approaches have dominated historians' writings about colonialism, a number of factors have recently underscored their limitations. Perhaps foremost has been the process of decolonization itself, which, beginning before World War I, gaining strength between the World Wars, and culminating in the two decades after World War II, forcibly reminded European states and European colonists that colonial subjects not only existed but were capable of claiming a place in the governance of those colonies. In many instances, of course, this led to political independence from the imperial power and the recognition of the sovereignty of India, Algeria, Indonesia, and other former colonies. The obvious agency of Asians and Africans in nationalist movements during the post-World War II era strongly suggested that colonial subjects had been capable of such action in the past.

Decolonization not only lessened interest in "Imperial History" – no longer a story of European triumph and good will – but also spurred the growth of the study of the histories of the new nation-states that had achieved independence. If Western versions of the world had been, in Eric Wolf's phrase, "Europe and the people without History,"[6] in the decades after 1960 the histories of India, Southeast Asia, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa became recognized specialties within the discipline. These historians insisted on the need to separate the histories of

[5] Paul Leroy Beaulieu, *De la colonization chez les peuples modernes*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Guillaumin et Cie, 1882), esp. 575; Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), 10–12; Moses Finley, "Colonies: An Attempt at a Typology," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 26 (1976), 167–88; James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20–32.

[6] Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

the former colonies from the empires that had dominated them during the now-gone colonial era.

The past forty years have also seen significant changes in the practice of historians of Europe and the United States. The growth of World History (sometimes called global history or international history) inter-nationalized a discipline that had usually taken the nation-state as its fundamental unit of analysis. Aiming to study historical forces that "do not respect national or even cultural boundary lines, but work their effects instead on a regional, continental, or global scale," world histo-rians from the very beginning found imperialism and colonialism to be a significant part of their subject matter.[7] At the same time, the 1960s also saw new forms of historical analysis and writing that legitimated historical subjects and processes that, in the past, had been ignored or neglected.[8] New groups became the subjects of histories: peasants, workers, slaves, non-Europeans, and women became not exceptional and marginal participants in the story of the past, but increasingly prominent parts of that story. While many historians continued to write traditional political, diplomatic, and intellectual histories, this "New Social History" seemed to be becoming hegemonic in the discipline by the late 1970s and early 1980s, with a flood of graduate students, monographs, and journals coming into the profession, especially in the United States.

But the dominance of social history would be brief. In the 1980s, some historians, influenced initially by cultural anthropology and then by developments in philosophy and literary criticism, focused atten-tion on the study of culture. Social historians who had grown uneasy about the emphasis in social history on broad societal structures rather than individual experience took a "cultural turn," attracted by the cul-tural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and his emphasis on the study

---

[7] Jerry H. Bentley, "A New Forum for Global History," *Journal of World History*, 1 (1990), iv. See William H. McNeill, *A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), and Leften S. Stavrianos, *The World since 1500: A Global History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966) for early versions of world history.

[8] For reflections on these developments by major participants see: Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Lynn Hunt, "Introduction," in Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 1–22; Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, "Introduction," in Bonnell and Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 1–32; Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), esp. 282–97; and William H. Sewell, Jr., "The Political Unconscious of Social and Cultural History, or, Confessions of a Former Quantitative Historian," in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 22–80.

of culture as an interpretive practice. Others took a "linguistic turn," influenced by post-structuralist philosophy and literary criticism. One of the most important aspects of this was the insight of the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault that what he called "technologies of power" operated not only through the state institutions that historians had always studied, but also through various forms of knowledge. In particular, Foucault outlined an approach that emphasized the importance of the interactions between power relations and the most intimate aspects of human life, arguing that "the body is … directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs." Subjection, in this view, can be "direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on material elements, and yet without involving violence; it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor terror and yet remain of a physical order."[9]

These influences broadened the ways in which power was understood, and made the categories of nation, class, gender, and race, often taken as unchanging givens by historians, themselves the subjects of historical analysis. But neither the "New Cultural Historians" nor Foucault himself had much to say about colonialism. Race joined gender and class in the trinity of interests for cultural historians, but colonialism remained peripheral. Foucault focused his historical studies on prisons, insanity, and sexuality in nineteenth-century France rather than the French empire. Historians of imperialism and colonialism certainly incorporated concerns about previously marginalized groups into their accounts, and it would be unfair to characterize their work as ignoring these concerns. But for many in the 1980s and 1990s their interests remained focused on more traditional aspects of the empires. The *Oxford History of the British Empire*, for example, published in five volumes between 1988 and 1999 and including contributions by many prominent scholars of the empire, largely retained the traditional emphasis on European conquest, diplomacy, settlement, and economic empire. Only after the turn of the century was it followed by a supplementary companion series that more directly addressed issues of gender, migration, race, and the environment that the original five volumes had not covered in depth.[10]

[9] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 25–26.

[10] Wm. Roger Louis (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford University Press, 1988–99); Philippa Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire* (Oxford University

By then it had become clear that the "linguistic turn" and the "new cultural history" would be useful in rethinking the way in which colonialism and other relationships between Europe and the rest of the world were understood. An early, and very controversial, contribution to this came from the literary scholar Edward Said, who drew on Foucault's insights about the ways in which forms of knowledge – specifically what Said called Orientalism, the study of the Middle East – both created a subject, the undifferentiated Oriental Other, and exerted European power over those peoples.[11] In this view, European colonialism became less the actions of armies and colonial proconsuls, and more the various ways in which European discourses and forms of knowledge created colonial subjects and controlled them. The racial distinctions that were part and parcel of European colonialism were easily susceptible to this kind of analysis, and beginning in the 1990s other scholars, influenced by Foucault's emphasis on the body as a focal point of discursive power in the modern era, became interested in the ways in which colonial systems of governance controlled colonial bodies through physical spaces, labor systems, medicine, and practices concerning gender and sexuality.[12]

Exploration of the cultural aspects of colonialism was accompanied by recognition of the interplay between metropolitan and colonial cultures. One form of this has been the recent revival in popular culture of a kind of "colonial blues" that has portrayed a bittersweet memory of the colonies in films, television, and fiction.[13] Historians have shown less nostalgia for the empires, but have recognized the complex interactions between the metropolitan imperial powers and their colonies. Colonialism now appears as a phenomenon that influenced not only the histories of the places that became colonies of European powers,

Press, 2004); Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (eds.), *Black Experience and the Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2006); William Beinart and Lotte Hughes (eds.), *Environment and Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine (eds.), *Migration and Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[11] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993).

[12] Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1995); Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007); Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford University Press, 1991); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

[13] The phrase is from Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 133.

but also the histories of those European powers themselves. In what has been called the "imperial turn," historians of the imperial powers have studied the implications of colonialism for all Europeans.[14] It has become apparent, for example, that the growing importance of colonial trade for metropolitan economies connected London dockworkers, even if they rarely left the London waterfront, with British colonies in India and Africa. Often as well the ability of governments to expand and maintain the colonial empires became a measure of their legitimacy and fitness for rule, while the popularity of empire helped European governments manage the social conflicts associated with industrialization and urbanization in the increasingly democratic political systems of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.[15] We also now see how European elite and popular culture was marked by colonialism, from the colonial subjects of Orientalist paintings to the stories of empire that Victorian youths imbibed, to popular entertainment, on stages and in international expositions, that became commonplaces for Europeans.[16] The pervasiveness of colonialism makes a modern European history without it incomplete at best, deceptive at worst, giving colonial history a position of prominence that it has rarely enjoyed in the past. Colonialism had always played some role in the narrative of modern European history. But it now joins long-standing topics such as the development of representative political institutions, national identity, human rights, urbanization, and industrialization as central elements of that history.[17]

[14] Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003); Durba Ghosh, "Another Set of Imperial Turns?" *American Historical Review* 117 (2012), 772–93; Gary Wilder, "From Optic to Topic: The Foreclosure Effect of Historiographic Turns," *American Historical Review* 117 (2012), 723–45. For opposing views: P. J. Marshall, "No Fatal Impact? The Elusive History of Imperial Britain," *Times Literary Supplement*, March 12, 1993, 8–10; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[15] Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Robert Tombs, *Nationhood and Nationalism in France from Boulangism to the Great War, 1889–1918* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991).
[16] Lynne Thornton (ed.), *The Orientalists: Painters-Travellers, 1828–1908* (Paris: ACR Édition Internationale, 1983); Leonard Ashley, *George Alfred Henty and the Victorian Mind* (San Francisco, CA: International Scholars Publications, 1999); Herman Lebovics, *True France: Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).
[17] Michael Adas, "'High' Imperialism and the 'New' History," in Adas (ed.), *Islam and European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University