

Geographies of Empire

How did the major European imperial powers and indigenous populations experience imperialism and colonisation in the period 1880–1960? In this richly illustrated comparative account, Robin Butlin provides a comprehensive overview of the experiences of individual European imperial powers – British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Belgian, German and Italian – and the reactions of indigenous peoples. He explores the complex processes and discourses of colonialism, conquest and resistance from the height of empire through to decolonisation and sets these within the dynamics of the globalisation of political and economic power systems. He sheds new light on variations in the timing, nature and locations of European colonisations, and on key themes such as exploration and geographical knowledge; maps and mapping; demographics; land seizure and environmental modification; transport and communications; and resistance and independence movements. In so doing, he makes a major contribution to our understanding of colonisation and the end of empire.

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Geographies of Empire

European Empires and Colonies *c.* 1880–1960

ROBIN A. BUTLIN



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*For Norma, Catherine, Ian, Richard, Martin, Cíosa, Sami,
Tilly, Polly, Alfie, May, Crea, Ted and Tom*

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Preface

This book is one of a number of outcomes of my teaching and research interests in historical geography which have lasted for more than forty years, and of a more recent interest, starting about fifteen years ago, in the geographies of imperialism and colonialism. An initial curiosity about the historical geographies of imperialism and colonialism was sparked by my discovery of a series of books on the historical geography of the British Empire published between 1887 and 1925, notably C. P. Lucas's edited series on the *Historical Geography of the British Colonies* and H. B. George's *An Historical Geography of the British Empire* (see Butlin 1995). This led to my subsequent research projects into the links between geographical societies and imperialism and colonialism, specifically through the libraries and archives of the Royal Geographical Society in London and of geographical and historical societies in Australia and South Africa. The seeds for this work were sown and germinated at Loughborough University, notably in collaboration with Morag Bell and Mike Heffernan, in the early and mid-1990s, and their continued support and encouragement throughout this project is greatly appreciated. Additionally, between 1999 and 2005, the opportunity arose in the School of Geography at the University of Leeds for me to share some of my ideas on the differing experiences of European states and their empires and colonies with undergraduates in a third-year special option course on the Geographies of European Imperialism. To the successive groups of students who took that course I owe a great debt of gratitude for the stimulus and interest that they provided. One of my happy memories of the course was of a seminar on geographies of war and rebellion, led by a confident undergraduate actor dressed in the uniform of a British army officer from the Boer (South African) War, whose entry to the room was accompanied by loud military music that must have amused or (more likely) distracted other lecturers and classes in adjacent rooms.

There has been a great deal of important and innovative work in the past decade on many new aspects of the historical and cultural geographies of imperialism and colonialism by groups of very able geographers, working in Europe, Asia, Canada, Africa and Australia, linked with new

insights afforded by, for example, postcolonial, gender, and indigenous perspectives, which has added to seminal work, conspicuously on Australia, Africa and Canada, which started in the 1980s. Neither of these substantial bodies of work has been as fully recognised and evaluated as it might have been outside the discipline of geography (Butlin 2002), and one of the purposes of this book is to attempt to showcase some of their insights for a wider audience, and to adjust, albeit slightly, the historiographical basis of broader writing on imperialism and colonialism about the period since c. 1880. Much of the notable work reviewed here, however, properly and necessarily digests a wide range of significant and seminal research and writings in other disciplines, conspicuously history, economic and social history, demographic history, and environmental history, and in a range of theoretical formulations. The broader context is that of trying in part through this book to meet the rapidly growing interest in the geographies and histories of former European empires and colonies and their postcolonial consequences, reflected in various media projects in Britain and linked publications (e.g. Ferguson 2003).

The chronological period covered by the book starts with the high imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and finishes with the independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Its topical coverage is selective, perhaps even eclectic, necessitated by the limits of size of an individual book and one's range of interests and competencies, and it focuses primarily on spatial links, manifestations, discourses and processes. The individual chapters address questions of analytical frameworks; chronologies; demographies; land allocation and appropriation; geographical societies and their imperial links; empire, cultures of exploration and geographical knowledge; maps and mapping; geographies of civilising mission; environmental interaction; the arteries of empire; towns and cities; economic geographies; and decolonisation. Within these chapters are to be found accounts of resistance to, and acceptance and modification of, change, and attempts to hear the voices of both colonised and coloniser. Detailed coverage of major global and regional warfare has not been possible; nor has a comprehensive account of the wide range of institutions engaged with imperialism, though analysis is undertaken of the roles and characters of geographical societies.

One of the consistent and justified criticisms about many writings on empire is that they are too Eurocentric. Though this imbalance is now being redressed by a plethora of important work from 'subaltern' and similar perspectives, this book is written by a British scholar who has spent most of his working life in Britain, with additional experience of scholarly

institutions and productions in Europe and North America, and with limited time in South Africa and Australia, and the book naturally reflects these experiences. Nonetheless, I have tried to represent and review alternative visions and perspectives, including those of other European countries.

Every attempt has been made to include a reasonably balanced narrative and analysis of significant parts and different experiences of the empires and colonies of European states, but geographical coverage has had to be selective to a degree, given the vast scales and spaces involved. The areas of major white settlement – the colonies such as Canada, Australia and South Africa which became Dominions and ultimately parts of the Commonwealth – have not been given the coverage that their extensively researched histories require because of space constraints, but selective narratives are provided of some of their major experiences and problems. Ireland's position as a colony and region is reviewed in Chapter 2, but the complexity and difference of that country's historical geography has meant that it does not figure prominently in this text.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr Alan Baker, a good friend for more than forty years, and editor of the Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography series, who some years ago suggested that my interests in historical geographies of empire might be turned into a book, and whose encouragement in this and other scholarly projects, and whose own epic contributions to historical geography, have been of incalculable value.

In addition to his unfailing encouragement over many years, Joe Powell of Monash University in Melbourne also kindly undertook to offer critical comment on a first draft of this text, and these comments and suggestions encouraged me to rework a number of significant sections. I am grateful also for the comments on the manuscript by an anonymous referee from North America, and on Chapter 3 by Adrian Bailey of the School of Geography, University of Leeds.

The thinking that informs this work reflects a long period of encouragement and stimulus from colleagues at the wide range of institutions in which I have studied, researched and taught during a professional lifetime of scholarship. They include colleagues from the Geography Departments at the University of Liverpool, the University of Keele, University College, Dublin, the University of Nebraska, Queen Mary College (now Queen Mary) in the University of London, Loughborough University, Wolfson College, Cambridge, and the University of Leeds. Sir Alan Wilson, as Vice-Chancellor and fellow geographer, and successive heads of the School

of Geography at the University of Leeds, provided, from 1998 onwards, further opportunities for me to teach and research, and I have been fortunate to have had there the scholarly support of colleagues which has enabled me to bring a number of projects to fruition. I have been singularly fortunate also in the encouragement that I have received in this and other projects from Richard Lawton, John Edwards, Tom Jones Hughes, Bob Dodgshon, Hugh Prince, Anngret Simms, Serge Courville, Alan Lester, Charles Withers, David Livingstone, Martin Purvis, Derek Gregory, Hugh Clout, Brian Graham, Graeme Wynn, Chris Christopher, Jehoshua Ben-Arieh, Haim Goren, Ruth Kark, Willie Smyth, Pat O'Flanagan, Tony Phillips, Roger Kain, Catherine Delano-Smith, George Revill, Paul Laxton, Iain Black, John Sheail, Philip Howell, Hans Renes, Elyze Smeets, and many other scholars.

I am also happy to have been one of the founders and members of two significant research groups: the Historical Geography Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), and the International Conference of Historical Geographers (formerly CUKANZUS). These have grown and matured most impressively, and provide stimulating centres for debate in important research fields, and their meetings have provided invaluable opportunities for comparing research with scholars from around the world. I have been much helped in my work by many colleagues in Canada, the United States, Britain, Ireland, Israel, Palestine, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Australia and Japan, and I extend my thanks to them all. I have also benefited greatly from support through research funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), the British Academy, and, through a Research Fellowship and an Emeritus Research Fellowship, from the Leverhulme Trust.

My researches in this country have been greatly facilitated by support from libraries and librarians in many different universities, and by the librarians and archivists at the Royal Geographical Society, the University of Cambridge, the British Library, the Geography Department at the University of Stellenbosch, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the Queensland Geographical Society, and the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland.

I extend my warmest thanks to the cartographers Alison Manson and David Appleyard in the Graphics Unit at the School of Geography at the

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Unwavering support has been given by my wife Norma and our children Catherine, Ian and Richard, who over the years have patiently tolerated my academic routines, and found different and imaginative ways of drawing my attention to other goals and priorities, and to them and to our son- and daughters-in-law and our grandchildren I extend my deepest thanks.

Robin Butlin
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