# 1 *Introduction*

## *Legacies of empire*

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'Empires and civilizations come and go', or so it is generally assumed. But what actually happens when imperial powers decline? Do the institutions and logics of empire entirely disappear? A great deal of historical and archaeological evidence suggests that they do not, that they leave their mark on international structures and processes and on the institutions, cultures, politics and legal systems of the peoples who inhabit the territories of their former cores and peripheries. But if empires never entirely disappear, why does it matter? What implications are there for how we understand the contemporary, supposedly 'post-imperial', system of national states?

Much has been written about the European colonial empires, largely focusing on relations between imperial powers and their colonies, and the impact of these relations on both. This book examines the phenomenon of empire from a somewhat different perspective. It explores the imprint that empires – their institutions, organisational principles and logics – have left on the modern world. Students of international relations are accustomed to thinking of the contemporary world as post-imperial, as divided among discrete political entities founded on national communities, each jealously guarding its sovereignty and power against the dangers of an anarchic world; facing each other, in Thomas Hobbes' colourful metaphor, 'in the state and posture of gladiators … their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another' (Hobbes 1951: 79). Yet, the reality is very different. While the contemporary world is conventionally seen as characterized by national states and, as some of the globalist literature suggests, increasingly post-national, it is our conviction that there is much to be gained by viewing the contemporary world through the lens of empire.

It is often assumed, wrongly, that empire is a form of political organization that existed in the past and that was eventually superseded or displaced by national states. Empire has not only been the

norm throughout most of the past five or six millennia – but as recent discussions of the USA, the Soviet Union and even the European Union (Zielonka 2006) and rising powers such as China or India suggest – imperial power and politics also remain very much a part of the contemporary landscape. In many important respects *world history is imperial history*. Robert Gilpin says that '[t]he nature of international relations has not changed over the millennia . . . One must suspect that if somehow Thucydides were placed in our midst, he would . . . have little trouble in understanding the power struggle of our age' (1981: 211). Yet the world with which Thucydides was familiar was a world of empires, not of nation states.

Why, then, do we call the field of study concerned with cross-border relationships 'inter-national' relations? The concept of international relations reflects a certain perspective on the world that emerged at a specific time and within a specific social context. It made its appearance during the French Revolution and has been associated ever since with the theories and debates that accompanied the rise of European nationalism (Fédou 1971; Mairet 1997). The term implies that international politics are concerned with relationships among organic social groupings that are genuine political 'actors' in their own right. It was during the time of the French Revolution and its aftermath that a young philosopher destined for greatness declared: '[t]he universal which manifests itself in the State and is known in it – the form under which everything that is, is subsumed – is that which constitutes the culture of a nation' (Hegel 1975: 53). And those nations that failed to constitute themselves as states, he warned his fellow 'Germans' (most of whom did not know they were Germans), would fall by history's wayside.

Certainly the nationalist project promoted by the Fronde movement in France and by early nationalists such as Hegel or Fichte proved tremendously successful. Yet, as Daniel Chernilo points out, the nation state is at best 'an unfinished project that paradoxically presents itself as an already established form of socio-political organization' (2006: 16). It appears to us that the notion of an international system or society of states, or of a 'world capitalist system' politically divided into nation states, glosses over the mosaic of practices, institutions, and social structures that remain as legacies of past empires and civilizations. It might be argued, in fact, that we can only really understand the national project by considering it in the light of the diverse institutional habitat in which it has flourished.

In this book we explore how our understanding of the 'international system' changes when we trace the extent to which the cultural, political, military and economic legacies of empires remain embedded in, and constitutive of, contemporary political life. Our concern, therefore, is with continuities, with the durability and persistence of imperial organization and logics, and with the military, political and socio-economic continuities and pathways that remain during the times and in the places that are characterized as 'post-imperial'. What we are concerned to explore is whether seeing the current order as, in some part, constituted by legacies of empire illuminates dimensions and dynamics of the contemporary world that are obscured by national historiography and perspectives.

In exploring the world through the analytic lens of imperial legacies our intention is not simply to substitute 'empire' for 'state' as the central focus of inquiry in the study of international relations, but to pose intrinsic conceptual and empirical problems for the whole of the nationalist theoretical edifice. By bringing into clearer focus striated spaces, historical nuance and a world in which legacies of the past are pragmatically reconfigured and rebranded, the imperial lens challenges the tendency of International Relations perspectives to treat political units as homogeneous and human action and thought as universal and unhistorical.

This book shows that empires have left their imprint on the contemporary world in a variety of ways that we often fail to appreciate. Its aim is to enrich our understanding of the historical origins of the complex mosaic of institutions, practices, habits of thought and organization that make up the modern world; to develop a more subtle and nuanced understanding of the complex ecology of the international system, and an appreciation of the richly diverse elements that make it up. We hope that exploring the multiple dimensions of empires past will also enable us to gain insight into how the current American imperium will shape the future world.

## The study of empire and its impacts

Empire is the focus of widespread public interest and academic debate. Interest in empire has been linked to questions concerning the conceptualization of contemporary structures and processes and the origins and nature of globalization. However, the lion's share of research and

writing on the subject has focused on the legacies of empire in former imperial states and colonies and the lessons that past empires might hold for the USA.

Legacies are elements of the present that are shaped by the past. The legacies of European empires and imperial expansion include contemporary conflicts (e.g. in Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Burma, Sudan and Nigeria), patterns of migration, art, legal systems and patterns and conditions of nation- and state-building. There is a large literature focusing on the persistence of British imperial legacies, both in Britain itself as, for instance, with respect to post-imperial citizenship and national identities in the United Kingdom (e.g. Goulbourne 2009), and in successor states and former colonies (e.g. Kwarteng 2011; Midgeley and Piachaud 2011; Centeno and Enriquez 2010; Darwin 2009; Moore and Thomas 2007; Reynolds 2006; Calhoun, Cooper and Moore 2006).

Broader and more pervasive impacts of European empire are the focus of a body of research and writing called Dependency Theory. Andre Gunder Frank articulated its main tenet: that colonialism created fundamental and interrelated structural distortions in the economies of Third World countries and that these were continuing to thwart development.[1] A key structural distortion and difference between 'Western' and contemporary Third World development is the coexistence of an advanced or modern sector with a backward or traditional sector (Sunkel 1973; Cardoso and Falleto 1973; Amin 1976; Frank 1972; Dos Santos 1970). 'Dependency' describes a situation in which development is oriented to a restricted, limited elite-oriented type of market and society (Cardoso 1973), in which capital cannot find its essential dynamic component (Cardoso and Falletto 1979). The foreign-oriented 'corporate' sector encompasses all capital-intensive enterprise, whether in industry or agriculture, as well as utilities, transport and the civil service, but there is no investment beyond the enclave:

[1] Dependency writings in the 1970s delineated a variety of alternative paths possible for capitalist development in the periphery, including the 'semi-peripheral', 'dependent', 'associated-dependent' and 'unequal' paths. See, e.g. Evans 1979; Wallerstein 1974; Amin 1976; Cardoso 1973; Cardoso and Faletto 1979. Cardoso and Falletto (1979) also delineated different forms of dependency. The theorization of these various types of peripheral development continued to undergo refinement in the 1980s and 1990s (see, e.g. Hettne 1990; Kay 1989; Larrain 1989; Becker 1987).

profits are either reinvested there or exported, and improvements in technology do not diffuse outward to agriculture or to cottage industry. Thus, the economy as a whole is characterized by a lack of internal structural integration: the coexistence of an advanced or modern sector with a backward or traditional sector, the concomitant coexistence of pre-capitalist and capitalist relations of production, and dependency on outside capital, labour and markets.

In the 1970s and 1980s two perspectives on the colonial experience emerged: post-colonial theory and subaltern studies. Post-colonial theory investigates how Western knowledge systems are related to the exercise of Western power: how knowledge of colonized people has served the interests of colonizers, and how 'Western' canonical traditions and universalisms, as well as the colonial relationship itself, repress, exclude, marginalize and objectify the 'other'.[2] It focuses, in particular, on the legacies of nineteenth-century British and French colonial rule for its subject people as, for instance, the difficulties faced by former colonial peoples in developing national identity. The subaltern studies project emerged from within this general perspective beginning in the 1980s.[3] Its key concern was to recover history from 'the bottom up': to bring to light and assert the value of alternative experiences and ways of knowing and, in this way, illuminate the history, agency and autonomy of the common people. According to the subaltern studies perspective, elite-centred colonialist (Liberal), nationalist and Marxist narratives are incapable of representing the history of the masses in the Third World. They are forms of Western teleology, ideologies of modernity and progress, meta-narratives of

[2] Edward Said's book, *Orientalism* (1977) is considered by many to be the founding work of post-colonial theory. Said argued that 'the Orient' was a construct of 'the West' that shaped the real and imagined existences of those subjected to the fantasy, and that, in turn, this 'othering' process used the Orient to create, define and solidify the 'West'. The result, as Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) is that, while former imperial powers may have physically left the lands they had ruled for decades and centuries, they still dominate them ideologically, culturally and intellectually.

[3] The 1988 *Selected Subaltern Studies* reader edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, with a foreword by Edward Said, defined the theoretical and methodological contributions of the project. The original subaltern studies collective of scholars were South-Asian historians working primarily within a Gramscian tradition. The term 'subaltern' is taken from the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1881–1937), whose perspective on the political and cultural basis of hegemony has had an important impact, in particular, on Marxist thinking.

the advance of capitalism and the triumph of the nation state, that reproduce knowledges and practices grounded in European history, and that seek either to endorse or to universalize Europe's historical experience.[4]

While the literature on European empires tends to emphasize economic and cultural impacts on successor states and former colonies, the literature that focuses on contemporary empire tends to emphasize International Relations perspectives and concerns and, in particular, states and their strategic interactions. This is evident in the large literature on empire and the Cold War, much of which focuses on the 'neo-colonial' policies of powerful countries as a key element of that period.

The term 'neo-colonialism' was originally applied to European policies that were seen as schemes to maintain control of African and other dependencies.[5] Neo-colonialism came to be seen, more generally, as involving a coordinated effort by former colonial powers and other developed countries to block growth in developing countries and retain them as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labour. This effort was seen as closely associated with the Cold War and, in particular, with the US policy known as the Truman Doctrine. Under this policy, the US government offered large amounts of money to any government prepared to accept US protection from Communism. This enabled the USA to extend its sphere of influence and, in some cases, to place foreign governments under its control. The USA and other developed countries have also ensured the subordination of developing countries by interfering in conflicts and in other ways helping to install regimes willing to act for the benefit of foreign companies and against their own country's interests.

However, neo-colonial governance is seen as generally operating through indirect forms of control and, in particular, by means of the economic, financial and trade policies of trans-national corporations

[4] See, e.g. Gupta 1998; Prakash 1996; Chakrabarty 2000, 1992; and, for an overview, Young 2001.

[5] The event that marked the beginning of this usage was the European summit in Paris in 1957, where six European heads of government agreed to include their overseas territories within the European Common Market under trade arrangements that were seen by some national leaders and groups as representing a new form of economic domination over French-occupied Africa and the colonial territories of Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands.

and global and multilateral institutions. It operates through the investments of multinational corporations that, while enriching a few in underdeveloped countries, keep those countries as a whole in a situation of dependency and cultivate them as reservoirs of cheap labour and raw materials. It operates also through international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which make loans (as well as other forms of economic aid) conditional on the recipient nations taking steps favourable to the financial cartels represented by these institutions, but that are detrimental to their own economies. Thus, while many people see these corporations and institutions as part of an essentially new global order and a new form of global governance, the notion of neo-colonialism directs our attention to what, in this system and constellation of power, represents continuity between the present and recent past.

Much attention has been devoted to the nature and impact of American empire since the end of the Cold War and to investigating the politics behind US imperial ambitions, either in the form of interest groups or in the geo-political dilemmas of the post-Cold War world (e.g. Lutz 2009; Lazreg 2008; Hardt and Negri 2004; Lal 2004; Ferguson 2004, 2000; Johnson 2004; Mann 2003; Chomsky 2003; Harvey 2003; Bacevich 2003, 2002; Calhoun, Cooper and Moore 2005; Barber 2003; Todd 2003). Unlike a formal empire, in which emperors have claimed absolute sovereignty, not only over their inhabitants, but also sometimes over the rest of the planet or even the entire solar system, the USA is seen as pursuing practices associated with what has been described as 'informal empire'.[6] Here, the empire does not claim to be an empire, at all: the title is bestowed upon it by its rivals or enemies. With the end of the Cold War, interest became focused on the causes, processes and consequences of US imperial decline. A resurgence of interest in this subject was prompted by Paul Kennedy's*The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, published in 1987. Kennedy argued that imperial great powers inevitably tend to extend themselves beyond their means, and that the United States is following the same pattern.

[6] Comparative studies have endeavoured to distinguish between different types of empires and imperial practice. See e.g. Parsons 2010; Steinmetz 2005; Eisenstadt 1963.

## Empires and nation states

As we have seen, much of the literature that explores the impacts of European empires on their successor states and former colonies is concerned with understanding problems of national development and national identity as legacies of former empires or imperial domination. While this literature has brought to light many aspects of the imperial enterprise that had previously been insufficiently understood and appreciated, it also tends, by defining a sharp distinction between empire and nation state, to obfuscate key dimensions of the contemporary political order. Though it has been pre-eminently concerned to 'liberate "history" from the meta-narrative of the nation-state' (Chakrabarty 1992: 19), much of the scholarship associated with the subaltern studies project has tended to assume and reinforce the nation as a concept and as a boundary. This is also true of post-colonial studies. We would argue that analyses of imperial legacies generally work within a national frame. By assuming that empires have been entirely supplanted or displaced by nation states, they obscure the extent to which imperial institutions and practices shape supposedly post-imperial times and places.

Empires and nations are typically defined in opposition to each other by reference to a number of analytic distinctions. In contrast to the imaginary proto-socialist collectives depicted in ideologies of the nation state, each pursuing a collective, 'national interest', empires are hierarchical structures, and those who use the term 'empire' to describe contemporary political formations such as the USA, the Soviet Union or even the European Union, emphasize the existence of hierarchy and the role of power within them.

Unlike nation states, empires have a geographically, politically, economically and culturally identifiable core and periphery, and, with one or two important exceptions, the core consists of a large city in control of a vast peripheral hinterland. In contrast to empires, the nation state exists in a world of like units, each of which is considered formally equal to the others (sovereign), and each of which is predominantly concerned with security because of the absence of a central governing authority within the overarching system. The security problems faced by nation states are external. It is assumed that inside the boundaries of properly run nation states things are reasonably stable; if there is a problem, it is caused by external factors and agents. In contrast, the histories of empires are about the great logistical, cultural, political and

economic difficulties in sustaining the great imperial venture. Empires decay or implode; their problems are as much internal as external. Indeed, very often, external dangers are used to mobilize against the more real and present 'internal' dangers.

However, if we view the world through the lens of empire, rather than from within the national frame, a different story emerges, one that is less narrow and one-dimensional, less national and uniform, and more varied and complex, than the one that conventional international relations scholarship often presents. From this angle of vision it is less easy to distinguish the social, economic and institutional characteristics of national and imperial states, and the world of nation states from that of empires.

In *Nations and Nationalism* (1990), Eric Hobsbawm showed that, between 1830 and 1878, when intellectuals and state personnel in Europe were concerned with defining the principle of nationalism, the theoretical discourse of those engaged in debate and discussion about nations held that:

1. nations had to be of a sufficient size to be economically viable – thus, the principle of nationality applied only to nationalities of a certain size;
2. the process of building nations was inevitably a process of expansion – national movements were expected to be movements of unification or expansion; consequently
3. nation states would be nationally heterogeneous.

There were only three criteria that allowed a people, in practice, to be firmly classed as a nation: the historic association with either an existing state or one having a lengthy and recent past; the existence of a long-established cultural elite; and a proven capacity for conquest. The history of the Age of Nationalism in Europe is consistent with this discourse and practice.

Although the term 'imperialism' came to be used exclusively to mean the direct or indirect domination of overseas colonial territories by modern industrial states,[7] the process of building states in Europe and empires abroad was essentially identical. Underlining the similarity

[7] The original meaning of 'imperialism' referred to the personal sovereignty of a powerful ruler over numerous territories, either in Europe or overseas. See Koebner and Schmidt 1965.

between this process and the colonial situation, a number of scholars have referred to this dimension of the state-building process in Europe as 'internal colonialism'.[8] Like colonialism, it involved reshaping the social and economic institutions of the conquered areas to the needs of the centre. A militarily powerful 'core' imposed physical control over culturally distinct groups. These groups are discriminated against on the basis of their language, religion or other cultural forms. Often, they are treated as objects of exploitation, 'as a natural resource to be plundered', and with the brutality that states treat conquered foreign countries (Gouldner 1977–78: 41). The economy of the peripheral area was forced into complementary development to the core and generally relied on a single primary export. Juridical and political measures similar to those applied in overseas colonies were imposed in order to maintain the economic dependence of these areas. Members of the core monopolized commerce, trade and credit while in the peripheral area there was a relative lack of services and lower standard of living.

Movements to form 'nation states' in Europe during the nineteenth century were thoroughly bound up with imperialism. In fact, their *stated* aim was not to form 'nation states', but to resurrect or create empires.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Napoleon fused French nationalism with the Roman imperial idea and, as the alleged heir of Charlemagne, united France, Western Germany, Italy and the Low Countries in a new empire. At the peak of its power (1810), France directly governed all Germany left of the Rhine, Belgium, the Netherlands and North Germany eastwards to Lübeck, as well as Savoy, Piedmont, Liguria and Italy west of the Apennines down to the borders of Naples, and the Illyrian provinces from Carinthia down to and including Dalmatia. German nationalists put forth claims to territory regardless of whether the population directly concerned really desired to change its sovereignty.[9]

[8] Numerous scholars have underlined the similarity between processes of nation building and the colonial situation, including Antonio Gramsci (1957: 430), Fernand Braudel (1984: 42, 328–52), Eugen Weber (1976: 490–93), Maurice Dobb (1947: 194, 206–7, 209), Michael Hechter (1975: 30–33), Alvin Gouldner (1977–78) and Oscar Jaszi (1929: 185–212).

[9] The annexation by Germany of French Alsace-Lorraine in 1871 against the will of the population, was justified by Heinrich Treitschke, as follows:

> We Germans . . . know better than these unfortunates themselves what is good for the people of Alsace, who have remained under the misleading influence of the French connection outside the sympathies of new Germany. We shall restore them to their true selves against their will. Quoted in Macartney 1934: 100.