The World and the West

The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire

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Contents

v

Conquest

The word *colonialism* is often a misnomer, used for any form of domination of one society over another. The original Greek meaning of a colony implied an outward migration from a mother city or metropolis to settle in a new place. True colonization in this original sense is represented today by examples such as the United States and Canada, where culture change took place but was mainly carried by a blanket immigration of Europeans who brought their culture with them. The Native Americans were pushed aside to become a small minority, sometimes culturally assimilated, sometimes not.

Another variety of so-called colonialism is demographically the reverse of true colonization. It is more accurately labeled territorial empire, where Europeans conquered a territory overseas but sent a negligible number of settlers beyond the administrative and military personnel required to control it. Examples of this type would be British rule in India and Nigeria.

A third, mixed case, midway between territorial empire and true colonization, also sometimes occurred. In these instances, European settlers were a substantial minority, living alongside other cultural communities of native inhabitants. The result is often called a plural society. A rough line between plural societies and true empires can be drawn when the settler community reaches more than about 5 percent of the total population. The important instances of plural societies in the past century or so are South Africa, Algeria, Israel, some Latin American countries, such as Peru or Guatemala, and many parts of the former Soviet Union.

The three chapters of Part I set the scene. The first deals with the emerging pattern of European dominance in the world. The second deals with roots of that dominance in European development and history. The third deals with the politics of European empire building overseas.

1

The Pattern of Empire

The conventional history of European empire building not only lumps dissimilar experiences under the rubric of colonialism, but it often, and too readily, accepts convenient fictions, concocted by long-dead publicists, historians, and government officials, in place of reality. Historians in recent decades have made great progress in correcting this European bias, but much remains to be done.

One tendency of past historiography, not yet altogether corrected, is the tendency to read backward from the clear pattern of European dominance in the recent past, assuming that it was the case in earlier periods as well. Territorial empire and large-scale true colonization have origins that can be traced to these earlier times, but they flourished only in the period since about 1800, or even later.

In earlier centuries, the most important modes of culture contact were commercial, mediated by trade diasporas or the settlement of merchants along a trade route to facilitate commerce. These commercial settlers came only in small numbers but were often extremely important in the process of culture change. They were, in a sense, professional cross-cultural brokers, facilitating trade between the home region and its commercial outposts. Examples can be found in the earliest urban societies of Mesopotamia and in the pre-Columbian Americas.

Many early trade diasporas were comparatively peaceful, living on sufferance with the permission, often the good will as well, of the rulers of the territory where they settled. Dating back to the medieval Mediterranean, European trade diasporas often took a more violent form, where Genoese and Venetian not only settled in alien trading

towns but seized the towns themselves and used them as bases for intercity competition in warfare as well as commerce. They rarely aspired to territorial control beyond those strong points, which is why militarized trade diasporas of this type are often called trading-post empires.

Between about 1425 and 1525, when the remnants of Magellan's fleet returned to Spain, European mariners revolutionized human ability to travel by sea and return. The achievement depended on a combination of improved vessels and navigational techniques with increased geographic knowledge, including the outlines of the world wind system. Before this time in world history, regular and routine navigation had been limited to coastal voyages and to some travel on inland seas such as the Mediterranean, though offshore voyages were common in the monsoon belt that stretched east and west from Indonesia to Africa and north through the South China Sea to Japan. After the 1520s, however, European mariners could sail to any coast in the world, though at considerable cost and danger at first.

This maritime revolution gave Europeans their first significant military advantage. They had, as yet, no technical advantage in the Mediterranean, where during the 1500s the Ottoman Turks were at least their equal. Overseas it was different. Maritime technology often made Europeans locally supreme in distant seas, where opposing ships mounting effective artillery were virtually unknown. Seapower also had the strategic advantage of mobility to concentrate the available force on a single objective.

It was the mobility of seapower that made it possible for Europeans to build trading-post empires at a time when they were still inferior militarily on land. In the early 1500s, when the Portuguese first began to send naval expeditions east of the Cape of Good Hope, they often chose as their bases islands such as Goa in western India, with secondary centers at Mozambique in East Africa, Melaka in Malaya, and Macau in south China. In the early 1600s, the Dutch established a similar network based on Batavia (now Jakarta) on Java, with connections westward to Ceylon and the east coast of India and north to an island in Nagasaki harbor in Japan. The English shortly entered the picture at Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta in India. France and other European maritime states followed with their own sets of competing trading posts. These trade enclaves were no threat to major Asian powers, but

they were the entering wedge from which territorial empires were to spread in later centuries.

Overland trading-post empires soon began to appear as well. In the 1600s, French fur traders fanned out to the west of the lower St. Lawrence River valley by way of the Great Lakes. English fur traders reached south from Hudson Bay. Neither had any interest in controlling territory or ruling over the Native American populations; they only wanted a secure base for trade and protection from rival European traders. In Asia at the same period, fur traders from Muscovy were extending their trading-post empire eastward across Siberia to the Pacific. In time, these overland trading-post empires were to form the background for territorial empire and true colonization in both North America and Siberia.

Empire in the Americas

In the Americas, and in the Americas alone, European territorial empires date from the 1500s. Here, the European maritime advantage intersected with a particular American vulnerability. The ancestors of the American Indians had crossed the land bridge from Asia during the last Ice Age, up to about 10,000 years ago. Their passage occurred before the agricultural revolution, hence before the development of diseases like smallpox, which grew out of the interaction of humans and their domestic animals. Other serious diseases, such as falciparum malaria, evolved in tropical Africa only after agriculture had made dense human communities possible. Those postagricultural human pathogens came too late to be carried to the Americas by the original immigrants, and the Americas, in isolation, developed no diseases of equivalent seriousness. Meanwhile, the intensity of intercommunication across the Afro-Eurasian land mass made it possible for diseases originating at any point to spread much more widely. Elements of a common disease pool, though with local variations, existed over most of these continents.

Any disease environment tends to build up a pattern of countervailing immunities in the children who grow up there. Victims of most diseases, if they survive, emerge with a degree of protection against further attack. Measles and other so-called childhood diseases mainly affect the young because most people are infected in childhood and

are relatively immune later in life. Some diseases are also benign in childhood but more serious for adults. Yellow fever, for example, is often so mild in children that it has no clinical symptoms, yet victims still acquire a lifelong immunity, whereas among adults, yellow fever is often fatal to more than half of its victims.

In the early 1500s, diseases from Afro-Eurasia were devastating for nonimmune American populations. Smallpox alone often swept away more than a quarter of the population, leaving the survivors incapable of an adequate military defense. As a result, major American empires such as those of the Aztecs and Incas were unable to withstand Spanish attack. The Portuguese also easily established bases here and there along the Brazilian coast. Even after the initial crisis, the disease impact lasted for decades as one unfamiliar disease followed another. Some of the new diseases, such as smallpox, were common to Africa and Europe alike, but the most commonly fatal of tropical diseases, yellow fever and falciparum malaria, were virtually unknown in Europe, though Europeans accidentally introduced them to the Americas through the slave trade. Amerindian populations declined steeply for about a century and a half after contact, before they stabilized and began slowly to grow again.

Patterns of disease are not, or course, a controlling variable to explain or predict what happens in history, but they can provide a first-level explanation of why a variety of patterns of cultural demography appeared in different places after Europeans mariners appeared. European maritime prowess allowed them to reach the Americas with an element of strategic surprise, before the Americans could reach Europe. Largely because of the disease catastrophe that followed, Europeans were able to establish their mastery over the shattered American societies. The first European territorial empires therefore appeared in the American tropics on the ruins of the Aztec and Inca empires in central Mexico and Peru, respectively.

Disease patterns were still more serious for the American tropical lowlands, where falciparum malaria and yellow fever from Africa joined smallpox and a range of childhood diseases from Europe. Native American communities in the Caribbean islands and the lowland coasts of tropical South America were virtually wiped out by the early 1600s. They made a genetic contribution to the Caribbean populations of the future, but most disappeared as a distinct cultural communities.

Only isolated communities in the Amazon basin have survived into the twentieth century.

In the new disease environment of the American lowlands, people from Europe also lacked protection from African tropical diseases, whereas those from tropical Africa carried childhood immunities to a wide range of Afro-Eurasian diseases as well. Their superior immune pattern made them best suited for the repopulation of the American tropics. Slaves could be bought on the West African coast, and the Atlantic slave trade began to supply them to the tropical Americas.

The resulting pattern is sometimes called the plantation complex. The Europeans used their seapower to establish political control, then used the same maritime skills to transport enslaved Africans as colonists to replace the dying Indians. In a more benign disease environment, they might well have brought European settlers to establish a true colony, but in the tropical lowlands they brought Africans instead. In the later 1700s, this pattern reached a kind of apogee in Jamaica and Hispaniola, but it also grew into a significant aspect of American development from the southern United States to south central Brazil.

Migration and Demographic Transitions

The mass emigration of Europeans is characteristic of the industrial age, beginning in the 1800s, although in any decade before the 1840s more Africans than Europeans crossed the Atlantic. Even though earlier European governments tended to think their best prospects overseas were trading-post empires, small true colonies were an occasional by-product. The Azores, in the mid-Atlantic at the same latitude as Portugal itself, were an uninhabited chain of islands discovered by chance. In the next century, after 1470, they were gradually settled by mainland Portuguese. By the mid-1500s they had become part of Portugal, producing the same wine, wheat, and cattle as peninsular Portugal. The Canaries and Madeira, closer to the African coast, went though phases of trading-post and plantation developments, but they too ultimately became true colonies of Spain or Portugal.

Brazil began as an adjunct to the Portuguese trading-post empire in the Indian Ocean. Ships bound for India had to pass close by. Though they did not often stop off, Brazil in unfriendly hands would have been

a potential threat to the safe passage to India. When, by the 1540s, the French and some others became active as dye-wood traders on the Brazilian coast, the Portuguese crown decided to plant a colony there, mainly as the self-supporting nucleus for a garrison to protect a crucial strategic position.

The original expedition of 1549 shows the Portuguese intentions. It included 320 people in the pay of the crown, 400 convicts to supply labor, and about 300 assorted priests and free men as colonists and missionaries. Up to about 1570, European colonists were a majority, but, as the influx of African and Amerindian slaves shifted the balance, northeast Brazil became a plantation colony with European managers and an African and Amerindian working class. It was only in the 1800s that a significant amount of true colonization was again attempted, this time mainly in central and southern Brazil.

In the 1600s, the French and the Dutch pursued a similar strategy of commercial settlements. Some of their Caribbean posts followed the Brazilian precedent and in time became plantation colonies with a majority population from Africa, but others took another direction and became true colonies, more by population growth than by continuous immigration from Europe. The Dutch settlement at the Cape of Good Hope and the French settlement around the mouth of the Saint Lawrence can serve as examples. Both of these settlements were founded in the mid-1600s to protect commerce, but with enough European farmers to produce a local supply of food and to provide local manpower for defense.

New France along the Saint Lawrence was established to serve the fur trade, which required only a few thousand settlers, and that was all that France sent out. During the whole period from its foundation to the conquest by England in 1763, no more than 10,000 immigrants came from France, and some authorities think the number may have been closer to 4,000. Yet the net natural increase of less than 10,000 French settlers led, with only small later additions from Europe, to a French Canadian population of more than 5 million in North America today.

The purpose of the Dutch settlements at the Cape was similar – to serve as a way station for the Dutch East India Company's trade to Indonesia and India and to provide a garrison to protect the harbor at Table Bay. For several decades after its founding in 1652, Cape Town

was a military post and little more. But then, in 1679, the Company decided to increase the number of settlers in order to make the post more nearly self-supporting. The settlers were not on the Company payroll, but they might be called out for militia duty. Meanwhile, they were encouraged to produce food for the garrison and for sale to passing ships. For a time, the Company subsidized the immigration of German, Dutch, and French Protestants. In all, it sent out some 1,630 people, but in 1707, it ended assisted immigration, and immigration died to a trickle. This European migration of two thousand or so before 1710 nevertheless grew by natural increase into a white Afrikaans-speaking South African population, which numbered about three and a half million by the early 1900s.

At the Cape of Good Hope, however, the result was not a true colony on the order of Quebec. The local Khoisan population survived and mixed with European settlers and with slaves from many shores of the Indian Ocean. The result is the present Cape Colored community, recently numbering more than three million people. The Cape Province thus became a plural society, but a plural society that absorbed many different cultures. Not only did the small nucleus of European settlers expand through population growth, but their culture became an important ingredient in the culture of the Cape Colored majority. The vast majority of Cape Colored people, for example, speak Afrikaans as their home language.

The European settlements at the Cape and in Quebec illustrate two important differences from other trading-post empires. In both, the settlers were not an all-male military force but included women. They soon developed a normal sex ratio, which led to a natural increase among the European community. European populations in the humid tropics rarely attained a net natural increase, even after many decades, partly for lack women and partly for lack of immunity to tropical disease. The disease environments of Canada and the Cape of Good Hope, however, were as favorable to European population growth as that of Europe itself, perhaps more so, and settler communities in North America and South Africa soon attained a higher rate of net natural increase than the European populations at home.

The demographic transitions in Spanish America were similar but more complex. By the 1570s, Mexico and Peru had overcome the anarchy of the conquest period to become the first territorial empires in

the European world; yet two centuries later, they had become a complex network of plural societies, with little net demographic input from Europe. The Spanish empire in the Americas had begun, not on the initiative of the Spanish government but on that of the conquerors themselves, and they numbered in the low thousands. Their successors were few as well – soldiers, administrators, missionaries, and later on, mine and ranch managers. Spanish America, at any date in the 1500s, was a territorial empire controlled by a tiny European minority.

After that time, the flow of net Spanish immigration to the Americas is difficult to estimate. Some authorities give the figure of 150,000 legal emigrants crossing from Spain to the Americas over the whole period from 1509 to 1740. Others suggest a half million up to 1650 only. These estimates are uncertain because they seldom take account of a large but unspecified number of officials, merchants, and soldiers who returned to Spain after a tour of duty in the Americas. In addition, the migratory flow in the 1500s was largely male – less than 15 percent female before 1550, less than 35 percent female by the end of the century. This suggests that the second generation of Spanish-derived population would be *mestizos,* Spanish only on the father's side.

These patterns of disease, immigration, and reproduction formed the historical demography of Spanish America through the colonial period. No matter what the net migration from Europe, once the sex ratio of overseas Europeans reached parity among American-born Spaniards, the overseas European population rose by natural increase, just as it did at the Cape of Good Hope or in Quebec. So too did the mestizo populations. With time, the Native American decline slowed and stopped, and recovery began, but the timing was not uniform everywhere. Those Amerindian populations that first encountered the alien diseases had begun a strong recovery before the disease crisis reached more isolated regions.

The size of the pre-Columbian population of the Americas is a troubled problem for historians. Not only are census data unavailable, but some historians give high estimates to reflect the high value they place on Native American civilizations. Others derive their figures from archaeological and other samples, and the range of conclusions is very wide. High estimates of recent years are often ten times more than the low, and the greatest discrepancy is found in the early decades after

the European arrival. After the establishment of Spanish colonial governments, the evidence is more secure. Central Mexico is a case in point. As of 1570, central Mexico had about 57,000 whites and mestizos and four million Indians. The foreign element was therefore less than about 1.5 percent of the total population, and the earlier disparity must have been much greater.

By 1700, 130 years later, there were only two million Indians (a 50 percent decrease) as against 400,000 whites and mestizos (a 700 percent increase). The foreign element at that time had risen to 18 percent of the total. Some of this increase certainly came from net immigration from Europe, but most of it was simply population growth. Local population dynamics rather than migration had changed this part of Spanish America from true empire to plural society, just as Quebec changed from trading post to true colony.

British North America passed through another kind of demographic transition during the 1600s and 1700s. The overseas-European population increased dramatically, as it did elsewhere outside tropical lowlands. The Indians that survived the disease crisis, however, were too few to form a working class, as they had in Spanish America. For the most part, the working class in the northern colonies was made up of indentured European servants and their descendants, a few African slaves, some convicts, and some free settlers.

The English, unlike the other colonial powers, sometimes founded true colonies in North America by intent. In the 1600s, it was a common opinion that England was overpopulated, and this opinion lay behind the colonization of Ireland as well. Some settlements were designed to reproduce the society of the mother country, but not all. New York was partly designed to anchor the fur trade through Albany to the west, just as Quebec was to anchor the fur trade of the Saint Lawrence. The South Carolina low country of the early 1700s was more a plantation colony on the West Indian model than it was a colony of settlement.

Nevertheless, more European migrants went to North America in the colonial period than to all other destinations, and their population growth after arrival was even more important. Recent guesses based on spotty immigration figures put the number of arrivals in the mainland British colonies at 360,000 to 720,000, depending on the mode of estimation. Whatever the actual number within that range, the rate of

population growth was so high that this small input produced an over-seas European population of more than three million by 1790.

Even so, the volume of the European immigration was insignificant compared to the flow that would follow in the late 1800s. Imprecise estimates of all European movement overseas by 1790 indicate around a million and a half – far fewer than the total of around eight million Africans landed in the Americas before 1800, and insignificant com-pared to the European emigration overseas in an equivalent time period from 1800 to 1990, sometimes set at sixty million.

The Emergence of Territorial Empire

Territorial empire, like the massive European migrations overseas, belongs to the industrial age. Before about 1750, significant European control over territorial empires was still confined to the Americas, but even then the area governed was a shadow of what text-book maps show as Spanish and Portuguese America. The maps show European claims to sovereignty, whereas real government administration as of 1800 covered only the highlands from central Mexico to central Chile, most Caribbean islands, and much of coastal Brazil. Otherwise, the Europeans actually controlled only enclaves within territory they claimed but did not try to govern. Such enclaves to the north of cen-tral Mexico included scattered mining centers, trading towns such as Santa Fe, and bits of California surrounding mission stations. Elsewhere in North America, the pattern was similar. Real control extended over the coastal settlement areas from Quebec to Georgia, but beyond the Appalachians the dominant pattern was that of an overland trading-post empire. By 1800, not a quarter of the territory of the Americas was actually governed by Europeans.

North of the Black Sea and south of Muscovy, Europe had another frontier of expanding control to the east. At the beginning of the 1600s, this region had been mainly controlled by Tatar nomads left over from Mongol expansion of the 1200s and later, now contested by sedentary states on the borders – Muscovy to the north, Poland and Lithuania to the west, the Hapsburg domains to the southwest, and the Ottoman Empire to the south. The political and military contest between these sedentary states was more fluid than similar frontier struggles in western Europe. Ultimate political control of bureaucratic

structures was less secure than in western Europe; populations were both sparser and more mobile. Over the period from 1600 to about 1800, however, the drift of power was away from the Tatars and Ottomans and in favor of the Russian Empire, and the military and political advance was accompanied by a massive settlement of what was to be Ukraine and southern Russia. It was the beginning of Russian colonization that would ultimately extend beyond the Urals as well.

Before 1800, however, the Russian presence in Siberia took the form of a trading-post empire that stretched eastward to Alaska. The bare beginning of true colonization centered in a narrow strip of land along the line of the later trans-Siberian railroad. In fact, the Russians had begun moving into that corridor a little before 1800, but the main Russian occupation came afterward, along with the Russian acquisition of territorial empire in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In this part of Eurasia, the pattern was that of incipient territorial empires in the south and overland trading-post empires in the north, with enclaves of true colonization scattered in both regions. The whole strategy of European expansion here was under the strong influence of older traditions of conflict between nomadic and sedentary peoples.

Along the southern and eastern coasts of Asia, the pattern of European empire was still that of the trading enclaves, though some territorial control was beginning here and there. In the Philippines, Spain had extended the patterns of control originating in Spanish America. Its bureaucratic administrative structure theoretically covered all the islands, but underneath, strong elements of control remained in local hands, Spanish and Filipino alike. The government in Manila did not even try to administer much, perhaps most, of the Philippine territory it claimed.

The most important European territorial empires in Asia were those ruled by the British and the Dutch East India Companies. They were chartered trading companies, originally intended to supervise trading-post empires. By 1800, the Dutch Company had considerable power over parts of the Indonesian archipelago, but it was mainly exercised for commercial advantage rather than tax revenue, much less day-to-day government administration. The Company's rule over territory, weak as it was, was confined to the western three-quarters of the island of Java. Otherwise it had genuine control over a number of trad-

ing-post towns and some islands of particular importance for the spice trade, like the Malukus.

In India as of 1800, the British East India Company was the dominant authority over the provinces of Bengal and Bihar, but the nature of that authority indicates the transitional stage between trading-post empire and real territorial control. Since the 1740s, European powers, especially Britain and France, had begun to be more than simple traders, even armed traders, and they transferred their European rivalry into Indian politics. The Mughal Empire, which had ruled north India through most of the 1500s and 1600s, was no longer a strong central authority except in name. Provincial rulers held the real power, though they might rule in the Mughal name. This fluid situation opened the possibility for the European companies to recruit Indian soldiers to oppose one another and to use their military power to participate actively in an Indian state system.

At first, the Europeans sought only to influence Indian rulers, but that influence gradually increased to the point that they were de facto rulers. In 1772, the British East India Company became, in theory, a corporate official of the Mughal empire for the provinces of Bengal and Bihar, in the hinterland of Calcutta. It assumed the post of revenue collector, or *diwan,* for those provinces but kept the revenue for itself instead of passing it on to the Mughal capital in Delhi. The actual tax collectors were Indian, as they had always been, but they now worked under supervision of British Company officials. Tax collection led the Company on to take over other administrative and judicial powers, at least over the top level of government. Still later, it began the indirect supervision of Indian "native states," which would agree to accept the authority of a British "resident," in effect a kind of ambassador whose advice the ruler was bound to accept in crucial matters.

Beginning with these convenient fictions, the authority of the British company increased until by 1805, it was the most powerful single territorial power in India. By the 1840s, the British East India Company was so powerful that its word could often be law even within most Indian states still not formally annexed to British India. Even so, the authority of the Company and of Crown officials above it was imbedded in a congeries of Mughal institutions, which were only gradually Westernized in the course of the 1800s.

The Changing Reality of Imperial Power

The powers of governments have varied over time, although the early industrial age made available a new technology of government, which, with local modification, has become worldwide. In the agricultural age government administration differed greatly from one culture to another. Feudal Europe was very different from Song China. Many historical atlases show a map of "Charlemagne's Empire," in a solid color and stretching over much of northwest Europe from a capital at Aachen. Charlemagne's overrule may have been recognized in some sense over this vast territory, but the levels of literacy and governmental efficiency in Europe at that time were so low that orders could not have been reliably transmitted everywhere, much less obeyed. It is doubtful whether a substantial minority of the population were conscious that they were part of an empire by any name.

Maps of later periods show such events as the transfer of Alsace and Lorraine from France to Germany in 1871. The meaning in that case was far more real. Taxes went to a new destination. Orders given were normally carried out; police and judicial authorities exercised control within a central framework of authority. Public education by that time was nearly universal, and changing the language of education from French to German meant something important, even though the people of Alsace continued to speak their own home language, which was neither. Hardly anyone, however ill-educated, could fail to be aware of the change. European governments in the early industrial age controlled a largely literate population through an increasingly efficient public administration, which controlled wide areas of public service. No preindustrial government had such extensive power to influence its subjects in so many aspects of their lives.

European empires overseas had increasing administrative power as well, but an enormous gap could sometimes exist between their claims to authority and the reality of power they were capable of exercising. The European use of grandiose titles to empire goes back at least to the early 1500s, when Manoel I of Portugal claimed the title "Lord of the Conquest, Navigation, and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, and India." At the time, very few people in these territories had even heard of Portugal, but the claim is not as foolish as it sounds. In the European context of that time, it was merely the assertion of a

Portuguese monopoly over Asian trade, to the exclusion of other Europeans, and a warning that other Europeans who attempted to conquer Asian or African territory could count on Portuguese opposition.

At other times, Europeans underplayed rather than overplayed the reality of their power. In 1882, a British army occupied Egypt, but the European diplomatic setting of the time made it inconvenient for Britain either to annex Egypt or to withdraw. As a way out, the British Foreign Office established its control over major operations of the Egyptian government and ruled Egypt in fact for decades. British over-rule began in 1882, and a measure of control over Egyptian foreign policy lasted until 1952, but Egypt was a legal part of the British Empire only from 1914 to 1922. Everybody important knew what was going on, but it was a convenient fiction to call the British governor "consul general" rather than governor, and to rule the protectorate through the Foreign Office rather than the Colonial Office.

Openly disguised control of this kind was common in the age of empire. The map was dotted with *Schutzgebieten,* protectorates, overseas provinces, Socialist Soviet Republics, African Homelands, and other disguised forms of territorial empire. In most cases, the disguise was merely a legal fiction for the sake of public relations, not a serious effort to fool either the conquered people or the world at large.

The true degree of outside control, nevertheless, is sometimes hard to ascertain. It was theoretically possible a the height of European empire to set up a fully bureaucratic imperial administration, with the apparatus of the modern state at its command and with little or no participation on the part of the local population. But this kind of imperial government was rare outside of plural societies such as Algeria or South Africa, where a local population of overseas Europeans was available as administrators. Elsewhere, the vast majority of police, clerical workers, and low-level administrators were recruited locally. Sometimes high-level administrators were local as well, such as the rajas at the head of Native States in India.

The proportion of European administrators to population could vary greatly, but even in the most heavily administered colonies they were comparatively few. The Belgian Congo was tightly ruled, but it had only about one European administrator for 1,500 subjects. In other African territories, where the Europeans made a conscious decision to

administer through existing authorities, the ratio might run as high as one to 50,000 or even more.

It was one question to decide how much authority to delegate to local subordinates, a second to decide how much authority to exercise at all. At one end of the spectrum, a European power might claim sovereignty over a territory in order to warn off European rivals but not attempt to rule over it. Actual influence might be limited to threats or an occasional punitive expedition. The Spanish and Portuguese claim to share sovereignty over the Americas in the colonial period was largely of this sort, and well into the twentieth century, Latin American republics left much of the Amazon basin and some of the Pacific coastal plain unadministered. Neither the Australians nor the Dutch attempted to administer all the interior of New Guinea until well after the Second World War. Unless the potential subjects had valuable resources such as minerals or oil, it was sometimes cheaper and easier to let them go their own way

Another possibility was to divide authority into a European sphere and a local sphere. Europeans often preferred to take over foreign affairs, the military, revenue collection, or posts and telegraphs, which seemed to affect their interests, leaving other matters to the local authorities, as the British did in Egypt. In other places, like parts of China in the late 1800s or the Persian Gulf sheikdoms in the early twentieth century, it is unclear whether Europeans were ruling at all or simply giving advice with a certain weight of power behind it.

A similar problem existed even with territories that were formally under European rule. Precolonial authorities could be left to rule their territory with the advice of European officials. Sometimes the advice was perfunctory, but at other times it was so detailed and precise that the advisers became the real rulers. The reality of imperial rule was therefore highly variable from time to time and place to place, even within a single colonial empire. Published maps colored appropriately to show French, British, or Portuguese territory merely showed claims to legal sovereignty, not the reality of power exercised on the ground.

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