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Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories

places in the various texts, with the enveloping setting—empire—there to make connections with, to develop, elaborate, expand, or criticize. Neither culture nor imperialism is inert, and so the connections between them as historical experiences are dynamic and complex. My principal aim is not to separate but to connect, and I am interested in this for the main philosophical and methodological reason that cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, impure, and the time has come in cultural analysis to reconnect their analysis with their actuality.

II · IMAGES OF THE PAST, PURE AND IMPURE

As the twentieth century moves to a close, there has been a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines *between* cultures, the divisions and differences that not only allow us to discriminate one culture from another, but also enable us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote.

There is in all nationally defined cultures, I believe, an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance. In this, French and British, Indian and Japanese cultures concur. At the same time, paradoxically, we have never been as aware as we now are of how oddly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains, cross national boundaries, defy the *police* action of simple dogma and loud patriotism. Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more 'foreign' elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude. Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?

These are not nostalgically academic or theoretical questions, for as a brief excursion or two will ascertain, they have important social and political consequences. Both London and Paris have

large immigrant populations from the former colonies, which themselves have a large residue of British and French culture in their daily life. But that is obvious. Consider, for a more complex example, the well-known issues of the image of classical Greek antiquity or of tradition as a determinant of national identity. Studies such as Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* have accentuated the extraordinary influence of today's anxieties and agendas on the pure (even purged) images we construct of a privileged, genealogically useful past, a past in which we exclude unwanted elements, vestiges, narratives. Thus, according to Bernal, whereas Greek civilization was known originally to have roots in Egyptian, Semitic, and various other southern and eastern cultures, it was redesigned as 'Aryan' during the course of the nineteenth century, its Semitic and African roots either actively purged or hidden from view. Since Greek writers themselves openly acknowledged their culture's hybrid past, European philologists acquired the ideological habit of passing over these embarrassing passages without comment, in the interests of Attic purity.²⁴ (One also recalls that only in the nineteenth century did European historians of the Crusades begin *not* to allude to the practice of cannibalism among the Frankish knights, even though eating human flesh is mentioned unashamedly in contemporary Crusader chronicles.)

No less than the image of Greece, images of European authority were buttressed and shaped during the nineteenth century, and where but in the manufacture of rituals, ceremonies, and traditions could this be done? This is the argument put forward by Hobsbawm, Ranger, and the other contributors to *The Invention of Tradition*. At a time when the older filaments and organizations that bound pre-modern societies internally were beginning to fray, and when the social pressures of administering numerous overseas territories and large new domestic constituencies mounted, the ruling élites of Europe felt the clear need to project their power backwards in time, giving it a history and legitimacy that only tradition and longevity could impart. Thus in 1876 Victoria was declared Empress of India, her Viceroy, Lord Lytton, was sent there on a visit, greeted and celebrated in 'traditional' jamborees and durbars all over the country, as well as in a great Imperial

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Assemblage in Delhi; as if her rule was not mainly a matter of power and unilateral edict, rather than age-old custom.²⁵

Similar constructions have been made on the opposite side, that is, by insurgent 'natives' about their pre-colonial past, as in the case of Algeria during the War of Independence (1954-62), when decolonization encouraged Algerians and Muslims to create images of what they supposed themselves to have been prior to French colonization. This strategy is at work in what many national poets or men of letters say and write during independence or liberation struggles elsewhere in the colonial world. I want to underline the mobilizing power of the images and traditions brought forth, and their fictional, or at least romantically coloured, fantastic quality. Think of what Yeats does for the Irish past, with its Cuchulains and its great houses, which give the nationalist struggle something to revive and admire. In post-colonial national states, the liabilities of such essences as the Celtic spirit, *négritude*, or Islam are clear: they have much to do not only with the native manipulators, who also use them to cover up contemporary faults, corruptions, tyrannies, but also with the embattled imperial contexts out of which they came and in which they were felt to be necessary.

Though for the most part the colonies have won their independence, many of the imperial attitudes underlying colonial conquest continue. In 1910 the French advocate of colonialism, Jules Harmand, said:

It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognizing that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity. Material power is nothing but a means to that end.²⁶

As a precursor of today's polemics about the superiority of Western civilization over others, the supreme value of purely Western

humanities as extolled by conservative philosophers like Allan Bloom, the essential inferiority (and threat) of the non-Westerner as claimed by Japan-bashers, ideological Orientalists, and critics of 'native' regression in Africa and Asia, Harmand's declaration has a stunning prescience.

More important than the past itself, therefore, is its bearing upon cultural attitudes in the present. For reasons that are partly embedded in the imperial experience, the old divisions between colonizer and colonized have re-emerged in what is often referred to as the North—South relationship, which has entailed defensiveness, various kinds of rhetorical and ideological combat, and a simmering hostility that is quite likely to trigger devastating wars—in some cases it already has. Are there ways we can reconceive the imperial experience in other than compartmentalized terms, so as to transform our understanding of both the past and the present and our attitude towards the future?

We must start by characterizing the commonest ways that people handle the tangled, many-sided legacy of imperialism, not just those who left the colonies but also those who were there in the first place and who remained, the natives. Many people in England probably feel a certain remorse or regret about their nation's Indian experience, but there are also many people who miss the good old days, even though the value of those days, the reason they ended, and their own attitudes towards native nationalism are all unresolved, still volatile issues. This is especially the case when race relations are involved, for instance during the crisis over the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the subsequent *fatwa* calling for Rushdie's death issued by Ayatollah Khomeini.

But, equally, debate in Third World countries about colonialist practice and the imperialist ideology that sustained it is extremely lively and diverse. Large groups of people believe that the bitterness and humiliations of the experience which virtually enslaved them nevertheless delivered benefits—liberal ideas, national self-consciousness, and technological goods—that over time seem to have made imperialism much less unpleasant. Other people in the post-colonial age retrospectively reflected on colonialism the better to understand the difficulties of the present in newly inde-

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pendent states. Real problems of democracy, development, and destiny, are attested to by the state persecution of intellectuals who carry on their thought and practice publicly and courageously—Eqbal Ahmad and Faiz Ahmad Faiz in Pakistan, Ngugi wa Thiongo in Kenya, or Abdelrahman el Munif in the Arab world—major thinkers and artists whose sufferings have not blunted the intransigence of their thought, or inhibited the severity of their punishment.

Neither Munif, Ngugi, nor Faiz, nor any other like them, was anything but unstinting in his hatred of implanted colonialism or the imperialism that kept it going. Ironically, they were listened to only partially, whether in the West or by the ruling authorities in their own societies. They were likely, on the one hand, to be considered by many Western intellectuals retrospective Jeremiahs denouncing the evils of a past colonialism, and, on the other, to be treated by their governments in Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Pakistan, as agents of outside powers who deserved imprisonment or exile. The tragedy of this experience, and indeed of so many post-colonial experiences, derives from the limitations of the attempts to deal with relationships that are polarized, radically uneven, remembered differently. The spheres, the sites of intensity, the agendas, and the constituencies in the metropolitan and ex-colonized worlds appear to overlap only partially. The small area that is perceived as common does not, at this point, provide for more than what might be called a *rhetoric of blame*.

I want first to consider the actualities of the intellectual terrains both common and discrepant in post-imperial public discourse, especially concentrating on what in this discourse gives rise to and encourages the rhetoric and politics of blame. Then, using the perspectives and methods of what might be called a comparative literature of imperialism, I shall consider the ways in which a reconsidered or revised notion of how a post-imperial intellectual attitude might expand the overlapping community between metropolitan and formerly colonized societies. By looking at the different experiences contrapuntally, as making up a set of what I call intertwined and overlapping histories, I shall try to formulate an alternative both to a politics of blame and to the even more destructive politics of confrontation and hostility. A more interest-

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ing type of secular interpretation can emerge, altogether more rewarding than the denunciations of the past, the expressions of regret for its having ended, or—even more wasteful because violent and far too easy and attractive—the hostility between Western and non-Western cultures that leads to crises. The world is too small and interdependent to let these passively happen.

III · TWO VISIONS IN HEART OF DARKNESS

Domination and inequities of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society. But in today's global setting they are also interpretable as having something to do with imperialism, its history, its new forms. The nations of contemporary Asia, Latin America, and Africa are politically independent but in many ways are as dominated and dependent as they were when ruled directly by European powers. On the one hand, this is the consequence of self-inflicted wounds, critics like V. S. Naipaul are wont to say: *they* (everyone knows that 'they' means coloureds, wogs, niggers) are to blame for what 'they' are, and it's no use droning on about the legacy of imperialism. On the other hand, blaming the Europeans sweepingly for the misfortunes of the present is not much of an alternative. What we need to do is to look at these matters as a network of interdependent histories that it would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand.

The point here is not complicated. If while sitting in Oxford, Paris, or New York you tell Arabs or Africans that they belong to a basically sick or unregenerate culture, you are unlikely to convince them. Even if you prevail over them, they are not going to concede to you your essential superiority or your right to rule them despite your evident wealth and power. The history of this stand-off is manifest throughout colonies where white masters were once unchallenged but finally driven out. Conversely, the triumphant natives soon enough found that they needed the West and that the idea of *total* independence was a nationalist fiction designed mainly for what Fanon calls the 'nationalist bourgeoisie', who in turn often ran the new countries with a callous, exploitative tyranny reminiscent of the departed masters.