

# **Colonization: A Global History**

Marc Ferro



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## COLONIZATION: A GLOBAL HISTORY

‘An extraordinarily adventurous work, in many respects almost a global history of the making of the modern world.’

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‘A lively and fascinating synthesis dealing with a major theme in the history of the world. Studiously avoiding the pitfalls of Eurocentrism, the author casts his net wide and his coverage is far more extensive than in any comparable work.’

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Marc Ferro’s *Colonization: A Global History* is a wide-ranging comparative account of one of the most significant themes in recent history. Uniquely, Ferro considers European, Japanese, Turkish and Arab colonization. He emphasizes ex-colonial views, and does not subscribe to the orthodox view that the history of colonization is necessarily followed by the history of the struggle of the people for their independence. He examines the impact on decolonization of other factors, such as globalization.

*Colonization: A Global History* is also unusual in giving prominence to the social and cultural dimensions of colonialism. Ferro analyses the new types of societies and economies brought about by colonization. He considers, for example, the impact of colonization in areas such as education and medicine.

Ferro’s richly textured overview offers a stimulating range of perspectives on a topic of considerable significance. It will be of interest to those researching and studying all aspects of colonization and decolonization.

# COLONIZATION: A GLOBAL HISTORY

*Marc Ferro*



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*Histoire des colonisations*

Translated by K.D.Prithipaul

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## PREFACE

During the time of the colonies we were given the rose-coloured view. Of course the colonist worked hard. Persecuted in his own country before setting forth, he had gone to settle down in a place to which he had been led by the Almighty. There he intended to cultivate the land, to grow and blossom, and there to multiply. However, to this end “he had to defend himself against aggressors, rebels and other such swine”. How great was his glory! How meritorious it was to suffer in order to be a conqueror!

Today the tune has changed. A guilty conscience has taken over. Anti-colonialism, once confined to the extreme left in France and to old-fashioned liberals across the Channel, has become universal. There are very few false notes. History is called upon to judge, in turn, the terrible misdeeds of the slave trade, the tragic toll of forced labour and God knows what else besides! Drawing up a final balance sheet for the French, Dutch, or British presence, one cannot find a single orange that was not defiled, a single apple that was not rotten.

Thus, with unsurpassed intransigence and as the final prerogative of pride, the European historical memory has retained for itself one last privilege: that of painting its own misdeeds in dark colours and evaluating them on its own terms.

However this audacity raises some questions. For instance, when the anti-colonialist tradition claims that no rickshaw was shown at the Exhibition of 1931 “thanks to” the action of the League of the Rights of Man, one wonders. A few years earlier, at the Marseilles Fair, had not the Annamites vowed not to play the role of coolies and that, if forced to do so, they would set fire to the Exhibition Park?

In short these Annamites, these Blacks, these Arabs, played their part as well. It is advisable to let them have their say, for, if they remember the infamous crimes already mentioned, they also recall with gratitude their school teachers and their physicians, malaria and the White Fathers. For this too was colonization. Likewise the struggle for independence was not merely a “decolonization”.

The histories of colonization have traditionally been told from the different points of view prevailing in the mother country. As Frantz Fanon puts it, “because colonization is the extension of this mother country, the history which

the colonist writes is not that of the despoiled country, but the history of his own nation”.

But here I intend to adopt a different plan. In the first instance, it is necessary to take into account the past history of colonized societies, because the relationship between the colonists and the colonized to a large extent depended on it. Nobody nowadays asserts, as they did till very recently, that these peoples have never had a history. We no longer speak of “dark centuries”, but rather of “opaque centuries” (see Lucette Valensi), because they were unintelligible to those who came into contact with them.

These peoples were not similar, not uniform merely by the fact that they had not yet been colonized. Further, if it is true that one colonization was different from another, the response of the conquered societies was equally varied in terms of their respective pasts and of their own identities.

Moreover, it is difficult to understand why historical analysis should assume a vision of the past which Europeanizes the colonial phenomenon. Admittedly, for five centuries Europeans embodied it and thereby set their seal on the unification of the world. But other colonizations have also contributed to fashioning the present image of the planet.

Prior to Europe, there were the colonizations of the Greeks and the Romans. There were also those of the Arabs and the Turks, who conquered the coasts of the Mediterranean, part of black Africa and of West Asia, reaching as far as India, which had itself, at the beginning of the common era, colonized Sri Lanka (Ceylon), part of the Indonesian peninsula and the Sunda Islands. Nor should one forget the Chinese who, in the fifteenth century, explored the eastern seaboard of Africa and colonized Tibet. The Japanese, likewise, conquered and colonized Yesso shortly before the Russians reached Sakhalin and the French, Canada.

But my intention is not to draw up an inventory of all the phenomena of expansion, or of colonization, or even to make the European colonial enterprise seem commonplace. It is, rather, to compare and contrast that enterprise on occasions with others.

This bias in favour of a global perspective derives from a concern not to reproduce a Eurocentric view of history. It determines other points of view as well.

First, I shall be considering colonization as a phenomenon which cannot be dissociated from imperialism, that is, from forms of domination which may, or may not, have assumed the appearance of colonization. On the one hand, for populations who were subjugated without interruption from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries—in India, in Angola, in the West Indies—there was continuity, and no break, in their state of dependency. This was so even if, during the age of imperialism, that is, from the end of the nineteenth century, their dependency assumed new forms. On the other hand, certain historical or geographical conglomerations which were not colonies—for example, the

Ottoman Empire shortly before 1914, Iran, some Central or South American states—have lived their history as a struggle against the imperialist powers.

Secondly, I do not subscribe to the orthodox opinion that in every case there was first the history of colonization and then later the history of the people's struggle for their independence. In Benin or Burma or Vietnam, for example, these histories were synchronic. Moreover, although the colonial discourse may have clouded over the views of those who were vanquished, this does not mean that the latter had, while in subjection, lost the very idea of recovering control of their own history. Hence, in this book, the term decolonization has been used with prudence, for it still connotes to some extent the persistence of a Eurocentric view.

Lastly, in analysing these problems, I felt the urgent need to free the history of colonization from the ghetto to which it had been confined by tradition. It is indeed revealing that in the great works of reflection on memory or on the past—of France, for example—no mention is ever made of the colonial societies. Should one see this as an omission, a lost opportunity, or a taboo?

Undoubtedly, as far as European colonization is concerned, many studies have cogently analysed some of its reverse effects, especially the economic ones. One thinks of the work done on Seville, Bordeaux, Bristol, Nantes. However, the question has scarcely been raised as to whether the types of relationships established with the colonies were all specific, or whether they ought not to be compared with others.

So, first question: the case of the Russian Empire entitles one to ask whether the national problem and the colonial problem are different. Is it the particular status of subject peoples, the non-participation of elites in the central authority, that constitutes this difference?

And, above all, there is a second question that remains open: have not, in Europe itself, certain political regimes behaved towards subject populations in the same way as was done in the colonies? It has been noted that racism became more marked there as time went on. Did it not produce situations similar to those which the Nazis institutionalized? Is it worth asking such questions? One is prompted to do so by certain telltale signs.

One is struck by a sacrilegious analogy when looking at images of the British presence in India, especially the pictures of the Great Durbar of 1911, preserved in the National Film Archive of London: the march past, the helmets, the discipline, the theatrical space skilfully and aesthetically organized along a plunging perspective towards the Emperor George V, the public held at a distance by cordons of soldiers. One cannot resist the feeling that this coronation foreshadows Hitler's rallies of twenty years later.<sup>1</sup> Is this a fortuitous analogy?

Here is another parallel, an inverse one, established by Aimé Césaire, in 1955:

What the very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against humanity, not the humiliation of humanity itself, but the crime against the white man...; it is the crime of having applied to Europe the colonialist actions as were borne up till now by the Arabs, the coolies of India and the negroes of Africa.

(Césaire, 1955)

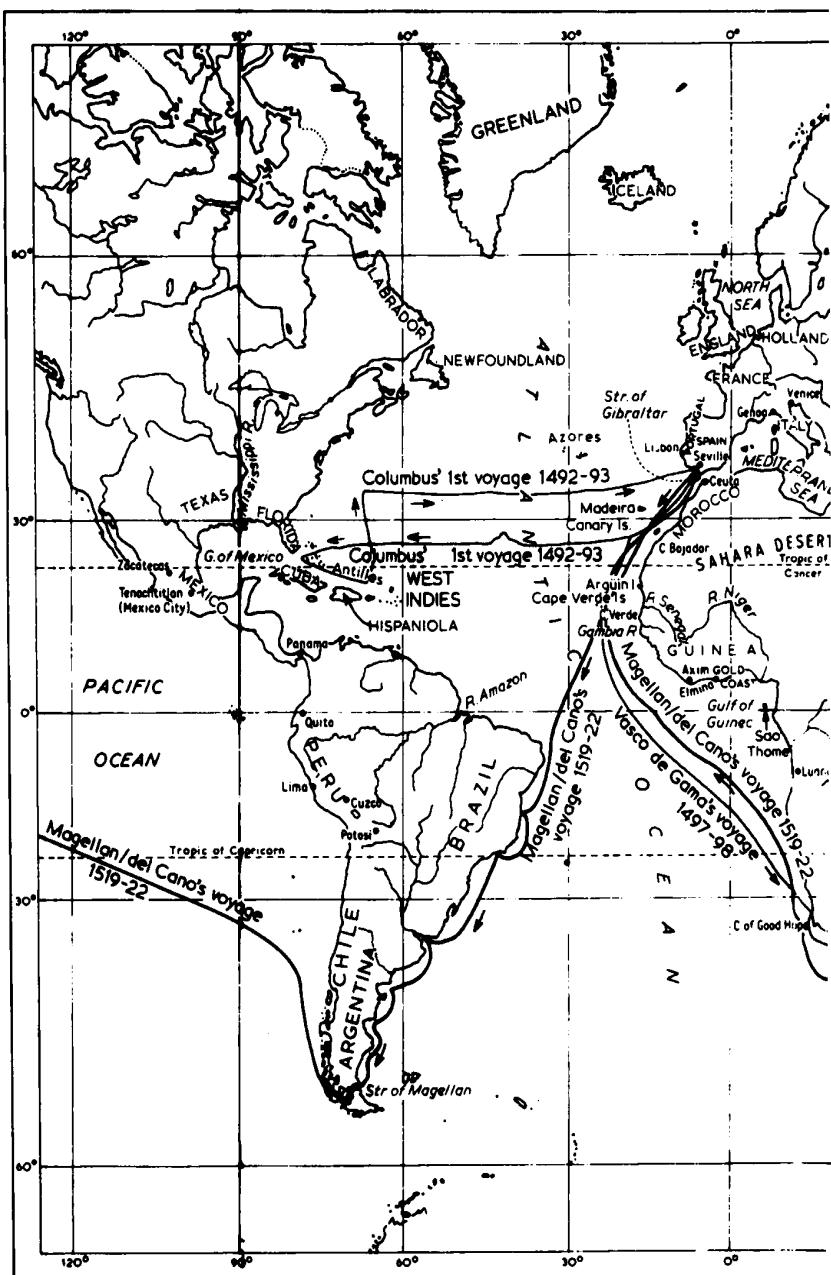
A final, and recent, sacrilegious analogy is found in the proposal made by the Prime Minister of Western Australia in 1993 to submit to a popular referendum a decision of the Supreme Court to restore part of the land of which the aborigines had been robbed in the last century. This led the Anglican Bishop of Perth to declare: “The State Government is adopting the methods of the Nazis.” This recourse to the “democratic” will against the appeal to equity, to just right, is indeed one of the methods of totalitarianism, one of the problems of our time.

These premises account for the plan of this book. It deals with each problem from the time of its emergence in history, examining conquests, divisions or rivalries, from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries up to the present conflict in the Kurile Islands, as well as the views of those who were vanquished, their resistance, the pitch-black or rosy legends of colonization, the movements initiated by the colonists, the constitution of new societies.

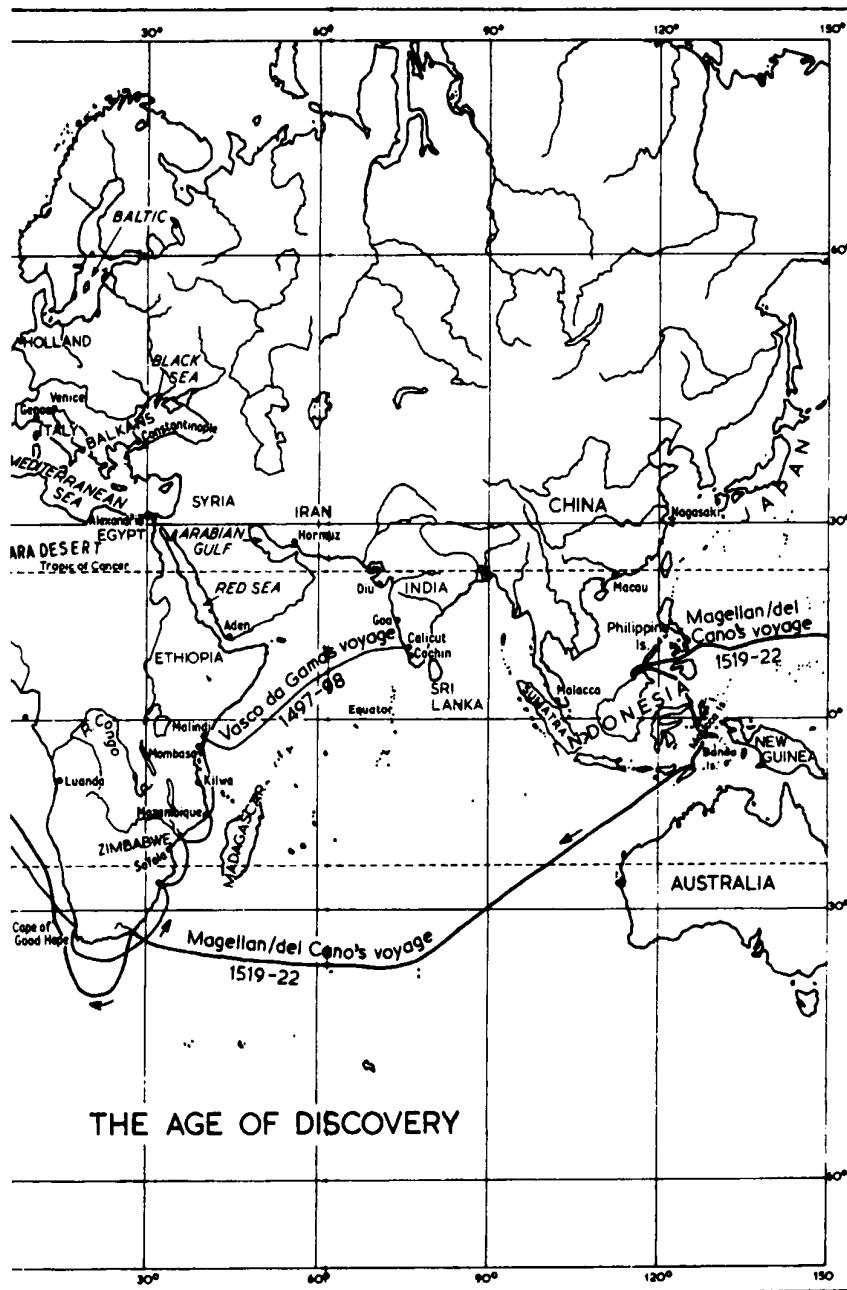
Undoubtedly this plan diverges to some extent from traditional scholarship which examines first the discoveries, then colonial expansion up to the nineteenth century, then imperialism, and lastly “decolonization”. But I believe it will help us to understand better the complexity of certain phenomena, especially the nature of certain nations, their appearance and disappearance in history, and the mentalities which have been developing slowly down to our own day.

In adopting the points of view of the various protagonists in this story, I am not suggesting that the intermingling of these different memories suffices in itself to explain the many problems posed by colonization and its consequences. But they do provide an essential piece of data, since imaginings are as much a part of history as historical fact and, even when it is mistaken, memory remains both an element and an agent of history.

That is why this work is a comparative one, organized in such a way as to explain situations and problems, rather than to follow the customary procedures of formal construction.



Source: David Arnold, *The Age of Discovery*, Routledge, 1994



## 1

# COLONIZATION OR IMPERIALISM

## **Gold or Christ**

Colonization is associated with the occupation of a foreign land, with its being brought under cultivation, with the settlement of colonists. If this definition of the term “colony” is used, the phenomenon dates from the Greek period. Likewise we speak of Athenian, then Roman “imperialism”. Has there been any change in the meaning of this term?

Western historical tradition, however, places the date of the colonial phenomenon at the time of the Great Discoveries. For example, according to the *Histoire de la France coloniale*, published in 1991, the “real colonial adventure” began with the explorers of the fifteenth century, when Jean de Béthencourt received from Henry IV, King of Castile, the Canary Islands as fief. It goes on to say that the exploration and discoveries in America took place later: the Bay of Rio de Janeiro and the Florida coast were occupied towards the middle of the sixteenth century, prior to any interest being directed towards Canada, during the reign of Henri IV and thanks to Champlain. This way of looking at colonization is equally valid for Portugal, Spain and England. That is, historical tradition links the expansion of these countries to the discovery of distant lands in the West Indies, followed by the installation of trading-posts along the routes of Africa, India and Asia.

Thus terms such as “colonist” and “colonization” disappear from the vocabulary of the history covering the period from the Roman era to the fifteenth century. The exceptions, during these twelve centuries, are the colonies or trading-posts which Venice or Genoa established on the other side of the Mediterranean or on the Black Sea, but still a good way from home.

However the case of Russia needs to be thought about. “Colonization is the essential element in our history”, wrote the historian M.Kluchevski in 1911. “Its development explains the growth as well as the changes experienced by the state and the society since the time of Rus, the Russia of the Dnieper.” Beginning in the twelfth century, the incursions of Novgorod, then those of Suzdal in the direction of the Urals and beyond, ended in the submission of the Mordvins and

other peoples. Interrupted by the Tartar invasion (1220), the incursions, following the expulsion of the Tartars after the victory of Kulikovo, were resumed in 1390.

But were these, in a strict sense, “colonial” expeditions? In any case, since the beginning of the eleventh century, Novgorod had been sending men up as far as the Pechora. This region, called the Zovolochie, to the east of the Dvina, was the habitat of foxes and sables for which a tribute had to be paid. The colonists lived in Matygori, Ukhto-Ostrov, and received their instructions from the officials and civil servants of the great city, the *posadniki*.

Up to the twelfth century the expansion proceeded without any noteworthy impediment. But the situation changed as soon as the principality of Suzdal-Rostov freed itself from its dependence on Kiev and intercepted the traffic between Novgorod and its colonies. In 1169 this principality provoked their secession and its colonists joined Suzdal. At the same time Suzdal-Rostov attacked the Bulgarians who were then grouped in the region of present-day Perm, in the Urals. The latter were themselves engaged in a struggle with the “natives”, the “Yura” or “Yugia” of the chronicles of the period. Within a short time, the Russians completed the conquest of the territory of the Mordvin.

At this point the Tartars rose up. They reached Nijni-Novgorod, established in 1221, the former Mordvin territories and the countries of the Dvina. Novgorod in the west was the only city to resist them (1232).

Consequently the case of Russia would indicate that, between the territorial expansion in the direction of Siberia and the conquest of the Tartar and Turkish territories, there is certainly a gap, but there is also a similarity, except in the difficulty of conquest. Thus, territorial expansion and colonization are more or less synonymous. But, in the West, the distinction is carefully emphasized: sea space is supposed to constitute the difference between the former, which is part of the national question, and the colonial question as such.

### *The spice route: how much is this explanation worth ?*

How good a criterion is sea space? Here we are confronted with the problem of Spain and Portugal. In these countries the Americas are viewed as a land of conquest, of colonization. But can one not say the same about the furthest advances of the Reconquista?—beyond Granada, into the Riff and on to the Atlantic coast; from the Portuguese Algarve, that is the Al Gharb, as far as Tangiers and Mazagan, the conquered territories which were retaken by Don Sebastian, leading in 1578 to the disastrous defeat of Alcazarquivir, the battle of the Three Kings. This foray, like the Russian expansion beyond the Volga, is an example of continuity with former enterprises; there is no evidence of discontinuity.

It is now evident that the history of colonization cannot be made to start with the Great Discoveries overseas, that is, with the search for a route to India. The

discoveries may have altered the dimensions of the phenomenon of colonization and perhaps its nature, but expansionism preceded it. The need to bypass the Turkish Empire, with all its consequences, does not by itself fully account for the different dimensions of the expansionist colonial phenomenon.

This is precisely what the Arab tradition holds. The Arabs believe that European expansion began with the Crusades, the first expression of “imperialism”. The Western tradition, by contrast, views the Crusades as an attempt to reconquer the Holy Land from Islam which had seized a Christian country. In any event, a European history of colonization must of necessity take the perimeter of Christendom as its starting point.

From the seventh century on, Arab Islam had unified the greater part of that Mediterranean world which had been fragmented since the division of the Roman Empire and amputated by the penetration of the “Barbarians”. In the east and west, Byzantium and the Carolingian Empire constituted, in the face of Islam and the Arabs, the two poles of Christian resistance. But, for the Muslims, the barbarian kingdoms of the West scarcely counted.<sup>1</sup> Only the Roman Empire stood as a real obstacle to the total reunification of the Mediterranean space. For the Muslims, Byzantium represented the survival of a state that was dominated by an outmoded religion, Christianity. The break-up of the Arab Empire began in the following centuries, under the pressure of internal, theological or dynastic conflicts between the Shiites and the Sunnis, but also as a result of the fragmentation of economic areas and of the difficulty of controlling such a vast territory, stretching from India to the far West.

As a result the Christian marches gradually succeeded in liberating themselves: in the West, beginning with the Asturias; in the East, thanks to the action of the Bagration dynasty which, for a while, “freed” Armenia and later Georgia. Was this a liberation? Was it a decolonization? Then, according to the Christian tradition, came the era of the Crusades, “for the reconquest of the tomb of Christ”. This is how Ibn al-Athir, an Arab historian who lived in those times, refers to the earliest expeditions: “The first appearance of the *Empire* of the Franks (my italics), their invasion of the land of Islam occurred in 478 (A.D. 1086) when they captured Toledo ... Then they attacked Sicily, Africa and finally, in 490, Syria.” Even in the twentieth century the establishment of the Frankish States of Syria is thought of as a harbinger of the future “invasions”, that of Israel being the latest. Moreover if the last crusade was indeed that of Saint Louis at Tunis, in 1270, it became possible subsequently to speak of a “thirteenth crusade” when, under the aegis of the Papacy and of Philip II of Spain, three centuries later, the Christian fleets defeated Islam at the battle of Lepanto (1571). In the meantime the Turks had taken over from the Arabs, destroyed their empire and forced them into subjection. That was a dramatic upset which the Arabo-Islamic tradition conceals even today, as if the destroyers of the past greatness of the Arabs had

been, not the Turks, but the Westerners who, during the period of imperialism, had renewed the attack.

When, after their victory over the Arabs, the Ottoman Turks replaced them, they did actually launch a new *jihad* which culminated with the fall, in 1453, of Byzantium, the Eastern Roman Empire, followed by the march upon Vienna, the capital of the Hapsburgs. Never had the Muslim Turkish Empire been as powerful as it was during the time of Soliman. The wars of Philip II and the battle of Lepanto constituted a halt to the second expansion of Islam. In the light of these events, should one speak of a conquest, or of a colonization?

#### *The four routes*

Christianity's counter-attack took place elsewhere and in a different manner. On one hand, in order to be able to trade with India and China, well known since the travels of Marco Polo, it was necessary to search for new routes to bypass the Ottoman Empire. However the expedition of Vasco da Gama had a religious connotation as well. When, after going round Africa, he arrived at Calicut the navigator declared "that he had come in search of Christians and spices". And, like the Portuguese, the Ottomans assimilated the trade associated with the Great Discoveries to one of the forms of holy war. "Let us dig a canal at Suez", they said at the time, "so that we may go to India and Sind, drive away the Infidels and bring back precious commodities."

Thus one ought not to overlook the context of the holy war in a search for the origins of the "discoveries" and of the history of colonization. As Fernand Braudel has shown, the main activities in trade and politics did indeed shift, around 1580, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. The legacy of the preceding conflicts was none the less still vivid in the memory of those who had not broken away from this past by transferring their attention to other worlds. Bernard Lewis has shown that, in the Islamic world, the remembrance of past greatness is the better preserved because Islam has a single dominant language, Arabic, which ensures the omnipresence of the Quran, while the "memory and the learning of the Infidels are dispersed in more than twenty-five languages". One comes across this manner of judging the other again, several centuries later, among the English colonizers in India, the French in black Africa, or the Russians in the Caucasus. As a result when the Christian reappears, in 1798 at Alexandria, and subsequently at Algiers in 1830, for the Muslim he remains the Infidel—still scorned and ignored. But if he establishes himself, takes command, colonizes, he very soon generates a trauma which is expressed with singular violence:

We have humiliated emirs more powerful than you. They have knelt down before our spears, their women have been our mats.

The gallop of our horses made the mountains of Jemanah quake.  
 We have pitched our tents in Voutoulou and in Damascus.  
 We have chased from this land all the enemies who, like hyenas,  
 were harassing us.

I have seen what happened yesterday, I know all that will happen tomorrow.

*Songs of war and of love of Islam*

This resentment provides a clue to understanding the violence of the events which were soon to follow.

**The second route** The nature of the efforts of exploration in the direction of the Americas is not without a connection with the preceding ones. Actually the writings of Columbus himself bear this out. He testifies that during his first voyage gold, or rather the search for gold, was omnipresent. On 15 October 1492 he wrote in his diary: “I do not want to stop, but to proceed further to visit many islands and to discover gold.”

But Christopher Columbus was not out simply to enrich himself personally and his sailors. He also aimed to enrich his patrons, the Kings of Spain, “so that they should understand the importance of the enterprise”. For him wealth was important first and foremost because it meant the recognition of his role as a discoverer. Furthermore, this thirst for money is justified by a religious vocation which is nothing less than the expansion of Christianity. On 26 December 1492 he wrote in his diary that he “hopes to find gold in such quantities that the kings will be able, within three years, to prepare for and undertake *the conquest of the Holy Land*”.

**The third route** Christopher Columbus was obsessed by the idea of a crusade: the reconquest of Jerusalem was one of his aims. We may observe that the same applied to the third route which was supposed to lead to India by way of the interior of Africa, and whose very existence was questionable. As the work of Geneviève Bouchon has shown, the purpose of reaching India through the Kingdom of Prester John was an alliance with Ethiopia to take the Empire of the Moors in the rear. For her part Queen Eleni felt the need to loosen the grip of Islam which controlled all the accesses of her kingdom to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The political worries of the queen converged with the religious preoccupations of the Coptic Metropolitan, whose nomination was in the control of the Egyptians. He wanted to have a closer relationship with Rome. So the decision was taken to send Mateus, the Metropolitan of the Ethiopian Church, on his famous mission from Ethiopia to Lisbon, *via* India.

Mateus met Albuquerque in India. The latter grasped the full import of the enterprise. At the same time he saw the illusory character of any relationships which the Negus might establish with the King of Portugal. The story of Mateus’

secret departure from Ethiopia illustrates the ubiquity of the Egyptian agents and the fear which the Ethiopians had of the Arabs. According to the account related by Damiao de Gois, Queen Eleni gave Mateus and his young companion Ya'kob letters of recommendation for the *barnagas* (cf. Geneviève Bouchon), the viceroy of the maritime province, "in order that he might help them as secretly as possible in everything that would be necessary, by pretending that they were merchants who had come to him to do business solely on her behalf". "For a while (*aliquamdiu*) Mateus acted in full freedom, never confiding his schemes to anyone and revealing neither what he had to do nor where he had to go. He passed himself off as a pelt trader, the more safely to fulfil the task that had been entrusted to him. However, from time to time, he would buy pieces of Indian jewelery which he would send in secret to Queen Eleni. Under this pretext he travelled through various regions of various countries, doing all this in order that, protected from the ambushes of his enemies while crossing the kingdoms and states of the many adversaries to the Lusitanian name, he might reach the Portuguese and fulfil the duties of the mission he had undertaken. There was no other way of carrying out the task."

**The fourth route** The opening of a fourth route, the northern one, coincided with the beginning of the fifteenth century. Russians living under the Mongol yoke, who were sent to Peking as hunting guides or guards, discovered the riches of China, then those of India on returning from China by way of Samarkand. The information reached Tver where Afanasi Nikitin organized, as early as 1466, the first expedition to India. At that time, Astrakhan, together with Bukhara and Khiva, constituted the still tenuous point of contact between, on one hand, the products of China and India, and, on the other, the products of Russia or the Baltic countries. Subsequently Zotov would write to the Court of Russia that "these cities would be of great use to us, for there lie the riches of China and India".

This route is the only one which, at that time had no connection with a crusade. But later the situation changed. In the age of imperialism it was in the name of orthodoxy that the Tsar wanted to colonize the Far East.

#### *A social cause: the decline of the nobility*

The list of things which account for the discoveries and colonization is well known: religious zeal, love for adventure, thirst for wealth, revenge by conquest. Does this set of reasons account fully for the surging vigour that marked the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries?

Undoubtedly, yes, as regards the conscious or unconscious behaviour of individuals. But there are at the same time weightier causes which predetermined the ability of some to act, while others did not.

The conflicts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—the Hundred Years War among others—resulted in the displacement of the great trading routes. In part they had to abandon the land, particularly between Flanders and Italy, in favour of the sea, between Genoa, Barcelona, Lisbon, Bruges, Antwerp and Amsterdam. So it was that Ceuta became, at that time, a strategic point. This displacement resulted in the considerable enrichment of the ports of the Atlantic seaboard. This was particularly true of Lisbon, whose “nation” was established in Bruges as early as the fifteenth century. Thus it was that in Lisbon one could come across Italian merchants, especially from Genoa, who had an eye on the trade with the Orient, but they had no means of organizing expeditions on a large scale. Besides they ran the risk of being shut out by the Venitians, or even of being stopped, as we know, by the Ottomans.

Capital was available in the Iberian Peninsula. But the route to the far North lay through forests. To the south, however, the links with Islam remained active in spite of the wars. Besides sea traffic was easy as far as southern Morocco. Moreover, at that time, the States of Castile and Portugal were in the process of being strengthened, while France, Burgundy, and the Empire were tearing themselves apart. That is why the younger members of the Castilian and Portuguese nobility became interested in these wealth-promoting commercial enterprises. Not owning any land they felt the need for such enterprises so as not to suffer any loss of social status. They joined the merchants.

This social phenomenon operated in tandem with actual scientific or technical developments—related to the Renaissance—and the economic or religious situation. The Polish historian Marian Malowist wondered whether overseas colonization in the case of Portugal, Spain and Genoa, the wars in Italy in the case of France, and expansion to the north and the east in the case of the Germans, and of the Poles and the Russians, were not parallel phenomena having the same origin: the need felt by the nobility to regenerate itself following the decline brought about by the wars of the preceding decades.

It was in Portugal and Spain that the nobility demeaned itself by joining hands with the traders. Later, in the seventeenth century, European countries which had developed much earlier, took over from them. These countries—Holland in particular, England, followed by France—had political structures which were in the process of being firmly established. Consequently neither the Dutch, nor the English, expansion, nor even the weaker French expansion which followed, had the same system of causes as that which triggered off Portuguese and Spanish colonization, or the Polish and Russian colonizations to the east.

Demographic pressure also played its role. The increase in the Castilian population in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries accelerated the movement for emigration, just as it did in Mazuria and in Russia. Moreover in the seventeenth century the easy victory which the Dutch won over the Portuguese was due in

part to the Dutch having a surplus population: they could mobilize not only their own citizens, but a part of the German population as well.

### **Colonial expansion and imperialism: continuity or discontinuity**

From the time of John the Navigator, the great enterprises in which the Portuguese monarchy had participated represented an alternative to the policy of reconquest and of crusade which had come to a tragic end, in 1571, at the battle of Alcazarquivir, the biggest disaster in the history of Portugal. In a magnificent film *Non, ou la vain gloire de commander* ("No, or the vain glory of commanding") Manoel de Oliveira has correctly identified the link between the failure of the Portuguese attempts to unify the Peninsula or to establish settlements in Morocco, and the development and exploitation of those voyages. Serving as substitutes for the kings' previous objectives, these voyages pressed on at the same time, but elsewhere, with the task of evangelization and of conquest.

This explains how the glorification of the great Portuguese discoveries brought about Portugal's turning away from a frontal struggle with the Moors. It was an amnesia therapy which lasted several centuries, because a second humiliation took place later when the rivals of Portugal, the royal princes of Spain, avenged Alcazarquivir at the battle of Lepanto, before capturing Portugal itself, in 1580, in order to unify the Peninsula. Lucette Valensi has studied the forms and the extent of this amnesia therapy in *Fables de la mémoire*.

However its function as counterweight and transference was soon taken over by others: commercial development, evangelization, colonization, enslavement of peoples, to the point where the Western historical memory ended up by forgetting how vital a motive the struggle against the Infidel had been. In the eighteenth century, only the Abbé Raynal showed a keen awareness of what had been at stake. But the will to forget erased all trace of him.

One finds the same process at work again in France in the age of imperialism when, by a transference of the same sort, the Third Republic engaged in a policy of imperial conquest as a means of forgetting and erasing the defeat of Sedan, the failure of the European policy of the Empire and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Hansi's cartoon, aimed at Jules Ferry, the promoter of these imperial conquests in Indo-China and Tunisia, expresses it correctly: "I have lost two children and you offer me two servants."

One can see the same game of alternatives being played in the Russian Empire where, in the nineteenth century, the Tsar, unable to impose his will upon Central Europe, transferred his will to domination to the Caucasus and later to the Far East. After the Crimean War, this expansionist stage was marked by the end of the conquest, and the "pacification", of the Caucasus, by the conquest of

Tashkent (1865), Samarkand (1868), Khiva and Kokand (1876), and later by the conquest of the regions of Amur and Ossuri.

On a second occasion, when the conflicts in the Balkans had been brought to an end, in 1897, by means of an agreement with Francis Joseph, the Tsar wanted to “compensate” for the restraint imposed upon Panslavism by moving Russia’s centre of interest towards the Far East and the Pacific. The intervention in China and the conflict with Japan were not viewed as presenting a “danger of war”. They were represented as a colonial expedition (1904–05).

Another characteristic attributed to imperialism is the territorial greed of which the division of Africa, in 1885–90, was the most obvious expression. The concern of the main rival powers—France, Germany, England, Portugal, Belgium—lay in assuring for themselves, on the map, the most extensive territories possible in order to forestall any rival’s attempt to seize territory at some unspecified time in the future. This is what became known as “the scramble for Africa”.

Such behaviour was evident well before the period of imperialism. For example, during the occupation of Canada, Samuel de Champlain justified his ambition in a report of 1615, in which he wrote to the King: “If we do not settle in, either the English or the Dutch [that is, Protestants] will arrive in Quebec.” This means that the first French colony was a “preventive” conquest, even though it had other purposes: the discovery of a passage to the west of the Pacific and to Japan, population and development, the conversion of the Indians.

This practice of occupying territories which belonged to no one before they could be seized by others, was both justified and criticized in colonial as well as in imperialist times, with the same arguments. From the time of Pufendorf and of Jean-Jacques Rousseau fictitious occupations were condemned. In the *Social Contract* the latter says: “In order to claim authority for a right of first occupation, one must acquire possession, not by means of an empty ceremony, but by work and culture.” In 1805 the practice of annexation was abused by the United States which, in Louisiana, claimed that occupation of the mouth of a river entailed a right on the totality of the basin (John Quincy Adams). This *doctrine of continuity* applied equally to the occupation of territory situated in the hinterland of coasts.

Only differences of degree distinguished *continuity* and *hinterland*, from “spheres of influence”. The law undertook to legalize them, the expression “spheres of influence” first appearing, so it would seem, in the Anglo-German agreement of 1885.

Diversion/substitution, alternative policy, lust for conquest: do the similarities among the different stages of expansion have the edge on the dissimilarities? An additional feature establishes a parallel between the period of the discoveries and that of imperialism. The same stages occur in the processes of domination. It is well known that in the nineteenth century the era of discoveries and the pioneers—Brazza, Stanley and others—preceded that of the governments which took over from them. Such was the case in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries too.

Dazzled by the final enterprises of Diego Cam, Christopher Columbus, Magellan, who, as is well known, were supported by kings, traditional historians have scarcely given heed to the pioneers who had preceded them. As much as either the outcome of a visionary project—the westward or eastward route to the Indies—or of the effect of a dynamic made possible by new technical resources, the expansion and the voyages were, as a matter of fact, the cumulative result of dozens of small attempts made by ordinary traders and adventurers like Luis Fernao Gomes, Eustache de La Fosse, and others. According to Joao de Barros, it was only when Portuguese sailors, while visiting Benin, learnt that the kingdom of Prester John could be reached through this country, that the Portuguese Monarchy decided to assume responsibility for Diego Cam's great enterprise to either penetrate Africa or to go round it (de Barros, quoted in Thornton, 1992, p. 35).

Christopher Columbus too had his predecessors, like Fernao Dulmo, who obtained from the King the privileges for any land found to the west of the Canary Islands and the Azores, the veritable crossroads of the discoveries and later of the conquests. But Dulmo did not meet with Columbus's success.

In summary, this two-stage expansion is as evident in the sixteenth as in the nineteenth century.

### *The market or the flag?*

So, the imperialist period displays modes of behaviour which recall the era of the great colonial conquests. However, the general feeling is that 1870 marked the beginning of a new era. What were its characteristics?

In the first instance, it appears that, for a whole century up till then, colonial expansion had not gone through a solution of continuity. Whether it was a failure or a success, like France's ventures in Algeria or in Senegal, the growth of the colonial power of the different European states had not always been the result of an explicit political will. Rather it arose out of circumstances. Moreover, the new colonies, notably Algeria, Australia and New Caledonia, had been populated with rebellious individuals, delinquents and political prisoners—a fact which did not endear them to public opinion. But the same was true of the earliest Portuguese colonies.

In France the change becomes evident when the newly acquired territories start to have an identity. This occurred in Cochin-China, which the navy needed to counterbalance the influence of Great Britain and to have a good base in the west of the Pacific Ocean. Such was the case also with Algeria, after the “heroic” battles against Abd el Kader. The army identified itself with this country. In this connection Raoul Girardet writes: “At the same time as a section of the army ‘colonized’ itself, for a segment of public opinion, the colonial idea militarized itself” (Girardet, 1972:13).

And if the colonial ideal and the missionary calling meshed with each other, just as they had done in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a new development, which lay in a shift in meaning. Thenceforth conversion to Christianity became identified with the duty to civilize, for civilization could not be other than Christian. In *Les Missions catholiques*, Mgr. Miché, Apostolic Vicar in Saigon, denounces “those rebels who have long impeded the progress of conversions”. Appointed Bishop of Algiers, Mgr. Lavigerie arrives “to help in the great task of Christian civilization …which must bring to light a new France freed from the darkness and chaos of an ancient barbarism”. These then are the primary impulses of imperialism: to colonize, to civilize, to spread one’s culture, to expand. And colonization was the “power” of a people to “reproduce” itself in different spaces.

For Prévost-Paradol imperialism was the ultimate resource of greatness, for Leroy-Beaulieu a generative force. Imperialism had roots in ideologies, but the ideologies were supported and sustained by more materialistic goals. In fact the latter are the source of the most widely spread formulation of the new-style colonial policy. Jules Ferry enunciated it on the occasion of the conquest of Tonkin: “Colonial policy is the daughter of industrial policy. For wealthy States...export is an essential component of public prosperity... Had the manufacturing nations established among themselves something like a division of industrial labour, a distribution based on aptitudes..., Europe could have resolved not to seek beyond its own frontiers for outlets for its products. But everybody wants to spin, to forge, to distill, to produce and export sugar.” Consequently, with the emergence of new industrial powers—the United States, Russia, Germany —overseas expansion was dictated by necessity.

Jules Ferry adds two other reasons to the one referred to above. Actually we have already mentioned these two reasons: (a) the humanitarian argument whereby the “superior races” must fulfil their duty with regard to the “inferior races” who have not yet started on the road to progress; (b) the nationalist argument formulated in a dynamic expression: “Were France to withdraw from these enterprises, Spain and Germany would immediately replace us. A ‘fireside’ policy would lead us nowhere but along the path of decadence... To have influence without acting is to abdicate our responsibility.”

Great Britain had to face similar problems, though it did so well before France. The victories of the Seven Years’ War constituted the first major turning-point which altered its relationship with the colonies. Up till then the Empire had been small, relatively homogeneous, very English, Protestant, and *centred on trade*. Suddenly, after the treaties of 1763, it acquired Catholic Quebec, Florida, Tobago and still more territories, to such an extent that Great Britain became the mistress of an immense, and above all heterogeneous, empire, quite out of proportion to its means (see L.Colley).

The Empire had, up till that time, incurred little expense. It was manageable. It had very little bearing upon the manner in which the English governed themselves. Suddenly it became a burden, an essentially military burden. Above all its preservation became incompatible with the principles of English liberty—a cause for concern with Burke—since it ruled over hostile populations.

Was it by chance that Gibbon wrote his great work on the fall of the Roman Empire shortly after the Treaty of Paris?

However there was another cause of the rude awakening experienced by Great Britain: American independence. The War of Independence was a civil war which, in England as well as in the American colonies, pitted Englishmen against Englishmen, since opinions were divided on both sides. By way of compensation the English took note of the loyalty of Scotland, especially since Scottish pioneers, such as Warren Hastings, Charles Gordon and others, had played an important military role in the rest of the Empire. Consequently the *English* colonies gave place to the *British* Empire which, driven by a vindictive patriotism, culminated in a reaction against the latitudinarian attitude of earlier periods. The India Act of 1784, the Canada Act of 1791, the Act of Union with Ireland in 1800, are the expressions of this policy of recovery and domination, which is *one* of the characteristic features of imperialism.

The other, vying with the former but coming to harmonize with it, is evinced in the need, which Great Britain felt for the first time, to refurbish its vision of its economic relationship with the rest of the world in the aftermath of losing America and becoming an industrial power. More than the mercantilist monopoly of overseas trade, which had enabled it to accumulate wealth, England now needed markets and raw materials. It needed another America—Australia will fit the bill; another India—and the target is China. It needs an Africa different from the one that supplied the West Indies and North America with slaves.

It was certainly not by chance that, within a few years, Great Britain sent its first important ambassador, Mac Cartway, to Peking (1797); set up the African Association; asked Mungo Park to explore Central Africa up to the source of the Niger; and established the North West Company in the North of Canada, while James Cook was installing himself in Botany Bay in Australia. This outburst of enterprise came after a long period of inter-national conflicts. It heralded a colonial redeployment, that of imperialism—as it came to be called.

The example of Mungo Park is simple and lucid. He explains that he would receive his salary of fifteen shillings a day from his sponsors “only if he succeeded in making the geography of Africa better known, in making new sources of wealth available to their ambition, their trade and their labours”.

The requirements of industrialization, the needs of the market henceforth rival the compulsion for domination. But very soon the latter prevails over the others.

### *Schumpeter or Hobson?*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the will to dominate had acquired such primacy in Great Britain, that in 1919 Joseph Schumpeter, in his survey of British imperialism during that century, argued that imperialism manifests itself when “a state evinces a *purposeless* (my italics) propensity to expansion by force, beyond all definable limits”, that is, when the warlike or conquering activity expresses itself “without being actually the means to some end other than what is implicit in its very exercise”. That is what Max Weber called instrumental rationality. In this context Schumpeter gives the example of Disraeli—the eulogist and the incarnation of imperialist expansion from the time of his speech in 1872 at the Crystal Palace—who nevertheless had earlier referred to those “accursed colonies which are like an albatross around our neck”. Disraeli now wanted to create an Imperial Federation by transforming the colonies into autonomous units within an Empire constituted as a single customs union. The available lands in the colonies would be reserved for the English. A central organization in London would be in charge of the coordination of these operations. A few years later Joseph Chamberlain would return to this plan of action. It is noteworthy that the expression “preservation” of the Empire, which was used in that context, actually meant territorial expansion. This turnaround of Disraeli’s came about when the slogan of imperialism showed its effectiveness as a distraction for the citizens from their everyday worries, to which former conservative leaders had not known how to respond. Also at a time when they had no other political policy. The imperialist slogan was successful. It provided advantages to a whole range of vested interests, among others a custom rate that gave protection to all those industrialists who felt threatened by the dumping policy of German exporters.

Here we may note a contrast. On the one hand English public opinion had, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, turned more and more hostile to colonial expansion, which was identified with the slave trade<sup>2</sup> and with the humiliations associated with the formation of the United States. On the other, it was favourable to imperialism as it flattered and defended English interests, whether on the peripheries of India, against the “looters” and bandits, or in South Africa where, during the Boer War, “there was not one beggar who did not talk about our rebellious subjects”. One comes across similar attitudes in France when the “bastards” (*salopards*) of the Moroccan borders “attack our colonists”, at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In Russia, in an identical situation in the marches of the Caucasus or of Central Asia, one finds the Prince Chancellor Gorchakov, in 1864, echoing word for word, the arguments of the British and French imperialists.

The situation of Russia, (he says) is that of all the civilized States which come into contact with nomads who have no well established state

organization... To provide against their raids and their looting, we must subdue them and bring them under strict control... But there are others further away...consequently we too must proceed further still... This is what has befallen France in Africa, the United States in America, England in India. We march forward by necessity as much as by ambition.

(quoted in Vernadsky, 1972, III, p. 610)

It was still a matter of “preservation of the Empire”, as formulated by Disraeli.

Several incidents in the history of Great Britain illustrate how the symbolism of domination has weighed as much as concrete material interests: from the maintenance of the protectorate on the Ionian Isles from 1815 to 1863—though in London the view prevailed that the possession of those indefensible islands was useless—to the military expedition for the defence of the Falkland Islands by Mrs Thatcher. In contrast, the loss of the whole of India, the Caribbean Islands and black Africa between 1947 and 1962, scarcely aroused any strong emotion. One comes across a similar paradox in Russia where, indifferent to the loss of the Empire in 1990–91, the citizens nevertheless mobilized for the defence of the Kurile Islands.

Popular support for expansion is one of the characteristic features of the imperialist age. It asserts itself despite opinions strongly opposed to it. This support goes hand in hand with a popular press which blossomed in the nineteenth century as a product of industrial development. In Great Britain the *Daily Mail*, in Germany the *Tägliche Rundschau*, in Russia the *Novoe Vremja*, in France *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Matin* are the most widely known examples. Imperialism thus becomes a public phenomenon—which was not the case with expansion in the preceding centuries—even if certain operations are clandestinely carried out, in defiance of the prevailing opinion, such as, for example, the expeditions of Jules Ferry in Indo-China.

Economic interest is none the less one of the main pillars and mainsprings of imperialism. This has been well established by John Hobson in *Imperialism* (1902), followed by Rudolf Hilferding in *Das Finanz Kapital* (1910). Drawing upon these two texts, Lenin subsequently popularized these ideas in *Imperialism, the last stage of capitalism* (1916). His book was translated into German and in French in 1920.

However a difference separates the theses of Hobson from those of Lenin. In British imperialism Hobson saw “the will of well organized industrial and financial interests to control and develop—to the detriment of the population and through the use of the forces of the state—private markets in order to dump into them the surplus of their goods and to invest in them the surplus of their capital”. In other words Hobson saw imperialism as a return to mercantilism, as its driving imperative was the need to accumulate a national capital in order to compete with the rival powers. In contrast, Lenin viewed imperialism as the final stage of monopolistic capitalist development. He carried out a debate with Kautsky who

thought that at this final stage inter-imperialist conflicts would no longer be profitable. Lenin thought they were inevitable.

The important point is that, for Lenin, imperialism presented several faces and was the end result of a variety of phases in the historical development. Imperialism had existed before the era of capitalism (cf. the Roman Empire). But it had also existed during its development, for example during the constitution of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. Consequently national struggles were merely part of the universal fight against imperialism: the struggle of the Baltic peoples against the Russians was equivalent to the struggle of the Irish or of the Indians against the British. For Lenin the First World War put an end to the distinction between colonial expansion and imperialism (1916).

Yet there was another more decisive divergence.

The imperialism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was different. In one specific feature it differed both from the spirit of conquest and domination which marked earlier eras and from the colonial expansion of the preceding centuries. This imperialism was, more than the others, associated with financial capital, and colonization and conquest did not constitute the only expressions of its existence. Colonization and territorial conquest can be imperialistic. But, in the nineteenth century and up to the Great War, imperialism had means of action at its disposal which could be adapted to political independence. Such was the case of the penetration of financial capital into China, the Ottoman Empire and Russia.

At different times in history colonization assumed forms which may have been different, but which were superimposed one upon the other.

Domination over other peoples has indeed been the motor of expansion, whatever might have been the declared purpose of "imperialism": religious at the time of the Arabs, religious again in the Christian expeditions against the Infidels, still religious when Catholics and Protestants, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, aimed to ensure the expansion of their faith.

Political interest may have been the adjunct of all these forms of crusades. It first evinces its autonomy, however, at the time of François I who concluded *Capitulations* with the Turk in order to fight against Charles V. Political interest becomes more and more prominent as from the time of the Thirty Years' War when Cardinal Richelieu formed an alliance with the Huguenot King of Sweden against the Holy Roman Empire.

Economic interest appears well before the so-called imperialist period. It asserts itself particularly when, with the Navigation Acts (1651), overseas expansion is held to be a monopoly of the English *nation as a whole*, and not merely in the interest of its traders. These Acts may be viewed as one of the sources of imperialism, because the latter claims to act in the name of the entire nation, of the nation-state.

Before the advent of imperialism the mercantilist doctrine—of which Bodin was the first theoretician, and which Colbert put into practice later —purported to associate the state with overseas enterprises in order to assure the monopoly of commercial exchanges and the maximum revenue in gold and in silver.

By prohibiting colonials from producing “so much as a nail”, the mercantilists would soon provide them with a pretext to revolt, as occurred in the United States and in Spanish America. This type of relationship was brought to an end by these uprisings. Colonized indigenous peoples were ruined by the enforcement of mercantilist practices, as is shown by the example of the textile industry in India. Nonetheless these practices did persist to some extent and were even developed by force at the time of the Industrial Revolution. It is in this sense that Lenin could argue that imperialism was the ultimate stage of capitalism.

British colonization integrated these variables and variations. It ensured the fortune of a social group that knew how to associate the wealth of its soil and its sub-soil with financial and commercial applications which enabled it to accede to world dominion. But industrial capital remained for a long time disconnected from banking capital. In this way industry grew *by the side* of the Empire, rather than thanks to it, or for its sake, except when, after the 1929 crisis, the “imperial preference” became a veritable global policy (Cain and Hopkins).

High finance has almost always been the driving force of imperialist policy. For instance, in 1882 the Egyptian expedition was launched, not to acquire markets or annex territories, but to prevent the Egyptian rulers from not paying back their debt with impunity. That would have created a precedent. Likewise, for the sake of the City, the Boers in South Africa had to be prevented from helping the Germans to seize the gold reserves at a time when the gold standard stood surely for the preeminence of the pound sterling.

#### *Comparison of results*

In their *results*, the main difference between the colonial expansion of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the imperialism which followed it, actually lies in the fact that the Industrial Revolution provided imperialism with the resources which enabled it to thoroughly alter the relationship between the mother countries and the colonies. In one way the colonial expansion of the first wave could be seen to be similar to the colonizations of the previous type (colonizations by the Turks, the Arabs, even by the Romans), in the sense that the economic, military, and technical gap between the colonizers and the colonized was narrow and trade was on a very small scale. At the outset the gap between the standard of living in Europe and in its colonies, at least in Asia, was of the order of 1 to 1.5, in so far as such an evaluation has any meaning. With imperialism and the effects of the Industrial Revolution deterioration set in, hitting the colonized peoples very hard. According to the computations of Paul

Bairoch, the gap in the standard of living went from 1.9 to 1.0 in 1860, to 3.4 in 1914 and 5.2 in 1950. It may be noted that the gap has not stopped getting larger since the end of the colonial period. This perpetually increasing gap has been shown to be above all the result of structural changes brought about by colonization and also of the shift in power relationships. Until the eighteenth century, in fact, the consumption of extra-European products amounted to only between 2 and 10 percent of total European consumption. Lastly, with the exception of Spanish America, the first colonization merely grazed the surface of the structures of the conquered or dominated societies. Its foundations too were weak. In India, for instance, it mattered little whether goods were sold to the Portuguese or to the Arabs. The advantage the Portuguese had was that they provided new weapons.

But with the demands of the economic imperialism, the second colonization brought about profound structural transformations. Of these, two are important: de-industrialization and non-food-producing agricultural specialization.

The example of the textile industry in India illustrates the first change. In the seventeenth century light cotton fabrics represented from 60 to 70 percent of Indian exports. Industrialization enabled England to produce machines that were 350 times more productive than one Indian worker. And, owing to her dominant position, England could freely introduce her cotton fabric into India. The outcome was that in less than a century the Indian cotton industry had almost disappeared. De-industrialization took place in many other colonies. Together with excessive specialization in the non-food crops, de-industrialization constitutes the second aspect of the change which imperialism imposed upon the colonies, both the old-established and the new ones.

In black Africa, which provides an example of the second change, the colonial situation gave rise to an opposition between the subsistence economy, traditional mainstay of African societies, and the market economy. Henri Raulin has observed how the cultivation of cocoa, imposed by the colonial administration, provoked a strong opposition on the part of the Agni of the Ivory Coast. Every night they poured boiling water on the cocoa seedlings they had been compelled to plant. It was only later that they realized that this crop earned them some money which they could use. These same Agni were held to be unfit for manual labour, indeed for any work whatsoever. The truth was that they lived under a complicated set of rules, and that respect for this code did not allow them, especially those who belonged to the higher classes, to work in public. They were labelled as "lazy" though they showed that they were capable of being extremely active. The failure to adjust to "progress", as understood by the colonizer, could manifest itself in other forms of cultural "resistance". For instance, among the Masikoro, the Bara of Madagascar and the Peuls, trade in oxen had a special significance. Cattle had a social value; to sell cattle was viewed as a sign of degeneration, because that commodity formed part of a specific trade network outside the

monetary economy. Likewise the Bété kept the amount of the future dowry which was usually considerable out of the monetary economy. Cotton cultivation failed among the Peuls and the Bambara, but succeeded among the Minyanka and the Senufo, because the former had established well structured historical societies which were undone by colonization, while the latter, less conscious of their identity, were more readily disposed to change their way of living.

Technical borrowings from the West were the issue in the conflict between the desire for progress and the resistance of tradition. Such was, for example, the case with the cultivation of yams. Some Senufo farmers of the Korhogo region had very early adopted the plough yoked to oxen. Instead of the tubers being planted in mounds made with a hoe, they were planted in ridges between the furrows formed by the plough. At first the saving in manpower was appreciated. But, as the new yams were less thick and more elongated, consumption decreased and the use of the plough was abandoned.

#### *Between colonization and neo-colonialism*

Several typical situations arose out of the domination of the colonizers and its consequences. Some of their features have managed to survive even after decolonization. Thus, in the first instance, we may distinguish:

- 1 *colonization of the old type*: it is of an expansionist nature, manifesting itself at a stage of free competition in capitalist development. Algeria, conquered in 1830, is one of its last examples;
- 2 *colonization of the new type*: it is linked to the Industrial Revolution and to financial capitalism. It is manifested in most of the post-1871 French conquests, of Morocco in particular, even though other considerations also applied. This form of colonization is also evident in the expansionist policy of Great Britain and Germany in East Africa and in South Africa;
- 3 *imperialism without colonization*: this occurred temporarily in the Ottoman Empire, for example, in the case of Egypt in 1881. It developed in a purer form—that is, without any disposition to settle colonists—in Latin America, where the City ruled in Argentina and in Peru, before yielding place to the United States. The practice of this imperialism without a flag has survived the independence movements of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Thus, the different forms of imperialism and of colonization overlap and penetrate one another.

The same applies to the phenomena known as decolonization and the independence of peoples, and to their liberation. Most of these peoples gained their freedom between 1945 and 1965. But if colonization, understood in its narrow definition, did indeed come to an end with the defeat of the French in Vietnam or Algeria, of the British in India, of the Dutch in Indonesia, it is none

the less true that Western domination has survived, in one form or other, either as neo-colonialism or as imperialism without colonists.

Actually this phenomenon existed before the Europeans lost their overseas possessions. The United States, for example, created its colonies without hoisting a flag, particularly in Latin America, even if the marines had to be sent here and there whenever the “need” arose, as in Haiti in 1915. To some extent, after 1965, France has at times emulated this policy in black Africa.

However “decolonization” has often been limited to a change in sovereignty. There has indeed been a substitution of one political authority for another. But all manner of economic bonds have survived, and they have perpetuated the former dependence in another form, to the joint benefit of the mother countries and of the new local middle classes. Moreover the flows of human beings generated by this interruption have increased. In this way the old ties have been perpetuated, albeit in an altered form. French consultants are active in Algeria and Algerian immigrants work in France. The same phenomenon can be seen operating between, on one hand, Great Britain and, on the other, the Caribbean Islands or India, between Germany and Turkey.

At the same time, since the 1960s, the evolution of the global economy has culminated in an interweaving and integration of national economies to such an extent that some of the formerly colonized countries find themselves in a situation of dependence or poverty worse than they had earlier experienced (cf. Ch. 11). In their turn the former colonizing powers themselves are realizing today that the dogma of liberalism, upon which they relied to give legitimacy to their domination, can be turned against them, to the advantage of new financial and industrial powers, like Japan or even former colonies like Taiwan, Singapore and Korea. And we need not limit the analysis of the processes linked to colonization to those effects which are the legacy of economic or technical domination. Its reverse effects have included such things as the increasing role of oil in the global economy, contacts between civilizations and the racism which such contacts have generated.

### Civilization and racism

“I believe in this race...”, Joseph Chamberlain said in 1895. He was singing an imperialist hymn glorifying the British and praising a nation whose strivings had surpassed those of the French, Spanish and other rivals. The Englishman was engaged in bringing his superior know-how and his science to other “inferior” populations. The “white man’s burden” was to civilize the world. The British were the torch-bearers.

This conviction and this task meant that the others were viewed as the representatives of an inferior culture. As the “vanguard” of the white race, it behoved the English to educate and train them—while keeping a proper distance.

If the French too viewed the indigenous populations as children, and considered them to be inferior, their republican convictions led them to use a different language, at least in public, even though it was not necessarily in conformity with their deeds. Still what brought together the French, the English, and other colonizers, and imparted to them the consciousness of belonging to Europe, was the conviction that they represented Science and Technology and that this knowledge enabled the societies they subjugated to realize progress. And to accede to civilization.

But history and Western law had codified what civilization was and also what its connection was with Christianity. The American Henry Wheaton, the Briton Lass Oppenheim and the Russian De Malten had successively laid down the foundations of this law, on the occasion of the signing of the “unequal” treaties with China, Siam, Abyssinia, the Ottoman Empire.

That is how it came about that a cultural concept, civilization, and a value system came to have specific economic and political function. Not only did these countries have to safeguard the right of Europeans to define the meaning of civilization—which actually guaranteed their preeminence—but the protection of this right became, in addition, the moral *raison d'être* of the conquerors.

And those who did not conform to this requirement were looked upon as criminals, delinquents, and were consequently liable to being punished. In India, for example, the British designated entire social groups as “criminal tribes”, though the latter were not necessarily tribes. Such a designation justified intervention aimed at substituting colonial legislation for traditional customs and the prevalent jurisprudence. Thus men and women who had in no way broken away from the social group to which they belonged were designated as “criminals”. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, followed by the Criminal Castes and Tribes Act of 1911 mark the decisive turning point of this legal control which culminated in the condemnation of suttee (the suicide of widows) as well as the elimination of the Thugs and other “highwaymen”. The chosen form of words, which lumps caste together with tribe, led to the exclusion of entire human groups, such as the Kuravar of the Madras region, who were designated as “hereditary thieves” (see M.Fourcade).

Does not this manner of repressing a population smack of racism to some degree?

In the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas attracted a great deal of attention, as Marx shows in his works. The class struggle represents the human version of the struggle of the species analysed by Darwin. In this context colonization presents itself as the *third side* of this scientific conviction. In his great goodness the white man does not destroy the inferior species. He educates them, unless they are deemed to be not “human”, like the Bushmen or the aborigines of Australia who were not even given a name—in which case, he exterminates them.

The force of imperialist conviction arose from the fact that the movement brought together, on one hand, the eulogists of reason and of progress who, in history, believed in the inevitability of social development, and in its intelligibility, and, on the other hand, men who placed instinct above reason and saw in the need for action an essential component of life. Impelled, in England, by the neo-idealism of Oxford, those who belonged to the first category perceived the world as an organism animated by its moral strength and its will. The Empire—naturally the British Empire—was thus viewed as the highest stage of the social organization. Spencer Wilkinson was one of the main eulogists of this notion of the Empire. His pronouncements made their mark on men like Alfred Milner, Toynbee and Haldane in England, and the disciples of the historian Ranke in Germany.

If the British Empire is to fill its true place in the world it must first find its true place in the hearts of its own subjects; they must have a reason for the national faith that is in them. That reason will be given by an analysis of the laws of British power and of the conditions which justify its exercise. This final inquiry will set out not from the assumption that might is right, which is the creed of despotism and the argument of caprice, nor from the theory that right is might, which is the mistake of shallow enthusiasts, but from the conviction that the universe is the manifestation of an intelligible order inseparable from the order revealed in the processes of thought; that the laws of the material and of the moral world arise from the same source and are but different aspects of the same reality. We cannot but believe that in the end right must prevail over wrong, and the faith that this is the real and ultimate law of the world is the foundation of all that is best in human endeavour....

(Spencer Wilkinson, *The Nation's Awakening*, 1896, pp. 267–8)

As a matter of course, British historians saw the British Empire as a historic fulfilment. Interestingly they set up against the Marxists, and especially against the German Franz Mehring, a parallel and different model of historical development. While the Marxists, in their analysis of historical development, defined the stages of slavery, feudalism and capitalism as the harbingers of socialism, the English imperialists—notably J.R. Seeley, but above all J.A. Cramb in *The Origin and Destiny of Imperial Britain*—emphasized other stages of historical development: the city-state, the feudal state, the class state, the national democratic state. The British state was thus the crowning achievement of a history in conformity with the ideals of freedom and of tolerance that were born during the Reformation.

To this trend of opinion was added a vision of man which tended to the glorification of exploits, of action, such as is found in the Lebensphilosophie eulogized by William Dilthey, Oswald Spengler and Max Scheler. All three were imperialists and, like Nietzsche, endorsed the idea of a form of social Darwinism

directed against the outside world. In the wake of this biological trend followed scientists, sociologists, eugenists who returned to and took up the ideas of Gobineau. Like Gidding, they glorified the *Übermensch* of tomorrow. In this manner they brought about a fusion of predominantly British neo-idealism with predominantly German biologism. This process was stimulated by Houston Chamberlain—the Britisher who became a subject of Kaiser Wilhelm II—who acted as go-between.

This filiation enables one to understand better the relationship between imperialism and Nazi racism.

At the time of imperialism, the conquerors succeeded in establishing the primacy of the idea that expansion was the ultimate aim of politics. If only from the moment when subject peoples ceased to experience the same law as the conquerors, this oppression of others, in foreign lands, ran the risk of promoting a disposition towards tyranny in the mother country. A typical example of such an occurrence is provided by the case of Ireland, as Burke was the first to point out.

The British Empire was the equivalent of the Roman Empire only in its dominions, where an Englishman lived as a citizen in the same way he would have done if he had been in Lancashire. Elsewhere he acted as an overbearing ruler who could not survive and prosper without destroying the ways and customs of the subject peoples. The French Empire claimed to be different in the sense that it wanted the law to be the same for all. In fact, whether the territory was called a department, a protectorate, or a colony, this project came into conflict with the colonial settlers and with a whole range of vested interests. The overseas Frenchmen felt it was intolerable for them to be obliged to justify their preeminence over the natives in the eyes of the mother country.

The dichotomy between imperialism and the nation became apparent when the fate of the Bretons, the miners, the Welsh or the victims of war ceased to be at the centre of political life, which instead shifted to Fashoda or to Bechuanaland. Colonial expansion became the solution to all internal problems: poverty, class struggle, overpopulation. It was flaunted as representing the *common* interest, as being *above* parties. In the colonies, the administrator or colonist wanted above all, to be seen as a Frenchman or an Englishman, belonging neither to the Left nor to the Right. He defined himself by his race, not by his activity or by his social role. Race characterized the elite; it justified oppression.

Undoubtedly theories of race existed well before the period of colonization, or of imperialism. But they were confined to a few and were little known. Imperialism, however, infused life into them and disseminated them widely.

They found an application even in continental Europe where racist ideology generated a particular totalitarianism which legitimized the total power of an “elite”, of a superior race, over other Europeans, and buttressed it with similar arguments.

## 2

# THE INITIATIVES

### **First the Portuguese**

“*E se mais mundo houvera, lá chegara*”—and if the earth had been bigger, we would still have gone round it.

In praising Portugal’s discoveries, this proud statement expresses well the nature of the voyages of those great explorers who are still glorified today by tradition. On land and on sea, from Vasco da Gama to Serpa Pinto, they went to the furthest limits and to the heart of the planet “bringing civilization”.

In his *Chronicle of Guinea*, written in the middle of the fifteenth century, Gomes Eanes de Zurara already announced the “five and one reasons” for those expeditions. The Infante Henry, who organized them, “is driven by the service of God”. He thinks that Christians are to be found in those lands. Goods can be brought back from there. And if none are to be found, the extent of the power of the Infidels can be assessed. Perhaps some foreign lord would like to help him in his war against the enemies of the faith, for great is his desire to spread the Holy Faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It was King John of Portugal to whom Christopher Columbus appealed, about 1484, for supplies of all that was necessary for him to reach Cipangu (Japan) by way of the west, for indeed it was from Portugal that all the voyages started. The king consulted his cosmographers who advised him against that crazy scheme. As Fernand Braudel puts it, “the Portuguese have always preferred scientific certainties to idle fancies... That was how they lost America. When they discovered Brazil, it was too late.”

As a matter of fact they were the first to go sailing south. They were equipped with all the available technical devices and, in particular, with those nautical maps with compass cards. The map of Pedro Reinel (1485) describes with great precision the coasts of Europe and of Atlantic Africa up to the furthest point reached by Diego Cam beyond the Gulf of Guinea. Following its development by the Italians, cartography became the Portuguese science par excellence, as Viscount Santarem described it. It gave birth in the sixteenth century to the first

atlases with eight maps. Another secure advantage enjoyed by the Portuguese voyagers was the caravels which took over from the barcas with which Gil Eanes had rounded the cape of Bojador in 1434. Equipped with sails having an area double that of the ones used till then, the caravels could sail close to the wind, that is, they could constantly modify their sails to zigzag along their course, even against the wind if the need arose. With the advent of the galleons, which were larger and better adapted to sea warfare, Portugal became the ship-building centre of Europe.

For the blacks of the western coast of Africa the arrival of white sailors, especially the Portuguese and the Italians, was a discovery, as were their Lombard dialects and their tallow candles. The blacks' practice of eating while sitting on the ground and of living in straw huts, and so on, soon generated a feeling of superiority in the Portuguese. They noted that the fewer contacts they had with the Muslims, the darker was their skin. Many declared themselves to be vassals of the Emperor of Mali.

One of the first African kings whom the Portuguese came across, Battimansa, in Gambia, had declared himself to be the vassal of the Emperor of Mali. But this did not impress the Portuguese. On realizing the poverty of the Africans whom they encountered, the Portuguese did not think it worthwhile to penetrate or occupy the hinterland. They were already the ruling power in Madeira and in the Azores—the island of the goshawks—and had gone beyond the dark seas and Cape Bojador from where, until then nobody had returned, for the north-east trade winds drove the ships towards the Atlantic. The caravels enabled the Portuguese to reach Cape Verde in 1444, then the rivers of Guinea and in 1460 Sierra Leone. When John II ascended the throne the treaty of Alcaçovas had been signed two years earlier, in 1479. This treaty settled the succession of Castile and demarcated the zones of influence to the south of the Iberian peninsula. The Gulf of Guinea was allotted to Portugal. In 1483 Diego Cam reached Zaire and send messengers to the king of Kongo. In 1487–88 Bartholomeu Diaz rounded the Cape of Storms, henceforth called the Cape of Good Hope, and reached present-day Port Elizabeth, the bay of the Herdsman, thus called because the Blacks used to raise cattle in that place. Then the Portuguese set out for India.

When Christopher Columbus arrived in the Bahamas, and just before Vasco da Gama reached India, Pope Alexander VI intervened to bring to an end the cut-throat competition that had arisen between the Portuguese and the Spanish. The bitter debates that arose in relation to the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) to mark the boundaries of the Portuguese possessions, not at a hundred leagues to the west of the Azores, but at three hundred and seventy leagues to the west of Cape Verde—which brought Brazil within the area—present a problem. Was it on a matter of principle that the Portuguese obtained this shift to the west, or was it because they had a hint that a land existed in those zones—Brazil—“discovered” six years later in 1500? Several indications gave credence to this supposition as soon as

Principe and San Tomé, in the Gulf of Guinea, had been reached: they had been “discovered” in 1471 and colonized as early as 1493...by Jews and criminals. San Tomé was uninhabited. It was the first colony linked to the adventure of the Great Discoveries.

When Vasco da Gama reached Indian waters in 1498, a few local kings, like the Zamorins of Calicut and the Sultans of Gujarat, exercised their authority without however controlling the ocean which remained in the hands of the Arabs. When he reached Calicut Vasco da Gama claimed, in the name of his King, the sovereignty over the Indian seas. Naturally the Zamorins refused to accede to this demand. But their rivals in Cochin joined the newcomers whose fleet was quite impressive. The sultan of Egypt answered the call of the Zamorins but, after a naval battle, his admiral turned back. Then, returning in force, the Portuguese under Albuquerque occupied Goa, then the island of Socotra, Ormuz and Malacca. Thus the entire western part of the Indian Ocean came under their sway. Goa was the centrepiece of this scheme. It was heavily fortified and repeatedly strengthened. Albuquerque was the soul of this enterprise.

It was not land that the Portuguese wanted, but control of the sea trade. Dazzled by the wealth of India they intended to secure its traffic for themselves. Refusing to grant to others the right to sail in that part of the ocean, they henceforth confiscated the cargo of anyone who did not have their authorization. Any ship caught sailing without their permission, the *cartas*, was treated as a pirate and seized. Consequently the Portuguese flooded Europe, via Lisbon, with the calico of Calicut, with pepper and other spices.

The poet Luis de Camoens was the first to provide testimony to the sudden wealth of those rude sailors who were scarcely prepared for such a change in their way of living. Several centuries later, following the final departure of the Portuguese, an Indian writer has tried to relate the saga of the battles waged by Abbakka, Queen of the Ullal, who is supposed to have driven them out as early as 1623, a mythical date. In this story the Portuguese are described as burly, uncouth, scornful of women, unable to understand the refinements of art and culture, sensitive only to the language of force. With the exception of their corpulence, this representation differs markedly from the conception which the navigators had of themselves. But what is amazing is that, in enumerating these defects, the Indians left out the only one which the Portuguese admitted to—cupidity. It is easy to understand why: to recall their plunder would be tantamount to acknowledging that, instead of driving them away, the Indians had to submit to their law, however temporarily, and allow themselves to be despoiled. At the same time it would have exposed the degeneracy of the present, when the memory of opulence was all that remained.

Moreover it was Islam that the Portuguese encountered again on reaching India. The tragic end of the Infante Santa, who died in jail in 1443 in the city of Fez, the siege of Granada in which Portuguese soldiers had taken part—these

events were still fresh in the memory when Vasco da Gama arrived in Calicut. Geneviève Bouchon has shown that, on the coast of Kerala, whatever was not Muslim did not count. The prohibitions relative to the sea actually affected the Hindu population, as Marco Polo had already observed. During the discussions held in 1500, at Calicut, Pedralvares Cabral had detained some notables on his ship as hostages, in exchange for the Portuguese left ashore. “As gentlemen, they could neither eat nor drink on those ships.” Muslims were substituted for them. In Cochin too the Portuguese chroniclers refer to Hindu hostages who took it in turns to go on board their ships so that they could go ashore to purify and feed themselves. All that related to seafaring and, even more, to trade was viewed with suspicion by the Brahmans.

This explains how trade gradually passed into the hands of a new community called the Mappillas. They hailed from the poorest quarters of the ports of the Malabar coast. To escape from the caste system they had converted to Islam. They ranked lowest on the social ladder on account of their contact with foreigners and the sea, or because they were the offspring of the temporary marriages (*muta*) which Islam tolerated—and still does. The statement—“When a Nayar woman strays into certain districts, she becomes a Muslim”—correctly affirms that when they were excluded from their caste the women had to convert to Islam.

Conversion elevated the untouchable or someone belonging to a low caste to a higher social status. This practice led to the enhancement of the power of the foreign community. Once they had put down roots and established themselves, the erstwhile transient Arab merchants soon occupied an honourable place in the society. In exchange they spared the Hindus of the higher castes the pollution of sea voyages while providing them with a share of the profits.

A century before the arrival of the Portuguese, the Arab geographer ibn Batuta observed that the Hindu majority evinced a condescending contempt for the temporal wealth of the Muslims. The Chinese, who were likewise active along the coasts of India, confirm that, when the Arab foreigners came, they were given seats outside the doorway and provided with lodgings in separate houses—as a protection against pollution. Food was served to them on banana leaves, and the leavings were eaten by dogs and birds. Ibn Batuta further notes: “The Infidels [that is, the Hindus] would turn aside from the path as soon as they saw us...”

However the situation changed when the Islamic invasions launched from Delhi brought about a Brahmanical reaction at the same time as the Islamization of a number of Indian princes, from Gujarat to Malacca, that is, all along the spice road. Gradually the Brahmanical community of Dravidian India found itself hemmed in by Islam. In the north the Brahmins had to contend with a territorial power centred in Delhi. In the south they were surrounded by Islamic communities of traders and sailors who increasingly felt solidarity with their fellow believers. Among the latter, the Gujaratis had gained the upper hand over the Mappillas of Kerala. But, having become sailors or soldiers of the battle fleet, the

latter became more and more integrated with Indian society. And when a conflict arose between Cochin and Calicut, they acted as intermediaries. For a while they continued to play this role with the Portuguese. It was with them that Vasco da Gama had to deal.

The Portuguese were eager for a fight with the *Mouros de Meca*—the Arabs—whom they wanted to eliminate in the Indian Ocean, even if that implied dealing with the *Mouros de Terra*, the Muslims in India, particularly of Kerala.

But when Albuquerque wanted to control all the routes and to exercise a monopoly by transforming Goa into the centre of his empire, the Muslims of Malabar immediately rose up against him.

#### *Albuquerque and Mamal of Canador*

An Indian adage says: “Princes are like crabs and they devour their parents.” It explains partly the success which the Portuguese, Albuquerque in particular, won in taking advantage of their quarrels. The victories of Duarte Pachaco cleared the way for him. They culminated in the restoration of the kingdom of Cochin, which nevertheless remained under threat of an offensive by the Zamorin of Calicut, aided by the Sultan of Egypt and by Venice which joined this “shameful” alliance, because it did not view favourably the development of Portuguese enterprises.

According to Geneviève Bouchon’s explanation, Francisco d’Almeida had, for a more effective control of the traffic, strengthened the fortress of San Angelo. From there it was easy to seize cargos, which greatly vexed the Indian merchants. In Cochin they murdered and burned the Feitor of Kollam and twelve of his companions who had taken refuge in a church. The reprisals were swift. The viceroy’s son destroyed the entire flotilla of the merchants: twenty-seven ships went up in flames with their cargo of spices, precious stones, horses and elephants. The Portuguese crews dined by the light of the flames. The Muslims of Canador called for vengeance, the siege of the fortress speeding up the infernal cycle of attacks and war. The fleet of Calicut responded to the call, but the accuracy of the Portuguese gunners established the superiority of King Manuel’s fleet (1505). On land they experienced greater difficulty in emerging victorious from the siege, for the Muslims protected themselves against artillery by means of huge bales of cotton which softened the impact of the cannon balls—until the day when the Portuguese came up with the idea of setting fire to the bales.

On the high seas the Portuguese still had to overcome the Mameluke fleet, anchored at Diu. This was accomplished in 1508: this victory assured for a long time the hegemony of Albuquerque’s fleets. Indeed with the occupation of Diu, India was opened up to King Manuel.

But the Indian kings and the Muslim communities, inspired by Mamal of Canador, found the answer to the ambitions of Albuquerque. In fact the latter had

realized earlier that there were leaks in the monitoring of the convoys of spices proceeding from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and from the Far East. He wanted to control the route they took, working back to their point of departure. For this purpose he established control over the Strait of Malacca, conquering this position and installing his garrisons. But the Indian traders were using the Maldives route to bypass the controls and maintain their monopoly. In the Maldives lay the source of a conflict with Mamal of Canador who owned rights and interests there. In his fight with Albuquerque he had other cards available to him. Many Portuguese were calling into question Albuquerque's policy of belligerence and conquest. They regretted the time of Almeida when trade, and trade alone, formed the basis of relations between Christians and India, with war intervening only occasionally. On the other hand, with Albuquerque, the occupation of territories—Canador, Diu, Malacca—became the very *raison d'être* of his policy, the prerequisite for the creation of a sort of territorial empire. The repercussions of this policy were that the Portuguese got involved in the rivalries among the Indian princes, which gave Mamal cause for rejoicing for that weakened at the same time both his rivals and the Portuguese. Still Albuquerque proved to be the best at this game. However Mamal had not lost everything for, thanks to his relay outpost in the Maldives, he retained the monopoly of the trade in spices with the Arab world.

Once the trading-posts in India had been secured, Albuquerque hit upon the idea, after crushing the Mameluke fleet, of ruining Egypt by means of an army of stone-breakers. He would bore through the mountain and dry up the sources of the Nile, under the guidance of Ethiopian advisers. At the same time, from Aden, he would proceed to seize the body of the Prophet in Mecca and exchange it for the Holy Places.

It was a Crusade again, yet another Crusade.

### **The pride of the Spanish**

As I have said before, the Spanish have discovered, explored and converted many lands in the span of sixty years of conquest. Never has a king or a nation explored and subdued so many things in so little time, as we have done. Neither have they done nor earned what our men have achieved and deserved by their use of arms, navigation, the preaching of the Holy Gospel and the conversion of idol-worshippers. That is why the Spanish are most deserving of praise. Blessed be God who gave them this grace and this power. Great is the glory and honour of our Kings and of the Spanish for having made the Indians accept a single God, a single faith, a single baptism, and to have made them give up idolatry, human sacrifices, cannibalism, sodomy and still more serious and wicked sins, which our Good God abhors and punishes. Again they have had to give up polygamy, this old custom and source of pleasure to all sensual men. They have been

taught the alphabet, without which men are like animals, and the use of iron which is so necessary to Man. Moreover they have been taught several good habits, the arts, civilized moral standards, to enable them to lead a better life. All this, indeed any one of these things, is worth more than the plumes, the pearls, the gold taken from them—the more so as they did not use this metal for currency, which is its proper use and the true way to profit from it. This holds true even though it would have been preferable to take nothing from them, and instead to content ourselves with what was obtained from the mines, from the rivers and from the burial places. Gold and silver—worth more than sixty million pesos—and the pearls and the emeralds they have extracted from the sea and from the land far outweigh the little gold and silver which the Indians already possessed. What was wrong in all that lies in their having been made to work too much in the mines, in the pearl fisheries and in the transports.

(Lopez de Gomora, *Historia general de las Indias*, quoted in Romano, 1972, pp. 112–13)

### *The encounter with the Indians*

This glorious, though critical, review is undoubtedly one of the earliest theoretical texts which justify conquest and its violence. The itinerary of the encounters between the Spanish and the Indians sheds better light on the reality of these initial contacts, at least in so far as it was actually experienced. The first witness is Christopher Columbus who had preceded them.

“This king and all his subjects went naked, just as their mother had given birth to them; so did their women without any feeling of embarrassment. They all look like the inhabitants of the Canaries, they are neither white nor black...” Columbus is struck by that trait, and more so by the fact that they have no sense of property, nor of the value of objects. “They give all that they own in return for any trifle offered to them, to the point that they take in exchange even fragments of a bowl or of broken glass... For whatever one gives them, and without ever saying that it is too little, they will immediately give in exchange all that they own...” “They do not covet what belongs to others... They give gold as easily as they do a gourd...”

But woe betide them if they steal, for Columbus will have their nose or their ears chopped off! These good savages have suddenly all become thieves.

“They all believed that the Christians came from heaven and that the Kingdom of Castile was situated there”, Christopher Columbus thinks. But in fact he is ascribing his own beliefs to them. “They come from heaven and are in search of gold”, an Indian would have said to his king. But how much did Columbus understand since he did not know their language? He believed it because it was what he was doing: he brought his religion and took away gold in exchange.

